Creative women in Science & Public Life
WS Debate Conference

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Session 111
Women in International Business
What can I contribute to this debate?

Background

- Run a small niche (rapidly growing!) business in Cambridge, UK delivering services to (mainly) large firms/MNEs
- Business owner since 1993
- Evaluator of FP projects and other ‘expert’ contracts since 1994: mainly DG INFSO but also RESEARCH, Educ & Culture and Employment
- Some of these had specific gender/science dimension; more recently, E&D is ‘addressed’ in all FP projects
Domain of work/services

- Focus is convergence of ‘Human Capital’ and ‘Knowledge Society’
- Integration of technology into working and learning
- Workplace/workforce changes
- Value of human capital and specifically, measurement of investment in human capital initiatives in workplaces
- Measurement of IMPACT and VALUE of investment in HC initiatives
- IMPACT – on the business / organisation’s goals
- VALUE – measuring costs versus benefits - was it worth spending the money?
Types of investments

- Learning and Development (L&D) Knowledge Management (KM)
- Performance improvement
- Change management
- Workforce re-structuring
- New business projects
- Would Equality and Diversity and Corporate Social Responsibility

REMEMEBR ALL THESE INVESTMENTS COST THE BUSINESS – TIME, EXPENSES, 3RD PARTY EXPERTS ETC – ALL COSTS TO THE BUSINESS

The business will always ask – what benefit will investing in these deliver to the business?
Business impact – what is meant by this?

- Hard and soft measures
  - Hard measures include cost, time, output, quality
  - Soft measures include innovation, external relationships, internal behaviours and attitudes
- In order to measure: need a specific unit of measure ‘metric’ e.g. 1 hour of time, one kilo of item, one item which costs €X, one new patent, % change in customer satisfaction etc
- Some metrics can be converted into money easily (hard measures); others are very difficult (soft measures – intangibles)
Be patient with me – nearly there!

- Investment in human capital initiatives are usually accounted not as a cost of sale/cost of good or service but as an operating cost
- This is called ‘below the line’
- Because they are not considered essential in selling the good/service, they tend to be treated with less importance
- Below the line costs tend to be subject to changing patterns of investment – usually linked to the financial performance of the organisation/economic environment: e.g. Learning and Development, R&D and other ‘desirable’ (but not essential) investments
So to your questions

- Current status of the gender policy in an organisations/society
- Current activities to improve the women’s status and equality in an organisation/society
- Major problems and deviations
- Proposed solutions to improve the women’s equality status in an organisation/society
Current status of the gender policy in international businesses?

- Most businesses have a policy but it almost always (in my experience) based on avoiding risk in relation to regulation (anti-discrimination)

- This means the business will usually have a policy which is NOT built from the expectation of a business benefit but the avoidance of a potential cost to the business

- Most businesses therefore develop a policy largely around the regulatory requirements and minimise the cost (of building and maintaining the policy) to the business as much as possible

- Result is that there is minimum investment and/because no business benefit demonstrated
Current activities to improve the women’s status and equality in international businesses

- Most concerned with regulatory requirements
- Some focus on recruitment (if evidence of possible business benefit)
- Occasionally requiring balance on project teams (e.g. for customer engagement programmes) – if some potential business benefit – usually rather obvious
- May be very specific (e.g. contract may require certain conditions)
- Occasionally special ‘mobility’/women into senior management/executive initiatives
- Investment will be viewed from two perspectives – what business impact will it have and is it worth it?
- All of these investments are always going to be influenced by firm performance and economic climate AND amount of investment required
Major problems and deviations

- Because most organisations experience E&D primarily in terms of regulation, they view any E&D initiatives as an imposed cost which has no evident benefit to the business.

- Because it is perceived to be a cost without evidence of benefit, organisations usually minimise the cost - often resulting in poor quality initiatives that deliver little or no result of any kind.

- Most businesses are concerned with short term goals - shareholders/investors ask few questions about long term investments and generally don’t care.

- Businesses need to make a profit to grow and sustain/improve their competitive position; below the line investment will always be vulnerable.

- Most people leading E&D initiatives in organisations make too little effort to build links to business metrics and measure the impact and value: the case is made in social and not economic terms.
Proposed solutions to improve the women’s equality status in an organisation/society

- Need better and more organisation specific business impact studies – using standard business impact analytics and ROI measurement methodologies (not ‘one off’ research approaches based on variety of methodologies) – for reasons of cost and credibility

- Public sector could do a great deal more as a customer/contractor

- Public sector should also be showing business benefit and leading the way

- The champions need to accept that economic justification is required: otherwise business won’t listen!
Thank you for listening and happy to take questions!