

The EAWE "Stories of DEI in Wind Energy" community

Answers contributed by Sarah Barber, Head of Wind Energy Innovation Division at the Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences

18.07.2024

Reflecting on your journey and career, can you share a pivotal moment or experience that highlighted the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)?

There was a particular moment during my career when I suddenly realised "it's not you, it's them". As a strong, opinionated women in a male-dominated environment, I often felt that I didn't fit in, I was too loud, talked to much, wasn't nice enough, etc. After recently reading the book from Arwa Mahdawi "Strong female lead", I realised that I had felt like that because women aren't supposed to behave in that way, and trying to get women to "behave like stereotypical men" is maybe not the best way forward. Perhaps we could encourage men to "behave like women", in other words encourage stereotypical female traits such as kindness, empathy and collaboration in everyone (especially in men). Maybe my feeling of not fitting in doesn't come because I am behaving "wrongly" but because society is "wrong". So maybe it's not me who's "wrong" after all?

What obstacles or challenges related to DEI have you encountered along your path, and how have these experiences shaped your approach to your work?

I have to say that I have personally benefitted from career support for "high-potential" women immensely. However, I don't think that I'm the right sort of person to aim career support at. We need to focus more strongly on people from under-represented groups (such as women in technical areas) who aren't managing to get themselves seen, who don't have the confidence to step up and fight against society norms, who haven't been able to develop a strong enough network to reach their potential.

I think that these benefits have probably just about compensated for the hurdles I have faced being in the minority in the room, and not getting a promotion because I am too argumentative, not getting credit for my ideas in meeting, not being responded to when requesting female dolls for reanimation training, being labelled as a student when I was a lecturer, being labelled a secretary when I was Chief Technical Officer, being mistaken for a member of my male employee's team, not being taken seriously in technical discussions, being told I'm too emotional, being told not to take things so personally, being laughed at for talking about communication. Shall I go on?

In moments of adversity, who or what has been your source of support or inspiration, and how has this influenced your advocacy for DEI within your professional community?

I have to thank my parents for my inner strength and belief that I can achieve anything I want. This has been a foundation to allow me to (usually) keep going when knocked down.

Could you describe a specific instance where you felt empowered to make a positive change in promoting DEI, either through your work or within your broader community?

A few years ago, I was invited to moderate a session on diversity at the wind energy conference TORQUE. Following this session, the European Academy of Wind Energy wanted to form a Diversity Committee, and I was asked to lead it. I couldn't really say no.

Looking ahead, what are your hopes and aspirations for the future of DEI in wind energy science, and how do you envision your role in shaping this future?

My hope is that people will begin to realise that diversity isn't harming them, but helping them. I hope that empathy and collaboration get given the recognition and value that they deserve in society. I hope that young girls and boys will all be taught empathy, kindness and collaboration, and that they will carry these values into the workplace in the near future. I am attempting to make diversity, inclusion, collaboration, empathy and kindness a central part of my activities in the area of wind energy digitalisation. I hope that people will be inspired by this and will join me in my mission.