



Interview with Michiel Kolman, President, International Publishers Association

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KENNEALLY: What makes us comfortable may also make us more successful. Diversity and inclusion in the workplace correlate to above-average profitability, according to a 2017 McKinsey survey of more than 1,000 companies in a dozen countries. For LGBTIQ employees especially, inclusive office cultures conclusively do drive higher achievement.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. Equal treatment for all is, of course, a basic principle of civil society. We shouldn't have to make a business case for it. As a challenge to discrimination in the workplace, though, the business case is a necessary and important argument to make, one among many others.

Over many years, Michiel Kolman has honed his skills as an advocate for diversity and inclusion in publishing as senior vice president, information industry relations and academic ambassador emeritus at Elsevier in Amsterdam, as well as on his travels around the globe as president of the International Publishers Association. Michiel Kolman joins me now from his office in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Welcome back to Beyond the Book, Michiel.

KOLMAN: Happy to be back, Chris.

KENNEALLY: We're looking forward to chatting with you about this very important topic and one that you have written a great deal about and spoken a great deal about. I'd like to start by asking you, why is it important to you and to Elsevier that publishers should make LGBTIQ workplace inclusion an important principle in their hiring practices? In other words, explain that business case that I was speaking of for LGBTIQ workplace inclusion.

KOLMAN: Yeah, happy to do so. So first of all, it's of course the right thing to do, but there is a clear business case. McKinsey already showed in studies in 2015, and they repeated them actually with a larger sample of companies in 2017, that it really pays off. There is a higher, better financial performance. So if you look, for instance, at companies which have an executive gender diversity, they perform 21% higher than the national industry average. If you look at companies with executive ethnic diversity, it's even better – 33%. Companies that are not so



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diverse, they really pay a penalty for it. They perform like 29% worse than the industry average.

Why would it pay off, so to say? Why does diversity pay off? I think there are five important reasons. One is it helps in attracting and retaining top talent. It also improves what you call the customer orientation. It leads to better employee satisfaction. The decision-making process is better. And companies which are more diverse are also more creative and more innovative.

It's not so surprising that LGBT employees are happier at companies that are strong on diversity, but it's also the straight employees that are more likely to apply to more diverse companies and feel happier there and stay longer. So it pays off for retention, as well.

KENNEALLY: That's a very strong case, but as you say, it is the right thing to do. Doing the right thing is something that has become important for businesses of all kinds around the world. Can you describe the evolution of attitudes towards LGBTIQ individuals in the workplace that you've witnessed at Elsevier and publishing in general?

KOLMAN: Yeah, absolutely. It wasn't long ago, actually, that being gay was something you could get fired for or something that you would keep secret because it might harm your career. Luckily, in the last decade, that has changed. Certainly here in the West, where societies are more liberal, it's much easier to be LGBT in the workforce.

I myself have been at Elsevier for over two decades and have only had, actually, a supporting environment, so I'm very happy about that. At Elsevier, for instance, I started a Pride chapter five years ago, and in the meantime, there are 10 chapters around the world. When we launched our chapter in London last year – actually, earlier this year – the CEO of our company came. So I think it's a very strong signal that somebody who's responsible for 7,000 people decides to spend part of his afternoon to signal that LGBT is important in the workplace.

If you look at the publishing world in general, I'm quite inspired what is happening in the UK. The Publishers Association of the UK has put diversity and inclusion high on the agenda. They have ambitious targets which I strongly support. For instance, in five years, they want 50% of all the leadership to be female and 15% of ethnic minorities. They're also going to address LGBT issues. So that's very important for all the publishing companies in the UK. For LGBT, we don't have the right – the same kind of data that we do, for instance, for gender or around ethnicity.



If you look at the global perspective, things are, of course, more of a challenge in other countries, where sometimes being gay is a criminal offense in some countries, even, punishable by death. So for multinationals, it's always an interesting challenge how to navigate through that. For instance, for Elsevier, we have offices around the globe, but we make it very clear when you're in an Elsevier office, it's our norms that are important – the Elsevier norms – so that you have to obey them as well. You cannot discriminate on sexual preference anywhere, also not in a country where it might not be acceptable to be gay or lesbian.

KENNEALLY: Michiel Kolman, it may be fairly obvious, but I think it's important to discuss the importance to you and to any employee about being out at work. Why does that matter so much to LGBTIQ individuals? There's an impact on the job performance, I suppose, apart from the important impact on the individual's well-being.

KOLMAN: Absolutely. Of course, it's extremely important if you can be yourself at work. It's much easier when you're out to connect with your colleagues. You come into the office on Monday morning, everybody tells their story about the weekend, and if you're not out, you're already hesitating – should I say that I was there with my partner and then try not to mention his gender or her gender? It's a struggle. It's much easier if you can just share some of your private life as well with your colleagues.

Studies have also shown if you're out versus being not out, you do much better in the area of depression. You're less depressed. You're much more satisfied in your job – actually, twice as satisfied. And you're also more creative. That's all very important for the business case.

And if you look, for instance, now, publishing companies are really struggling to hire the right talent. The economy's doing well. Everybody is competing for the same people. Nothing is more frustrating if you would hire the right person, invest in training, and after a year, they leave anyway, because they feel that in your company culture, they cannot be themselves – they cannot be out. So there's a clear business case, actually, to create an environment where everybody can be out, to create an inclusive culture.

KENNEALLY: Tell us about some of the best practices that you've seen that help develop that inclusive culture.

KOLMAN: Sure. So it's not only about having inclusive policies. Of course, they must be there, and they must be in place. But I think it's very important to have visible



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LGBTI leaders, and I hope to be one myself. At the same time, it's also important that the top leaders give public support. So you need that CEO commitment. As I mentioned earlier, when we had our London chapter, the Elsevier CEO, Ron Mobed, came. It's very important.

It's very important to engage the staff – not only the LGBTI folks, but it's crucial, I think, to get the allies on board, which used to be called straight allies. It's the majority that determines the culture much more, of course. So it's very important that you be inclusive also for all your activities for the allies.

Communication is important. Do this as early as possible. For onboarding, mention that there are LGBT chapters, etc. And of course, when there are events, give them a big splash in the internal and external communication, as well.

Celebrate the successes. For instance, this year we have 10 Elsevier Pride chapters around the world. I think that's something for us to celebrate.

KENNEALLY: In fact, I was going to ask you about the activities that you organize as part of the Elsevier Pride structure there. You started that program in 2013 in Amsterdam, and you mentioned that you recently launched one in London. Apart from celebrating when there are occasions to do so, what other activities have you organized, and what's been the reaction over the past five years?

KOLMAN: Yeah, so we've been very active, lots of activities. I think there were two categories, the more serious ones and the more fun ones. The fun ones are usually also fundraisers, so they have a serious touch to it. For instance, we did workshops around how can you be yourself at work – so how do you deal with challenges that you're openly gay, but you meet a client, you meet an editor of an important journal. At one point, would you tell him or her that you're gay, because we live in a straight-normative society? We had workshops, for instance, about kids of gay parents. We had two workshops about PrEP. This is a medication to prevent HIV. When we had the first one, people actually didn't even know what the abbreviation stands for. What is great about Elsevier is that we got some of the local experts here from the health authorities, but we also flew in the editor-in-chief of our journal *Lancet HIV*, who has all the knowledge about PrEP. We had a workshop about intersex – what is it? How can we best support it?

And I think on the fun side, the highlight every year is what is officially called Pride Bingo, but often referred to as Drag Queen Bingo. So every year during Pride Week in Amsterdam, we have bingo. It's a fundraiser, as well. We raise funds for Amnesty Pride. But the emcee is one – or actually a couple of years, we had two drag queens. And it's a great, fun event. People love doing it. I had to



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kind of get my head around it a little bit when it was first suggested. This happens in our canteen where we eat our cheese sandwich with milk, and all of a sudden you have these two huge drag queens running around there. But people love the event. Hundreds of people join in. And it's certainly not only the LGBT colleagues, but it's also lots of our straight allies and also colleagues from other companies around Amsterdam.

Sorry, go ahead.

KENNEALLY: I was just going to say, that kind of an atmosphere really does – you were talking about sending messages. Something like that sends as clear a message as you can imagine.

KOLMAN: Absolutely, absolutely. I love that this is such a popular event that people asked me already in March, so when is it going to happen again? It always happens in July. So it's good to put that on the agenda.

We also branch out internationally. We had an event in Chennai in India, which was, of course, quite special. At that time, it was illegal to be gay. That just changed last week. So a clear sign of activism on the side of Elsevier. There, we had an event about LGBT at work together with an organization called Workplace Pride and local organizations. The participation was from, of course, Elsevier colleagues. I was one of the speakers myself. But there were also participants from Accenture, IBM, Shell, and McKinsey, and it had lots of media coverage. This was really a big thing – how companies are involved in Workplace Pride – and it was in the *Times of India* and the local newspaper, *The Hindu*, etc. I was quite proud of Elsevier that we did this and showed a little activism in a country where it's more difficult to be LGBT than, say, in the US or in the Netherlands.

KENNEALLY: Indeed. As president of the International Publishers Association, you often speak around the world, particularly around copyright and condemnation of censorship. In many countries, LGBTIQ communities face discrimination in law and in social practice. You were just describing the situation that had prevailed in India until the recent Supreme Court decision. As you probably imagine, such discrimination can have the spillover effect of censoring freedom of expression about these issues. So what is IPA doing to address this particular kind of censorship?

KOLMAN: Yeah, absolutely. So the IPA, although it's a trade organization, it's also an NGO. We have a human rights mandate, and we fight for freedom to publish, and we fight against censorship. Censorship can take all kinds of forms. It can be



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ensorship of academic articles, as we see in China. We can see lots of censorship that happens now – many publications in Turkey.

An interesting example is the censorship that is now the case in Russia. Formally, it's called censorship of non-traditional relationships, but it's commonly more known as the anti-gay propaganda law. I opened the Moscow Book Fair as IPA president last year, so it was a dilemma for me. Should I speak out on this topic, which I knew was a sensitive topic in Russia? I decided to do so. It was my role, and I think my duty and obligation as IPA president to raise that issue that this kind of censorship is not a good thing. So I did so, and it got lots of press coverage as well. Interestingly, not at all in Russia (laughter) – actually, zero – but very much in the press outside of Russia.

My colleagues were a little bit worried also about my personal safety, because people had been arrested. I thought it was certainly worth the risk. Nothing happened, by the way. I joked a little bit that I had the number of the Dutch ambassador on speed dial. But in the end, everything was fine. I'm happy that I raised this issue – that censorship is a bad thing, it takes many forms, and we certainly should also speak out against anti-gay censorship.

KENNEALLY: I have to commend you for that activity and to say I think it's important for listeners to recognize that the issues around inclusive cultures for LGBTIQ employees isn't just about workplace. It's about much more than that. That example you've just given us shows us how it really has an impact on everyone. When freedom of expression is restricted anywhere, it affects us all.

Do we have Michiel?

KOLMAN: Sorry, yeah, you just dropped out the last moment.

KENNEALLY: OK. I'm not sure if you heard that. I can restate that. I'll just take it again. Why don't we do that, Jeremy? OK?

Well, Michiel, I want to commend you for doing just that and to underscore the point that I think listeners may begin to see much more clearly because of what you've just been saying, that when it comes to inclusive cultures and creating an environment that is welcoming for LGBTIQ employees, it's about much more than the workplace, because it has an impact on perceptions around censorship and freedom of expression. And it's my view that where freedom of expression is restricted, it has an impact on all of us.

KOLMAN: Absolutely. I couldn't agree more.



KENNEALLY: Well, we appreciate speaking today with Michiel Kolman. He is the senior vice president, information industry relations and academic ambassador emeritus at Elsevier, as well as president of the International Publishers Association. He's joined me today from his office in Amsterdam. Michiel Kolman, thank you for joining me on Beyond the Book.

KOLMAN: Thank you, Chris. Great being here.

KENNEALLY: Beyond the Book is produced by Copyright Clearance Center, builders of unique solutions that connect content and rights in contextually relevant ways through software and professional services. CCC helps people navigate vast amounts of data to discover actionable insights, enabling them to innovate and make informed decisions.

Beyond the Book co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening, and join us again soon on Beyond the Book.

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