

**CLOUD
REALITIES**

CR032

Diversity
in data
with Roisin
McCarthy,
women in data

CLOUD REALITIES

PODCAST



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Diversity in data with Roisin McCarthy, women in data

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[00:00:00] Yeah, I was, I, introduced Rob to the counter intuitive, oh no, no. Hang on a minute. That, that sounds like it was for my welfare. But what we need to be clear is I was in the middle of the pink flamingo with day at two o'clock in the morning drinking Titos and soda, and it didn't go well the next day.

Welcome to Cloud Realities, a conversation show exploring the practical and exciting alternate realities that can be unleashed through cloud driven transformation. I'm David Chapman. I'm Sjoukje Zaal, and I'm Rob Kernahan. And this week we're gonna be taking the challenges of finding the right diversity mix in the world of data.

Something that's always a challenge in the technical realm, but specifically important when it comes to data. And in this episode, we're gonna explore why

I'm delighted to. [00:01:00] Say that joining us this week is Roisin McCarthy, founder of Women in Data Roisin. Thank you so much for joining us today. You just wanted to introduce yourself. Thanks for having me, gang, I'm Roisin, as you mentioned, Dave. I am a founder. I'm the founder of Women in Data. I'm also an entrepreneur.

I'm a business leader, uh, in the space of talent and recruitment. I'm a mother. And I often feel like I'm an imposter. Welcome to the club. Yeah, exactly. Oh, as do we all, as do we all. Well, let's kick off with some background, shall we? And, and really just bring us up to speed. So when did Women in Data kick off?

What was the catalyst for that? And, and just share a little bit about the journey so far. Well, Dave, it's an interesting story. It's a personal story. The, the inception of Women in Data, it was back in 2014 and in my day job, the one that pays my bills. I've been running a recruitment [00:02:00] business for the last two and a half decades, and it was in 2014.

We were looking at the year end reporting. We had had our most successful year of trading. Today we place more people and more global opportunities than ever before, and I decided to throw gender into the end year end reporting. What I learned at that moment changed my world forever. We'd place less women that year than we had ever historically.

Wow. And it didn't sit right with me. So I decided that day to go about spending a considered amount of my personal time researching why. And I set off on a, a qualitative research project to learn the reasons and, and really engage with females across the industry to understand what was happening. What I was learning was not only were women not joining the sector, their careers were stagnating faster than men's mm.

And actually they were leaving the industry to not return. And at that point I was [00:03:00] compelled to do something. It was actually my mother that compelled me to do it. I shared some of the horror stories with her, Dave, of, you know, some of these qualitative, stories that I was gaining from, from women that I was working with.

Hmm. And she challenged me that day. She said, Roisin, it's time to put up or shut up, do something about it. You're the most connected woman in data and, yeah. Listening to my mother, like a good daughter should. Yeah. I decided to connect 125 women leading female data practitioners from across the UK to connect for a day without very much purpose.

It was really just to connect unconnected women in data. Mm-hmm. And WID was born. So we started, uh, back in 2015 with 125 members, demand grew exponentially overnight. Clearly this was something that was, it hit a nerve somewhere. It really hit a nerve. And, uh, the, the energy that was [00:04:00] created in that room that day on a November raining day was palpable and everybody wanted more. So we decided to create a community setting, a platform, women in data, really with the, uh, purpose of that stage to equip an enabled



careers of PR women practicing in the space. The reality was that women were often very isolated, and they certainly didn't have any peer group that they could lean on.

Mm-hmm. So that was day one, What we recognized very quickly then was with further research from Women in data, was that this was a ubiquitous issue across every industry sector, right? There wasn't one organization or one industry vertical that were performing well in terms of female or diverse representation within their data teams.

And these data teams were building, you know, solutions not only for con consers, but for society. With non-diverse [00:05:00] data teams, so you can imagine what the impact to the outcomes of those solutions were. Right? I mean, if you, if you create solutions, I mean, particularly solutions in the world of data, coming at it with a, let's even be generous, but only one or two points of view, nevermind a fully mixed set of perspectives, you're gonna bias the outcome and probably, let's face it, not in a positive way.

Absolutely. Absolutely. And then, you know, with some research and, and understanding, what we were learning was that women's careers needed some key aspects of development, and it was our role really to provide that. So we've spent the last. Eight years, providing, uh, a year-round agenda to our community, which now stands at 35,000.

In fact, it's over 35,000. Wow. Congratulations. And, the community resides in over 85 countries, which is just simply phenomenal. We were grown here in London, in the UK, but , the need is again, ubiquitous across the planet. What do the meetups [00:06:00] and things like that look like now? So what's the sort of.

The daily interactions across such a large and geographically spread network. Yeah, absolutely. Well, the pandemic gave us a quick lesson, uh, yeah. In in geography. Yeah. And that is that we didn't have the opportunity to be in person and territories really didn't matter anymore. Only time zones did. So we took the world of women in data online, alongside now returning to in-person events.

So we traveled the globe. Hosting, uh, incredible engaged learning opportunities for women and our allies in data to excel their careers. We actually host the world's largest data event for women, and very proud to say that in March of 23, we hosted 2000 female data practitioners at the O two. And we're gonna be back next March on the 7th of March, the day before International Women's Day, with a crowd of over 3000 we hope.

Wow. Wow. Congratulations. What, what an amazing progress that is. And, and when you look [00:07:00] at that global community, are the shared experiences the same across all the different geographic regions? Is it a common global issue or does it vary region by region, or do you know, is it, is experience broadly shared in the same way?

It's a great question, Rob, Firstly, there are threads that replicate across the globe in, in territories such as the skill development piece, the lack of representation in leadership roles. You know, there are lots of replicated issues that are, are in different territories. There are different cultural needs to our community in different.

Regions, and we have to be sensitive to those. Uh, for instance, we've just, uh, established and launched our Indian chapter, our India chapter. And, uh, the, the challenges that women are facing into there are very different to where we are here in the UK. I would say that maturity of understanding the importance of diversity, particularly in [00:08:00] data in India, is way behind the curve of where we are.

So we're almost starting at the journey where we were eight years ago with women in Data again in India. And if I play back in my mind, Rob, when I was starting the initiative, women in



Data. I can genuinely tell you diversity was not on the topic of any leader in any enterprise or FTSE 100 organization.

Genuinely, it was not a topic being discussed and I was poo-pooed away from meetings. Now it couldn't be more of a vogue and important, a structural aspect and strategy for, for organizations. So we've come a long way in eight years, and I've been in organizations for the last, I don't know, 10, 15 years that that sort of metrics.

Diversity if you like, you know, X percentage of, of this, uh, type of person. When you said it wasn't on the agenda of lots of the, of the chief executives you were talking to, was that because they thought [00:09:00] they had it measured somewhere and they'd put some form of metric in and HR was supposed to be created, like a mechanical response to it?

Or was it more that the topic and the. Business value of diversity, not just the level of fairness, but like why you would do it, why you just get better outcomes from diverse workforces? Is it the sort of the substance of that that wasn't in their minds? Do you get the distinction? I do, and I can tell you right now, Dave, that HR functions aren't.

Mechanically measuring this as effectively as they should be. Right, right, and, and that's a, a further topic in things like gender pay gap, and I can talk about that till Christmas. But, when we go back to that point in, in time particularly, I don't think the economic value had been recognized. Right, right.

Yeah. That's only since the last four to five years. Right, exactly. Yeah. And that was a big step change for women in data. So, myself and my partners personally funded the work that we'd done in, in the early days to, you [00:10:00] know, to create the, the platform to ensure that we had the events. We self-funded all of that work for the first three and a half years, and because industry wasn't interested Mm.

And suddenly the penny dropped. There was a real recognition that, uh, there was economic benefits. Yeah, to nourishing, nurturing this untapped talent. Absolutely. And in sponsorship terms now, is that showing up for you guys? Absolutely. It's an absolute essential aspect of the work that we do. Women in data provide all of our services to our membership utterly for free.

Right? So whether that is our flagship event, You know, well cast training, whether it's mentoring, whether it's, uh, an aspect of membership, full stop. We provide those services for free. How we are funded is through, corporate partnership, and it isn't a case of donation to us and we spend the money. What we do is work with organizations to wrap our thought leadership, our experiences, our learnings from the last eight years around the [00:11:00] organizations that, that show the same values and, and drive with the same moment as women in data.

Fantastic. And, and can you give us an insight into what that looks like? So what kind of information are you sharing and Yeah. And how is it resonating with those organizations? Well, I think the, the challenge that if you find an organization that isn't finding data talent a challenge right now, I'd like to know who they are.

Yes, right. There's war on if you haven't heard, and particularly when it comes to, to that diverse representation, I've gotta stress as well, you know, gender is not diversity. Gender is 51% of the population. So it's a, a majority, but, uh, the, the War on Talent really has been a central part of the partnership offering that we have.

So, women in Data, uh, 18 months ago developed a job board, which is exclusively for our partner organizations. It's been superbly successful with 87% application rates from women.



Oh, fantastic. Which is unheard of Fantastic. In this [00:12:00] space. That's fantastic. And Dave, just to give you some context on that, only 26% of the landscape overall of data and AI is occupied by women.

Right. So that gives you a real flavor of its success, uh, and the opportunities that it offers, but alongside, you know, the, the tangible, you know, aspect of. Talent attraction and, and the methods because men and women actually go about their job search very differently. Mm. Some news three, maybe, maybe not, but women don't tend to apply via a job advert nine times out of 10.

Right? They will take the route of a referral, a recommendation, a sponsorship, or being headhunted. Mm. So if you are relying on an advertising mechanism alone for your, for your recruitment, Drive, then you are going to not receive a balanced short list. Right? So it's these sort of tips and tricks and, uh, experiences that we bring in and we wrap around the organization.

There's two other key elements to, to partnership with organizations. The second, [00:13:00] uh, of the three is community built. Data is always referred to in enterprise businesses, as you know, being transformational and how they have to bring siloed data capabilities together. Well, the community needs the same aspect, and particularly women need, uh, and joined up.

Base in which to, to navigate their career internally in an organization. So we assist organizations in, you know, building successfully maintained, sustainable community for women practicing in this space. And is, is that a mechanism you focus on now? So obviously you've got, you've got the groundswell, you've got this amazing community built.

Once they're established in a, in a, in a role in data, that ongoing mentoring to help them. Guide the way through the complexities of very large organizations to make sure they get the right opportunity. There's, there's, you know, there's a huge value in that to make sure they get to the top, cuz that diversity at the top of the shop will then help drive a better culture down back through the organization.

Absolutely. Bob, another [00:14:00] interesting step for you is that the average tenure of a data scientist today is 15 months. It's really short. Wow. However, when you, uh, segment that by gender, it's 20 months to women. Right. Interesting. So there is another invested reason to, to look at, at particularly creating safe spaces and places of belonging for women cause they're more likely to stay.

So when you look at the landscape today compared to when you started this journey, what are your reflections on the progress so far? The landscape is complex, Dave and. Multifaceted with a range of challenges, but let's talk some data points. Mm. So at the point of inception, back in 1415, it was 23% of the landscape was occupied by women, right?

I mentioned today that we were at 26% that's fluctuated in that time. So [00:15:00] we actually in 2019 had got 28% occupational roles. And the pandemic set us back. Pushed it back. Yeah. So that's the first data point. We're now sitting at 26%. We've got work to do to, to get ahead of the curve again. And is that gonna take another five years to, to do watch this space?

Right. I think the, the complexities are around this are, I use the word multifaceted because it's, it's an. Every stage of the career journey. So let's talk a little bit about the broken pipeline that we're all experiencing. I think it was, uh, a noted consulting firm suggested there's gonna be 149 million new jobs in the next two years in data alone.



Right? They also predict that only 20% of those will be occupied by women. Wow. And, and that's because you talk about pipeline, is that because Pipeline right? Back to schools is not supporting that? [00:16:00] Absolutely. Dave, we, as women in Data in 19, when we've been, you know, with deeply Data centric and everything we do, but we were looking at some of the key aspects of the Broken Pipeline.

And what we recognized in the research was that young women by the age of 14 are disengaged with STEM topics. Right? And that is because fundamentally our education, System is broken when it comes to teaching young women STEM subjects just before you move on stem. For those who haven't heard that phrase before, is.

Science, technology, engineering, and maths. Yeah. And uh, you know, it was 2020 pre pandemic that women in Data introduced our little sister girls in data, really with the vision of sick, inspiring young women, uh, earlier on in their, in their education to understand. The impact of data. We're not suggesting all of them are gonna sign up and become data scientists and engineers tomorrow.

[00:17:00] However, they need to recognize that data literacy is a life skill. And also, I, I prese in, in that technology, a lot of the stem. Teaching, I think can appear like very dry and uncreative sometimes. And you're absolutely right. You know, the, the world of data and, and the way that, the way that technology is evolving today is actually, it's, it gets more and more creative, like the more creativity and life you can bring to these subjects.

The, the more valuable the outcomes become. So when, when you're talking to younger age groups, what's your focus? Do you, do you bring some of that life to it? Oh, absolutely. So, uh, when we started off on the research, we worked with, uh, reception age. School children. And when we asked them about their, you know, experiences with, with STEM subjects in, in reception terminology, every hand was raised.

Everybody was excited. They loved maths, they loved science. And we continued this research through the years. And the nbers dropped and dropped. And dropped and dropped. [00:18:00] Right. And what we learned when we had done a study was that young women feel that the STEM topics disengaged them because they're not creative.

They've already been pushed towards arts, so they think they are creatives first, right? The second aspect is that it's non-collaborative, they believe mm. The third is that it's binary, so it's right or wrong, and. Nobody wants to be wrong in their learning. That isn't a feeling of success as you are progressing in your education.

The perception there doesn't leave enough space for you to have opinions and have debate. It's like, it's like zero or one. Exactly. Binary. Yeah. And, and the the final influencing factor, which. Really did break my heart is that girls and boys feel, uh, differently influenced in the home about stem. Mm. So boys feel that they are [00:19:00] encouraged and supported, whereas girls less so.

And I think all of these factors drive to where we are today on top of a curricular that is not fit for purpose, nevermind fit for the digital age regardless of gender. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. It's that thing and, and it makes a lot of sense what you say, but it is baked into who are societal being, isn't it?

It's a global phenomenon. Is that to, to fix it is one hell of a challenge and it'll obviously be a long generational journey, but the creativity point such a key one that it's sold as like boring and dry and there's no fun in that. And it's just the wrong way to think about it, isn't it? Especially something like data, which can be an incredibly creative thing.



When that data curiosity kicks in and you find new patterns and mechanisms and things and insight, it can be a very fulfilling, results. We just sell it badly at a, a young age, which I suppose if, if you had a magic wand, what's the one thing we could do tomorrow to make the biggest difference from your perspective?

Support Girls in Data? Shameless plug. Shameless, shameless plug. Let me tell you a [00:20:00] little bit more about what's happening right now on the ground. So we have thousands of our women in data community with their hands firmly raised, ready to volunteer and get out into schools and inspire. Girls in Data have developed a curricula called the Inspiration Sessions, which is planning to do exactly that the program will be delivered by the women themselves and it's bookended with their personal stories.

And in the curricula is included with, you know, three key topics. You know, coding is a, is a major part, right? But it's not everything. And that's one aspect that's slightly touched upon, but you know, AI and ethics. Seems to get these young women excited, engaged, feeling relative to the topic. Right? And uh, the third of which is Smartsheets.

So looking at concepts of, of building things they really enjoyed. So this program, we have a vision that it is gonna be available to every school in [00:21:00] the country. It is currently targeted at the age group of 14 because that is the point in. Their journey education wise, where they will select subjects that will form and define their careers going forward.

And at that age, when you hear stories about what people have done and how their lives have gone based on that, that theme of technology and data, uh, that, that must be a very compelling and powerful thing that storytelling. And that's almost the most important part to say. This is where this pathway can take you.

And I think that that then can have huge influence when you hear the personal stories of. Of what is it? Sports personalities or technology people or whatever, that tends to be the most compelling thing to drive somebody into a, you know, a particular direction. And it sounds like that's absolutely the way you are looking to motivate.

Definitely. Jill Scott actually is one of our ambassadors for Girls in Data. And you know, she talks so eloquently on how data drives the success of the lioness. Yeah. You know, those sort of stories are game changing. Yeah. Game changing. [00:22:00] Absolutely. Absolutely. Michelle, I wonder what you've experienced going through your career and whether you recognize any of the same challenges.

Yeah, I recognize, of course, I recognize them. I also see, uh, to be honest, if I look at the data tech field, there are more women in data than in the other tech fields. I've worked as a developer, as a cloud engineer. I was mostly the only woman in the team and sometimes the only woman in the company. So there is still a lot to win here, but I'm really, really happy to hear that you are putting so much effort into it, rosan, and that it's really growing.

It really is. Yeah. It makes me sad to feel that, that that was your experience. We need to change that going forward. But what was the impact to your career? Did it have an impact on, on your career being the only woman in the room? I think it did. But on the other hand, if I look at lots of women, they want a female role model.[00:23:00]

But I was also happy with a male role model. So that, I think that made a difference as well for me personally. Role modeling is absolutely centric to the work of, of Women in Data and in 2016 we launched, uh, 20 in Data and Technology. Now this is a series that showcases phenomenal women at every stage of their career.

This is not a power list. This is not a list of who's the, the biggest and the bravest in, in the



world of data. It showcases brilliant women changing our world around us through data. And we're actually just embarking into the sixth series of this project, where we will then have 120 women in our alni.

Uh, this role model series has had huge impact for the community, and these role models are accessible. You can reach them at events, you can connect with them. They will come and speak in your organization. They are true trailblazers, and as I say, we recognize women early on in their career, you know, pioneers, entrepreneurs, technologists.

It's a [00:24:00] phenomenal series. I really recommend taking a look. If there's somebody listening who would like to get involved or, you know, contact one of these role models, how would they go about doing that? Absolutely. First, Portugal has become a member of Women in Data. I remind you it's utterly for free.

You can join us @womenindata.co.uk to sign up for membership will you g will get access to our events, our event calendar, where so many of these role models are included. Within that, but also Dave, I've gotta say the nominations are open right now. So again, get to women in data.co.uk where you will find the nominations page.

If there's someone that's inspiring you, if you feel that you have something to give to the community and a story to tell, please consider self nomination. Great. And then maybe just to bring today's conversation to a bit of a conclusion, let's try and gaze forward. So as you, as you look maybe over the next 12 or 18 months, I wonder what your priorities are for the organization to tackle [00:25:00] some of these issues.

And then a little bit further out, are you optimistic about the next five years and what the outlook might be? It depends what day of the week you speak to me, Dave, on, on optimism. But there are peaks and there are troughs, and I do feel optimistic. I think the work that with Girls in Data has real energy and and opportunity to make impact and change that dial.

But the reality is, right now for every four men who are entering a career in data today, we do not have a whole woman. It's no 0.68 women to every four men. So that makes me feel. Dave, that if we're basing this on numbers, we're gonna go backwards again. For the demand versus supply. So this is a long game.

Will it be in my lifetime? Will it be in my daughter's lifetime? I hope so, there's so much work still to do.[00:26:00]

What you been looking at this week. So each week I will do some research on what's trending in tech, and this week I want to focus on the five benefits of diversity in the workplace. So diversity in the workplace means the acceptance and inclusion of employees of all backgrounds and the diverse workplace is a very important asset since it acknowledged the individual strengths of each employee and the potential they bring.

So what are then the concrete benefits of diversity in the workplace? First one, increased productivity, but also creativity, the improved cultural awareness of positive reputation. And lastly, marketing opportunities. So a question to the whole group, do you think that these benefits cover it all or are there any benefits to add or maybe some that needs to be removed from the list?

So my [00:27:00] perspective, sort of talking with my day job hat on, I think relates to a point that Roisin made earlier in the conversation, which is Roisin when you were referring to, it's particularly important to have a diverse group together when you're working with data because the worst thing you wanna do is have your lack of diversity bias that data.

And I think that applies to just, just general. Solutioning of almost anything. So it seems to



me to be, if you put the exact same group of people, same demographic, same age, same background in a room with a problem statement, you are gonna get a very one dimensional answer to that problem. But, It seems blindingly obvious to me that if that is a, a more diverse group with different backgrounds and different perspectives and different ages and all kinds of different demographics, that you're gonna get way more richness in the dialogue around that and, and the answer, and therefore the solution you come to not only will be better quality, but I think it'll be, it would better represent the audience that you're then pitching [00:28:00] that solution to.

Do you think. I totally agree. Totally agree. Dave. I do think on the point of, of culture that you raised, uh, you know, the benefits are, are so deep there and in diversity you're gonna have, you know, by standard you're gonna have better working conditions for your employees, which will create productivity.

It will become, create better outcomes for, for business, better economic benefits. But the reality is a diverse Workforce has better working benefits and conditions through flexibility, through opportunity, through promotional opportunities and beyond. So I think that for a long term game, the culture aspect for an organization is a big win.

A big, big win. It's a similar effect to when you democratize access to IT systems and yeah, push them outside the domain of the IT professional. Diversity of different roles and backgrounds creates radically different thinking around what [00:29:00] they're actually doing and just generally creates better results.

It is that let the biggest community you can with the best diversity, access the problem, and you'll always get the best result, won't you? It's that it's that keep it within a narrow silo and protectionism and things like that in within these types of systems just don't work or they, they can work, but they don't get the best outcome.

They don't rob. And I think that it's one thing when it's commercial and when it's product driven and it's in the word world of commerce, but when it's societal, We have a responsibility to absolutely engineer this in the foundations of the work that we do. Yeah. Because this is representing the citizen in everything that we do, which is really difficult for many, you know, government departments, agencies, world over.

But that should be a fundamental pillar and strategy point in building their data strategy. You know, I also think it's just. More fun. Yeah. That, that is what I wanted to add to it from. Yeah. It's much more fun to work with a diverse group of [00:30:00] people and learn from each other. You just learn so much about the world generally as well.

Yeah. When you, when you travel, ask the questions, be inquisitive, find out more. Great. You, you, you get more empathetic with the world at large as well. They should just create better hans, I suppose. Totally agree. Yeah. So what a great and inspiring conversation today, rosin, thank you so much for joining us, particularly, I know you're back from a fairly hellish weekend, uh, over in Vegas, and we really appreciate you, uh, hauling yourself in.

So thank you so much. Thanks for having me. It's been great fun, and we wish you just endless luck with your mission. Here it is. One of the more important ones I think we've had on the show. It was a real pleasure talking to you. So we end every episode of this show by asking our guest what they're excited about doing next.

And that could be a great restaurant you got booked at the weekend, or, you know, getting outside and away from the desk for a little bit. Or it could be, you know, the next thing that's exciting you in your professional life. So Roisin, what are you excited about doing next? I



cannot wait [00:31:00] to announce. The next flagship conference for Women in Data and the ballot for our members will be open at the back end of the summer, but we plan for 3000 women in data to be at the O2 stadium on the 7th of March.

You heard it here first, Dave. Well, it's an exclusive. It's an exclusive. Well, we're honored. Thank you so much, and we wish you absolutely the best with that. So a huge thanks to our guest this week, Roisin.

Thank you so much for being on the show to our sound and editing wizard, Ben, and of course to all of our listeners, We're on LinkedIn and Twitter, Dave Chapman, Rob Kernahan, and Sjoukje Zaal. Feel free to follow or connect with us and let us know if you have any ideas for the show.

And of course, if you haven't already done that, rate and subscribe to our podcast. See you in another reality next week.[00:32:00]

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