A more equitable future: Diversity, inclusion and belonging in the UK workplace

2022 report

indeed

About Indeed

Indeed, the world's #1 job site[1], allows jobseekers to search millions of jobs on the web or mobile, in over 60 countries and 28 languages. Over 300 million global unique visitors each month search for jobs, post CVs and research companies on Indeed[2].

At Indeed, our mission is to help people get jobs. We have nearly 15,000 global employees passionately pursuing this purpose and improving the recruitment journey through real stories and data. We foster a collaborative workplace that strives to create the best experience for jobseekers.

We are committed to advancing, cultivating and preserving a culture of diversity, inclusion and belonging because it makes us a stronger, more successful company, and because it directly aligns with our mission to help all people get jobs. Visit uk.indeed.com/hire to start building a pipeline of diverse and quality candidates today.

Questions?

We'd love to discuss your diversity, inclusion and belonging initiatives. Please reach out to your Indeed account manager to arrange a meeting.

Research methodology

Figures are taken from a survey conducted between 23rd September - 3rd October 2022 by YouGov on behalf of Indeed, of 2539 UK nationally representative adults. The survey comprised 1268 employees, 765 senior managers and 506 HR leaders/decision-makers.

YouGov

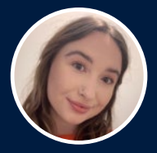
Sources:
1. Comscore, Total Visits, September 2022
2. Indeed internal data, average monthly unique visitors April-September 2022

Contents

— **Profile** — **Tips, advice, actionables**

Meet the experts

Introducing our esteemed cast of contributors—including (but not limited to) company founders, bestselling authors, tech leaders and equity champions. Before they impart wisdom on all things DI&B, we've asked each one question. The answers are every bit as impressive as their respective CVs.



Armelle McGeachie

Founder of Girls with Dyslexia

What does true belonging look like?

"It's about being able to express yourself authentically, without exception. Accepting the strengths our differences bring, but also recognising that we're underserved. It's about going through your day knowing that people genuinely hold your best interests at heart. And knowing that you no longer have to be on edge, wondering what people really think."

"It's about going through your day knowing that people genuinely hold your best interests at heart."

Jahanzaib Ansari

Co-founder & CEO of Knockri

What's your why?

"I don't want to be known as a founder of just another HR tech company. I wake up every day with a mission to remove barriers and create equal hiring opportunities for all. My goal is to ensure that every person has a fair shot at applying for a job and that no one is ever overlooked due to their race, gender, age or disability."

Leanne Maskell

Founder of ADHD Works

What's your why?

"Having had bad experiences myself, my 'why' is to make it better for other people. Before I was diagnosed with ADHD, I was very, very suicidal. Since then, I've just been trying to help as many people as possible, so they can avoid having the same experiences, and have fun along the way."

Bruce Daisley

Podcaster, speaker & bestselling author

What's your why?

"I grew up as the child of an addict. As a result of that, I think what you end up doing is compensating for some means in your own life. I've got this relentless urge that if I just work a little bit harder, the world will be better, which is clearly broken logic and the consequence of something being wrong, but it just means I've got this restless energy to try and keep doing stuff. I think some deep-rooted chasm that's been excavated inside me is probably my 'why'."

Eleanor Snare

Speaker, author & creator

What does the future hold for workplace belonging?

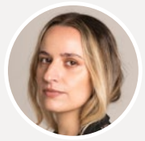
"I think what we'll probably see is a hyper-localisation of workplaces. The 15-minute city will change the dynamic of work, with lots of different people who live in the same place co-working for different companies. The workplace will become less about belonging to an employer and more about belonging to a community."

Ellie Middleton

Neurodiversity advocate & founder of (un)masked

What does true belonging look like?

"It means being able to show up as 100% my true self and being 100% accepted as that person. It means being valued as a whole, rounded human—rather than just as an 'employee'—and knowing that I have a connection with the people around me."



Daniela Herrera

Diversity & inclusion professional

How can employers foster a better sense of belonging?

"In order to truly achieve belonging, you have to be in a very, very good standing with equity and inclusion. This will then lead to a healthy culture, which will lead to belonging. If you don't, I think it's very, very hard, as we are just asking people to bring their whole selves to work, when we know they might not be fully welcomed."

Sophie Williams

Author, speaker and equity consultant

What's your why?

"I think the 'why' is to give the next generation a better starting point than we had. I think that's all we can do. I don't think we're going to solve anything in a single moment or a single generation, but we can push things forward—so it's easier for the next group."

"In order to truly achieve belonging, you have to be in a very, very good standing with equity and inclusion."

Rachel Charlton-Dailey

Founder of The Unwritten

What does true belonging look like?

"Having a community that won't judge you for how much you can do, but is there to celebrate your achievements. The online disabled community is unlike anything I've ever been part of in terms of support, and how open we are to everyone. It's also about seeing yourself represented in all forms of media—which is something I'm really working on."

Adah Parris

Artist, activist & now-ist

What's your why?

"Market share doesn't matter if there's no planet. I feel that our first responsibility should be to make sure we don't do damage to this planet—it has not got finite resources, and it's not here for us. As humans, we're just another species as part of this ecological journey, and I try to get people to think about the real implications of that in everything that they do. That's my 'why'."

Jack Dyrhauge

Founder & CEO of Neuropool

What's your why?

"There's a clear unevenness in corporate and educational institutions when it comes to neurodiversity, and my 'why' is to tackle that. At Neuropool we do this through, yes, helping people into employment, but we're also an ecosystem of employers, universities and a talent community. We know the biggest impact we can have for someone is by helping them into a job."

Foreword: Envisioning a more equitable future of work

The bias and barriers to employment faced by people who are underrepresented are often unrelated to their ability to do the job. These individuals have the skills and experience, and the desire to work. Too often they are overlooked or screened out during the hiring process, simply because of their identity, background, and personal history.

It is imperative that employers challenge the status quo of their hiring practices and philosophy to mitigate bias and remove barriers to meaningful employment. It is all too often that marginalised groups, job seekers facing barriers are unable to find work. I hope that with the new information about how to improve hiring practices we can question current processes and implement the necessary changes to change the trajectory of our workforce.

> "The improvements we need to make require a level of vulnerability, compassion and empathy."

This requires a shift in mindset, introspection, letting go of the fear of getting things wrong and accepting that you don't have all the answers. The improvements we need to make require a level of vulnerability, compassion and empathy — the essential leadership skills that matter most right now.

To create lasting, positive change, we have to say and do the hard things, which will be uncomfortable, however growth and change happen outside of our comfort zones.

In this report, you will find the most-recent YouGov survey data commissioned by Indeed, alongside tips, advice and actionables from some of the most progressive thought leaders in the diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging sphere. We hope you find it valuable and actionable, and are able to reflect on the current state and the progress we can make towards a more equitable future.

Misty Gaither
Environmental, Social, Governance

Vice President, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB+) at Indeed

Financial times: Workplace DI&B in the age of permacrisis

Can you sum up 12 whole months in a single set of syllables? It's not easy, but is exactly what Collins English Dictionary—with its time-honoured 'Word of the Year'—strives to do. Launched in 2013, this yearly yardstick provides a surprisingly accurate snapshot of national, if not global, mood.

Looking back, 2013-15 seemed more care-free. Back then, modern life was best described by 'geek', 'photobomb' and 'binge-watch'. Then a drastic vibe shift ensued, with the second half of the decade beset by 'Brexit' (2016), 'fake news' (2017) and 'climate strike' (2019). And, not that we need reminding, 2020 was defined by 'lockdown'.

While last year saw a brief reprieve in tone ('NFT'), the above trend forms part of a growing list of global factors (soaring costs, climate concerns, European war and more), and gave this year's entry a glib sense of inevitability.

Indeed, the Collins Word of the Year 2022—defined as "an extended period of instability and insecurity"—is 'permacrisis'.

What does this mean for UK organisations, and the millions of people within them? Both nothing and everything, all at once.

On one hand, no single employer has the power to force change on macro, world-shaping issues. And though many would love to spike every salary in line with inflation—to combat the rocketing cost of living—few can afford it (with a wage-price spiral a genuine risk).

On the other hand, we live in an age where many seek purpose from their work. Employees expect companies to have a conscience. Perhaps most important, we encourage staff to bring their full, authentic selves to work. And while much of this rightly focuses on belonging, it does also mean people turn up with life-based strings attached.

And it shows.

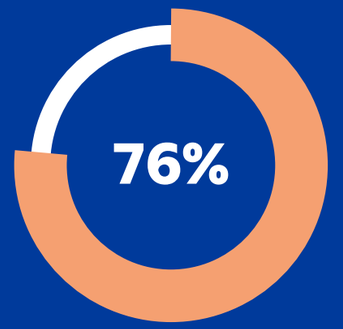
In Indeed's exclusive survey with YouGov, more than three-quarters (76%) say the economy is among the most important issues the UK faces right now. This a *30+ point* increase from our previous DI&B survey, last year. Back then, respondents viewed health and the economy as roughly equal, whereas now only a third (36%) see health as a top concern.

In another departure from peak Covid (*and* a symbol for these bleak economic times), last year senior managers and HR decision-makers looking for a new role said work-life balance was as important as pay—if not more so. Now, a sizeable majority of HR leaders, managers and employees are all more focused on a bigger pay packet.

Meanwhile, many other meaty matters are dwarfed by people's cash-based angst. For instance, just 26% of survey-takers say the environment is a major issue, with even fewer pointing to Brexit (20%) and social factors (10%).

As the UK stares down what may become the longest recession in a century, don't mistake this as a reason to scale back diversity, inclusion and belonging initiatives. After all, the shock of 2020 was a start-point, not a high watermark. In fact, during times of permacrisis, investing in DI&B—or, put another way, investing in *people*—is even more important.

But don't take our word as gospel. Instead, put your faith in facts. Because, as you'll see from the stats that follow, the UK workforce's attitudes on DI&B are as strong as they are sticky.



of respondents say the economy is the most important issue facing the country at this time.

Salary is the top consideration for all audiences if they were to seek a new role.

Is diversity and inclusion important to your organisation? Because it is to your staff

In the YouGov survey, a majority of all workplace audiences say diversity and inclusion is personally important to them. This is true for 52% of employees, 56% of senior managers and 60% of HR decision-makers. And it seems these opinions are hard-wired, as the findings are strikingly similar to 2021 data (employees: 51%; managers: 60%; HR leaders: 60%).

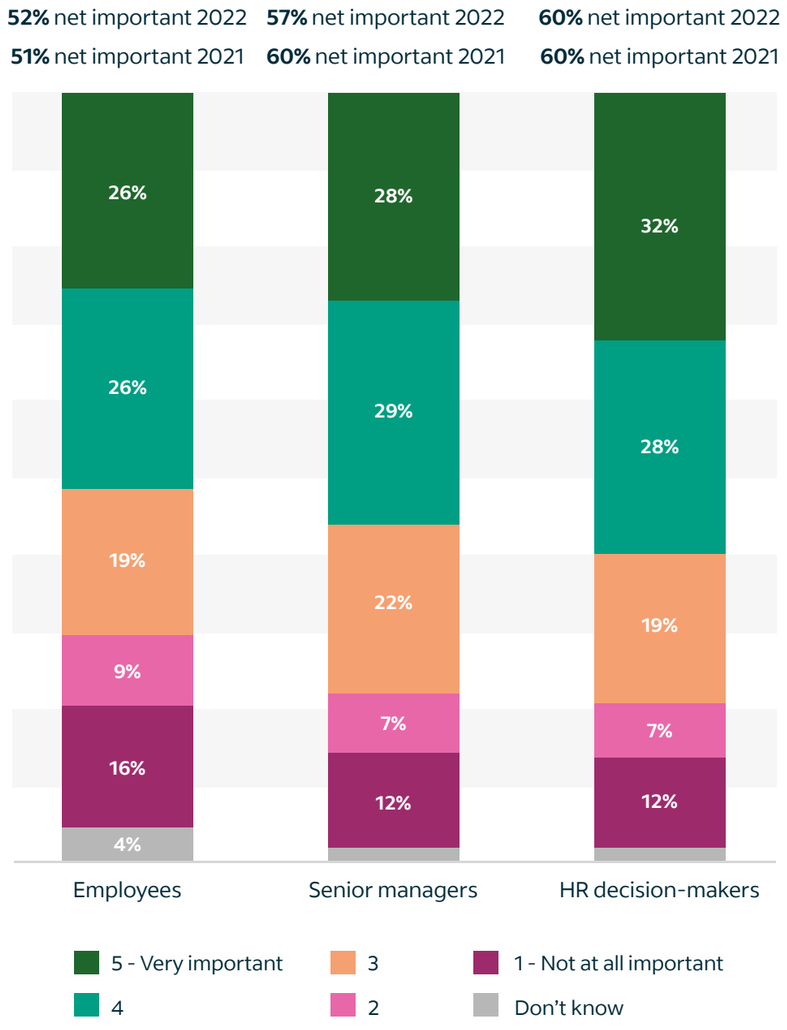
Digging deeper, while it's worth noting there's no group with a majority view that diversity and inclusion is *not* important, respondents aged 65+ are evenly split: 42% say it's important to them, 41% not. This reveals a clear generational gap, as 58% of 18-24 year olds (aka Gen Z) claim a personal investment in diversity and inclusion (vs 13% not). There's an even bigger gap to 25-39 year olds—broadly speaking, millennials—62% of whom say it's personally important, and 15% not.

58% of 18-24 year olds (aka Gen Z) claim a personal investment in diversity and inclusion (vs 13% not).

A divide also exists across the sexes, with two-thirds (64%) of women seeing diversity and inclusion as important, compared with 47% of men—a 17 point difference. What's more, twice as many male survey-takers say diversity and inclusion does *not* matter to them; 29%, compared with 15% of female survey-takers.

Another enlightening—if unsurprising—finding is that historically marginalised groups place great value on diversity and inclusion. Some three quarters (73%) of LGBTQ+ survey-takers say it's important to them, and likewise 7 in 10 minority ethnic respondents. Just 1 in 10 and 1 in 50, respectively, claim it doesn't matter.

Over half of respondents from all audiences say diversity and inclusion is important to them personally, with HR decision-makers most likely to say this



Q. How important, if at all, would you say diversity and inclusion is to you personally?

There's a broad gap between people's beliefs, and experience, of belonging

A diverse workplace is *very* different to one where every individual feels they belong. On the topic of which groups can be their true selves at work, 8 in 10 employees, HR decision-makers and senior managers agree: men.

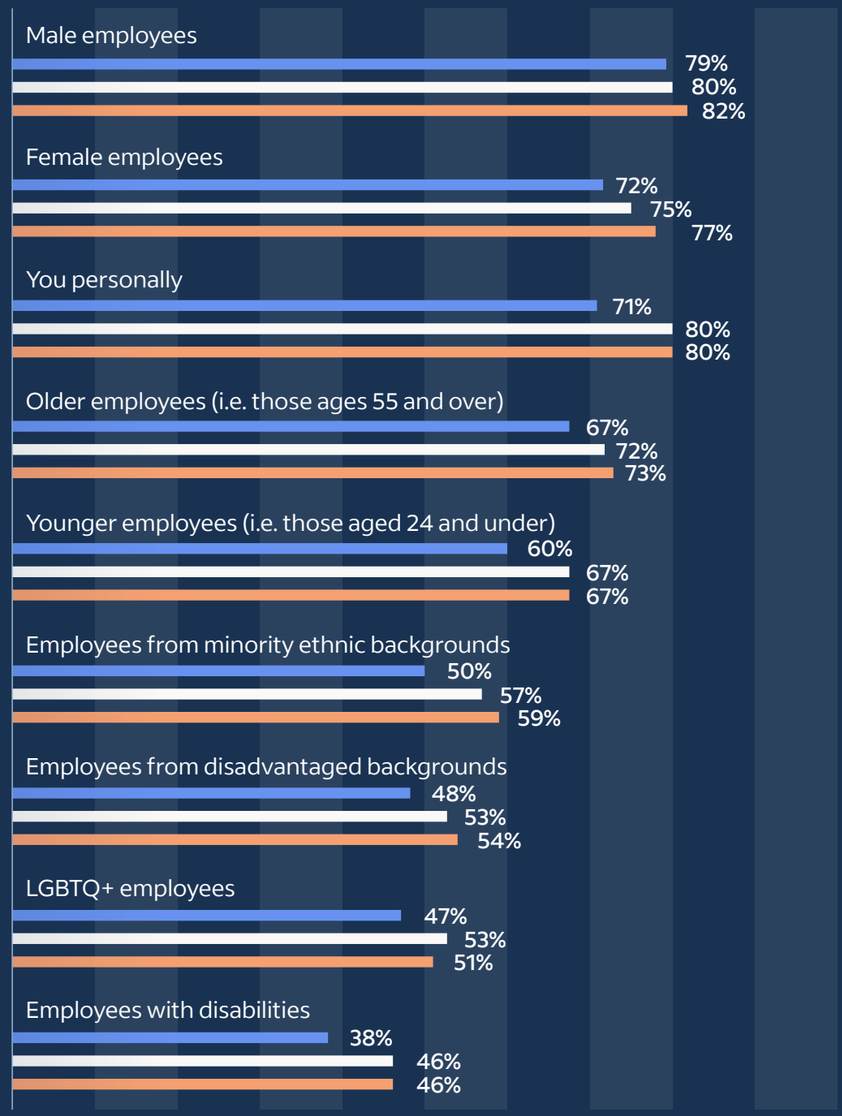
This finding is unchanged from 2021, and the same is true for respondents' perceptions of female staff. Some 72% of employees say women can be themselves at work, with three-quarters (75%) of managers and 77% of HR leaders saying the same. Again, this tracks very closely with 2021 data.

Maybe it's no surprise that survey-takers think marginalised groups are less likely to feel comfortable at work. For example, less than half of employees say they believe LGBTQ+ staff can be themselves (47%), with their expectation of disabled staff's comfort lower still (38%). Yet, when you contrast expectations with lived experience, there's far cheerier news in store.

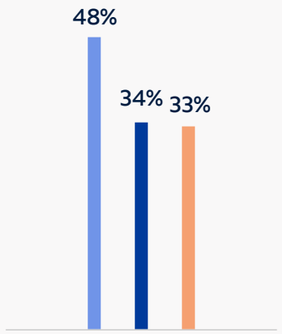
Three-quarters of all respondents (76%) say *they personally* feel safe being their true selves in the workplace. And this is the majority view of every single audience group—from senior managers and HR decision-makers (both 80%), to Gen Zers and the over-65s (68% and 79%), plus 3 in 4 disabled workers (75%), 65% of LGBTQ+ survey-takers, and 7 in 10 ethnic minority respondents (71%).

And given these particular stats are based on people's own experiences—rather than their perception of others—it's safe to put a little extra faith in them.

All audiences believe male staff are most comfortable being themselves at work, and also feel disabled workers are least likely to be their true selves



Q. To what extent, if at all, do you feel each of the following groups feel comfortable being their true selves in the workplace at your organisation?



Q. You mentioned you've been discriminated against because of your age, gender, race, ethnicity, physical or mental ability or sexual orientation at work. In what way were you discriminated against?

Tales of discrimination expose an unfair workplace

To state the obvious, one instance of discrimination is one too many. So it's troubling that a quarter of employees (23%) and managers (26%), and 28% of HR decision-makers say they've been discriminated against at work—either for their age, gender, race, ethnicity, physical or mental ability, or their sexual orientation. The fact these findings closely match 2021 data only adds to concerns.

Within these groups (left), employees most often feel their opinion isn't valued—48% say so, compared with a third of senior managers and HR leaders. The most common issue HR decision-makers raise is feeling they have to work harder than others to prove themselves (39%, vs 36% of managers and 35% of employees). The top fear for managers, meanwhile, is being overlooked for promotion or a pay rise (38%), something that's less frequent among HR leaders (31%), but even more widespread for employees: 44%.

The situation is bleaker still for some groups. While a quarter of all respondents say they have faced discrimination, rates are more than 15 points higher among disabled survey-takers (38%), LGBTQ+ respondents (39%) and people from a minority ethnic background (43%). There is also an 11% gap between men and women—with nearly a third of female survey-takers saying they have been discriminated against (31%), versus a fifth of men (20%).

Of those who have experienced discrimination, 56% of LGBTQ+ respondents say this has taken the form of 'colleagues making seemingly harmless comments' that made them feel excluded. For 18-24 year olds, 54% say workmates making 'seemingly harmless jokes' triggered a sense of exclusion, and half (49%) claim they've been made to feel like their opinion isn't valued. This last finding is mirrored among respondents aged 65+, which suggests feelings of marginalisation are common at both the start, and end, of a person's career.

These findings strongly highlight that we have a long way to go to deliver a truly fair and equitable workplace. As it stands, not only does discrimination still exist, it disproportionately affects groups that have previously experienced systemic oppression. Until this changes for good, every employer has a duty to both seek—and stamp—it out.

11%

the gap between men and women—with nearly a third of female survey-takers saying they have been discriminated against (31%), versus a fifth of men (20%).

56%

of LGBTQ+ respondents say discrimination has taken the form of 'colleagues making seemingly harmless comments' that made them feel excluded.

The workforce stands ready to fight discrimination (yet power and people factors play a big part)

Taking a stand against workplace discrimination is a worthy cause, but it's rarely straightforward or easy. Sometimes, doing so can put the person taking action—or even the individual they're advocating for—at risk. And this context is clear within the YouGov data, as it's those with the most power who feel safest to call out bad behaviour.

Employees, senior managers and HR decision-makers all point to female workmates as the group they would feel most comfortable taking action for. Yet what's interesting is the relationship between an audience's support and their organisational role. As while 7 in 10 senior managers (70%) and HR leaders (71%) say they'd fight for a female colleague, for employees it's just over half (55%). And this is a consistent trend.

While the majority of HR decision-makers and managers say they'd challenge discrimination on behalf of *every* group—for instance, older workers (68% of managers, 69% of HR decision-makers), young staff (64%, 67%) and ethnic minorities (both 65%)—this isn't the case among employees. In fact, besides male (55%) and female (52%) colleagues, there is no other group a majority of employees feel safe to stand up for.

70%

of senior managers and 71% of HR leaders say they'd fight for a female colleague.

55% / 52%

Besides male (55%) and female (52%) colleagues, there is no other group a majority of employees feel safe to stand up for.

All groups are most likely to feel comfortable in taking action against discrimination towards female employees, with levels of comfort generally much higher among senior managers and HR decision-makers

	Employees		Senior managers		HR decision-makers	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Female employees	55%	1	70%	1	71%	1
Male employees	52%	2	64%	=5	65%	=4
Younger employees (i.e. those aged 24 and under)	50%	=3	64%	=5	67%	3
Older employees (i.e. those aged 55 and over)	50%	=3	68%	2	69%	2
Employees from disadvantaged backgrounds	47%	=5	62%	8	65%	=4
Employees from minority ethnic backgrounds	47%	=5	65%	=3	65%	=4
Employees with disabilities	46%	7	65%	=3	63%	=7
LGBTQ+ employees	45%	8	63%	7	63%	=7

Chart displays % of respondents rating each saying they would be comfortable reporting it

Q. How comfortable, if at all, would you feel in taking action against discrimination towards the following staff within your organisation?

Why? It's likely twofold. First, it can't be ignored that, in different ways, advocating for colleagues is part of a HR decision-maker and senior leader's job. This cannot often be said for employees.

Until every group gets equal action and support from those in management and HR, the workplace can't and won't be fair.

Second, it's vital to bear in mind that a management or HR role comes with a clear sense of authority and, as such, security. It figures that employees are less at ease fighting for others—they are not lacking in conviction, empathy or backbone, rather the guarantee that speaking out won't negatively affect *them*. Especially if the person they call out for discriminatory conduct is in a position of power.

There is one more thing to reflect on, here. Though managers and HR decision-makers are bold in their support for workmates—again, a majority say they'd speak out for every group—there is a small but noticeable dip in places. Where 7 in 10 managers (70%) and HR leaders (71%) say they'd back a female colleague, this drops to 6 in 10 (both 63%) for LGBTQ+ workers.

Elsewhere, while the gap is smaller, respondents in management and HR roles are more at ease advocating for older workmates—68% and 69%, respectively—than they are ethnic minority colleagues (both 65%).

This implies there is still work to do. While being an active bystander isn't easy, it's incredibly important—and no more so than for those in power. Don't forget, until *every* group gets equal action and support from those in management and HR, the workplace can't and won't be fair.

Workplace diversity policies paint a mixed picture

Though the data shows people have a strong passion for DI&B in principle, the reality—in terms of initiatives across UK workplaces—is less clear. For instance, 54% of HR leaders and half of senior managers (50%) say their organisation has a DI&B policy.

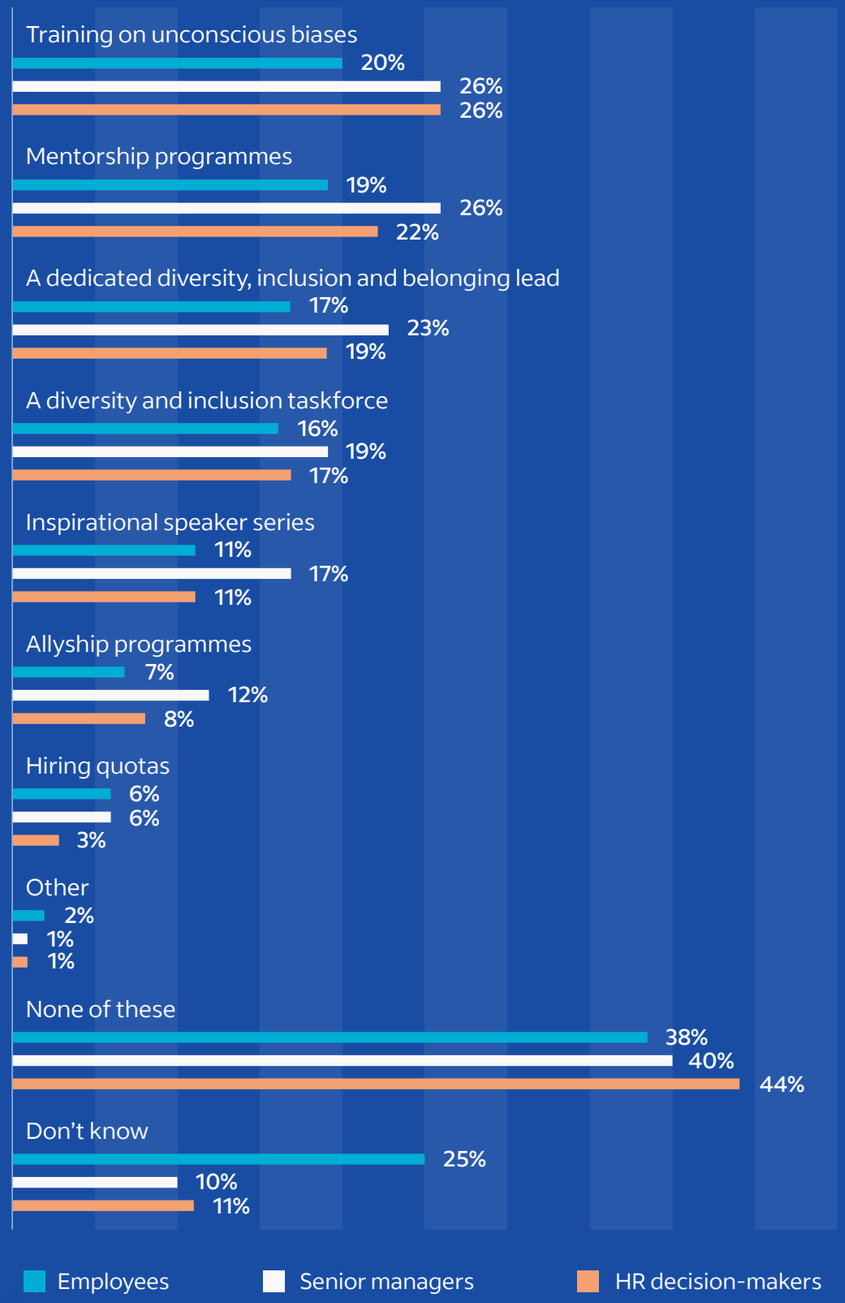
At least half of managers and HR decision-makers report having a diversity and inclusion policy, with a slightly smaller number of employees saying the same.

Q. Does your organisation currently have a diversity (and/or inclusion and/or belonging) policy?

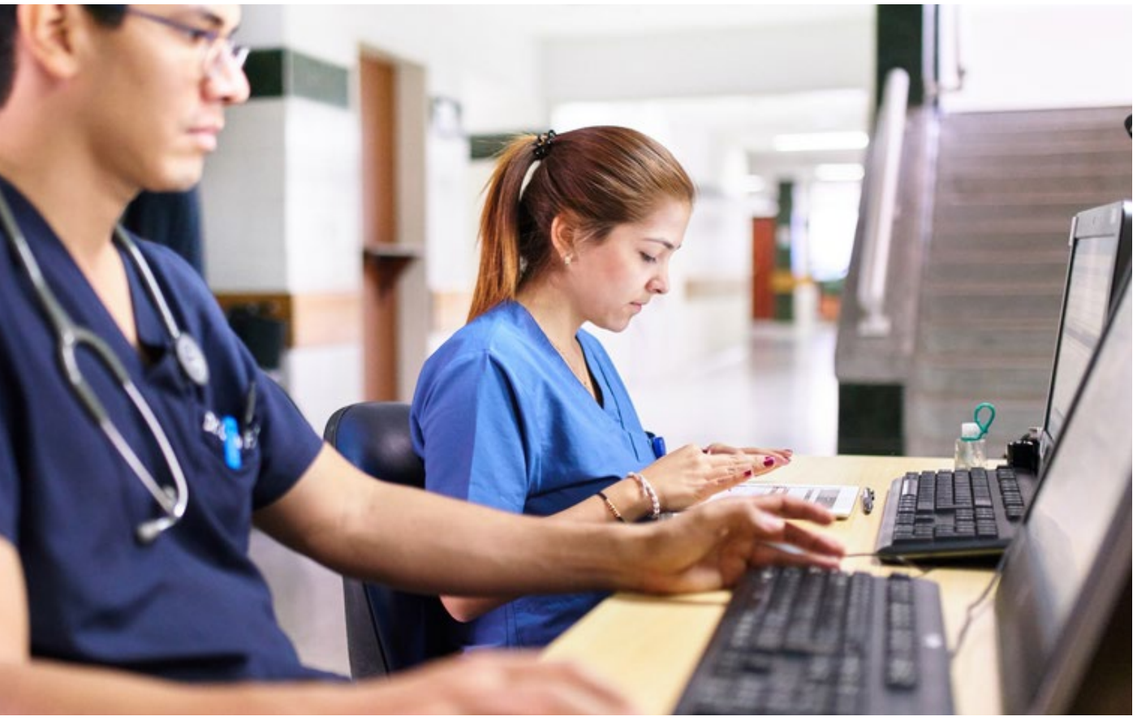
This is positive—if a slight fall from last year's data (managers: 51%; HR decision-makers: 59%)—although it does mean around a third of all workplaces have no scheme at all. Even fewer employees say their company has a DI&B policy (45%), with 'don't know' a more popular answer than 'no' (30% v 25%). This is understandable to a point—HR and management are more involved in both planning and the rollout of such schemes—but does suggest companies need to double down on engagement and awareness measures.

That said, the excuse of uncertainty can only go so far. Four in 10 HR leaders and managers admit their company doesn't have any DI&B processes in place (see graph to the right). In fact, 'none' is a far more popular survey response than any scheme organisations *do* have—like unconscious bias training (a quarter of HR leaders and managers claim they have it, alongside a fifth of employees) or mentorship (a quarter of managers; a fifth of HR leaders and employees).

Unconscious bias training is the most common diversity and inclusion offering observed by employees and HR decision-makers



Which of the following, if any, does your organisation currently have/offer?



As for impact, employers may do well to invest in allyship programmes. Though these are only offered in a fraction of organisations (12% of managers say their company has a scheme, versus 8% of HR decision-makers and 7% of employees), the pay-off is profound. Both employees (65%) and HR leaders (79%) both rank allyship schemes as having the greatest impact on employee experience. And some two-thirds of managers (65%) agree, although they point to mentorship as slightly more impactful (71%).

It's important to note that virtually every scheme has majority support (except 'inspirational speaker series' among employees—only 48% say this has an impact), although hiring quotas rank low, comparatively speaking. Just over half (52%) of employees say they're impactful, and though over 6 in 10 HR leaders and managers support quotas, they place last in terms of impact.

Meanwhile, organisations aren't yet aligned on a fair and objective recruitment process. Half of HR decision-makers and senior managers (49%) claim their company has processes in place—for instance blind applications or standardised interviews—and likewise 4 in 10 employees. For all audiences, this is similar to 2021 data. But given the combination of 'no' and 'don't know' answers are on par with—or, in the case of employees, exceed—'yes', this reveals a mixed picture, and hints that equitable recruitment is not yet the norm.

Employees and HR leaders see allyship schemes as having the most impact, with managers more keen on mentorship. All groups picked a top three of allyship, mentoring, and diversity and inclusion taskforces

	Employees		Senior managers		HR decision-makers	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Allyship programmes	65%	1	65%	3	79%	1
Mentorship programmes	64%	2	71%	1	77%	2
A diversity and inclusion taskforce	58%	3	66%	2	74%	3
Training on unconscious biases	56%	4	65%	5	65%	6
A dedicated diversity, inclusion and belonging lead	55%	5	65%	6	70%	5
Hiring quotas	52%	6	64%	7	62%	7
Inspirational speaker series	48%	7	65%	4	70%	4

Chart displays % of respondents rating each as impactful

Q. How significant an impact, if at all, do you think each of these have had on employee experience in the workplace?

Great expectations: The UK workforce wants action from employers

Before we dig into people's demands, let's first make clear what organisations are getting right. A large majority of HR decision-makers and senior managers—4 in 5, to be exact—and 7 in 10 employees, say they are 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with their employer's approach to DI&B. These sentiments are sticky, with only a few percentage points difference, compared to last year's data.

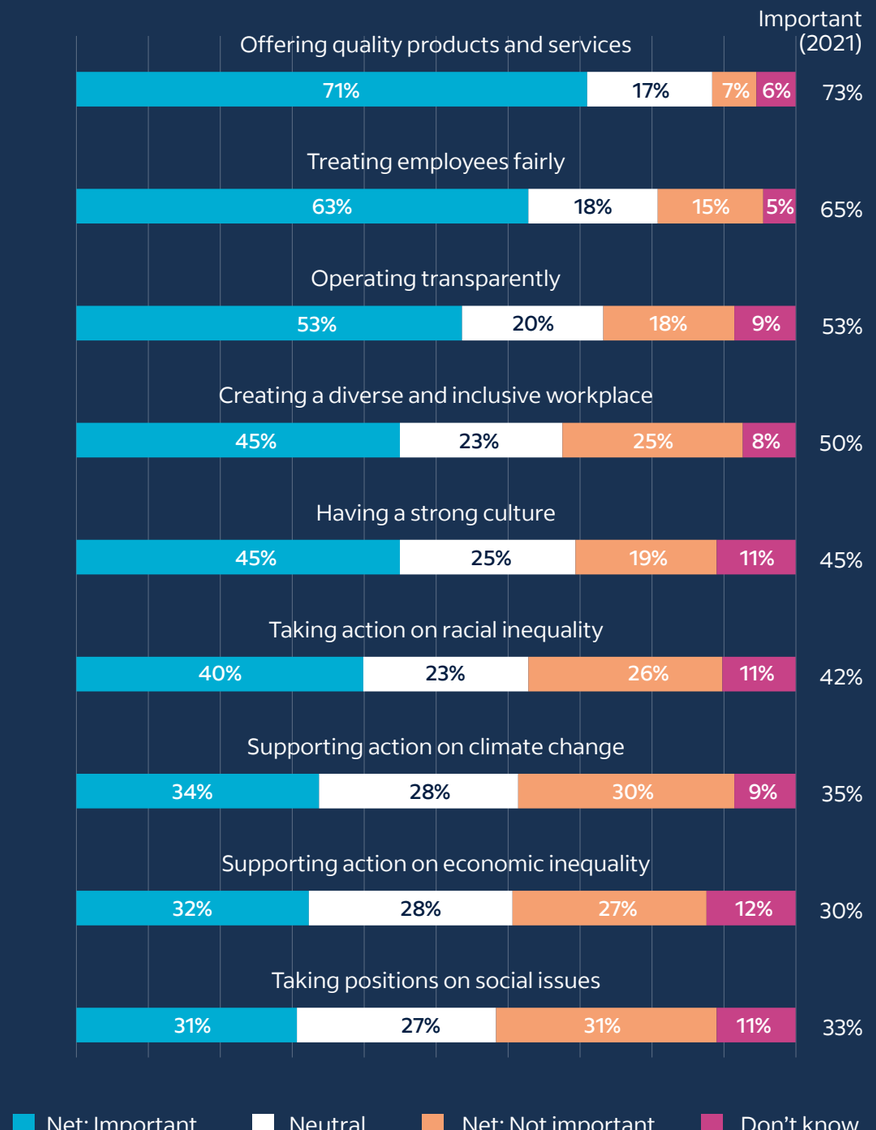
Likewise, though all groups agree their organisation's top priority is 'offering quality products and services' (which figures, as we're talking about for-profit companies, not charities), survey-takers also seem to back their employers' moral compass.

On the topic of organisational priorities, a majority of each group feel their company places importance on 'treating employees fairly' and 'operating transparently'. And, while only 45% of employees say their company feels 'creating a diverse workforce' and 'having a strong culture' is important, around three-fifths of HR leaders *and* senior managers think this.

Of course, with great support comes great responsibility. And staff from all levels of UK organisations have strong thoughts on a modern company's role in society. The top concern? Gender pay equality. Some 7 in 10 HR leaders (72%) and managers (70%), and 2 in 3 employees (66%) feel their employer has a 'significant' responsibility to tackle this issue. Factor in respondents who think their company is 'somewhat' responsible, and this amounts to 86% among all audiences.

	Employees		Senior managers		HR decision-makers	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Gender pay equality	66%	1	70%	1	72%	1
Age discrimination	62%	2	70%	2	68%	2
Climate change	54%	3	57%	4	58%	5
Racial inequality	53%	4	63%	3	62%	3
LGBTQ+ discrimination	48%	5	55%	5	60%	4
Poverty	44%	6	44%	6	45%	6

Offering quality products and services is seen as the most important area of focus for organisations by employees, as was the case in 2021.



How important, if at all, do you think each of the following are for your organisation currently?

Survey-takers are similarly passionate about age discrimination—which, like equal pay, is a workplace-specific issue—with three-fifths of employees (62%), plus 7 in 10 HR leaders (68%) and managers (70%) believing their company bears a 'significant' responsibility. (And, as before, add answers of 'some responsibility', and this climbs to more than 8 in 10 all round.)

This strength of feeling extends to social issues, yet there's a noticeable gap between demand and (perceived) supply. A majority of all audiences believe their organisation has a duty to tackle climate change, for example (54% of employees; 57% managers; 58% HR decision-makers), though respondents are less sure about their company's commitment. Just 35% of employees believe leadership is dedicated to addressing environmental issues, with HR decision-makers and managers a bit more optimistic (50% and 49%).

A majority of all audiences believe their organisation has a duty to tackle climate change, though respondents are less sure about their company's commitment.

Likewise, the majority of all groups—that is, just over half of employees (53%), plus three-fifths of senior managers (63%) and HR leaders (62%)—think their firm should play a role in tackling racial inequality. Here, though a small minority of employees feel leadership is committed (44%), there is more faith among HR decision-makers (56%) and senior managers (58%).

Across all audiences, survey-takers agree that businesses should take a stance on key social issues in the UK. This is a consistent finding, year-on-year, with fewer than 1 in 3 respondents claiming companies should not take a stand.

35% of employees believe leadership is dedicated to addressing environmental issues, with HR decision-makers and managers a bit more optimistic (50% and 49%).

Also in line with 2021 data is the belief that it's more appropriate than not for employers to have a public stance. And that applies to every issue, from LGBTQ+ issues and racial inequality, to economic problems and the environment. In the case of climate change, three times as many respondents believe it's right for businesses to have a view, than those who don't.

Interestingly—and, once again, just like 2021—while survey-takers think it appropriate for their company to take a position on societal issues, a plurality say theirs has not. Only a quarter of managers (26%) say their company has a public stance on environmental matters, compared to 1 in 5 employees (19%) and HR leaders (21%).

Similarly, 1 in 5 senior managers say their organisation has a stance on LGBTQ+ rights (vs 15% of employees and HR leaders), although this remains higher than the organisational response to the current cost of living crisis. Just 1 in 10 employers (all audiences) has taken a position on economic inequality.

Despite the workforce's strong view that modern businesses should be both bold and vocal, the most popular answer—'none of the above'—sticks out. It's something every socially-conscious employer should take on board.

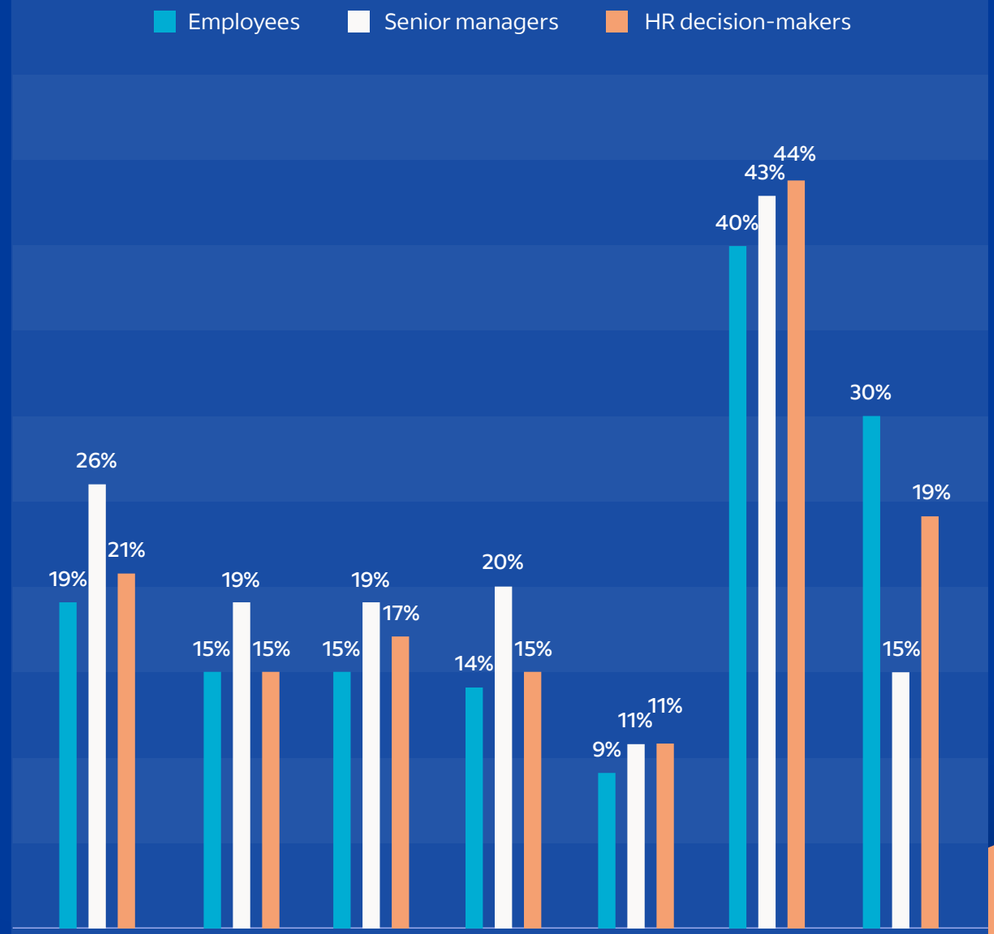
26%

of managers (26%) say their company has a public stance on environmental matters, compared to 1 in 5 employees (19%) and HR leaders (21%).

1 in 5

senior managers say their organisation has a stance on LGBTQ+ rights (vs 15% of employees and HR leaders).

Consistent with 2021, while respondents think it appropriate for businesses to take a stance on issues, a plurality say their business has not



	Environmental issues	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (LGBT+) issues	Racial equality	Gender equality	Economic inequality	None of the above	Don't know
	16%	12%	12%	10%	7%	41%	32%
2021	24%	18%	21%	20%	14%	43%	12%
	21%	17%	18%	16%	14%	50%	13%

Which of the following issues, if any, has your organisation taken a public stance on?

WFH: A work-life boon, but is it a disaster for DI&B?

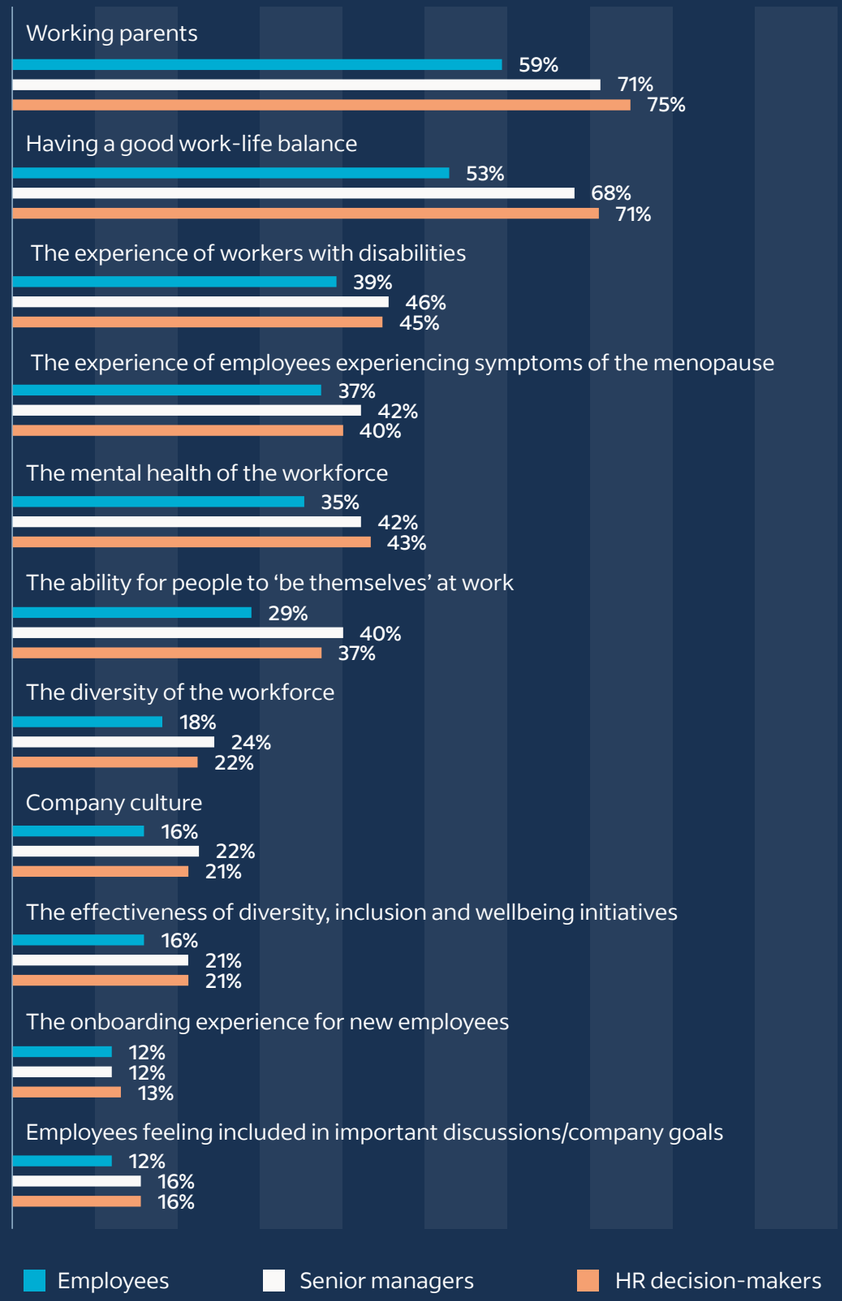
Given how ingrained remote or hybrid work has become, it's wild to think March 2023 marks three years since millions switched to this 'new' way of working. (Wild in that It feels like decades and, somehow, a few mere months.) By now, companies have had the luxury of time to perfect—or scrap—it, and the UK workforce has had a chance to reflect. As it turns out, the impact on DI&B is also pretty wild.

Just like last year, the biggest perceived winners in the age of homeworking are working parents. So say 6 in 10 employees (59%), 7 in 10 senior managers (71%) and 3 in 4 HR leaders (75%). Respondents champion work-life balance as the next big positive—again, mirroring 2021 data—with just 1 in 10 survey-takers in any group claiming a negative impact.

And, though 'the experience of disabled workers' ranks a distant third in comparison (employees: 39%; managers: 46%; HR decision-makers: 45%), the impact *on* these individuals cannot be underestimated. For some disabled staff, WFH not only signifies a path towards real equity, it can be the difference between being able to work or not.

It's not all rosy. Some 59% of senior managers, and 53% of HR leaders, feel hybrid or remote work has a negative impact on the onboarding experience for new employees. Over a third of employees (37%) say homework makes them feel less included in key discussions and company goals, with rates even higher among HR leaders (44%) and senior managers (46%).

Audiences agree that working parents and disabled workers benefit most from WFH measures, yet all feel company culture, onboarding and DI&B schemes suffer



What effect do you think the shift to home/hybrid working has had / will have on each of the following?

Maybe worst of all, WFH's effect on company culture should alarm every employer. At least twice as many respondents, in every group, say remote work has a negative impact than a positive one. For instance, only 16% of employees believe WFH is good for company culture (vs 35% negative)—down from 23% in 2021.

And the problems don't stop there. As it stands, chatter about the pros and pitfalls of hybrid work is *irrelevant* to many, with nearly half (46%) of employees saying they work in an office full-time. This is more than a 20 point gap to HR leaders (25%) and managers (23%), and strongly implies hybrid work is not the default setting many believe it to be. Instead, it risks becoming the preserve of a privileged few.

Employers who oversee such a divide should not only take note, they, wherever possible, should take action. Because, in any environment where it's one rule for some, and another for everyone else, a sense of togetherness and shared purpose—*inclusion and belonging*—swiftly disappears.

16%

of employees believe WFH is good for company culture (vs 35% negative)—down from 23% in 2021.

46%

of employees saying they work in an office full-time. This is more than a 20 point gap to HR leaders (25%) and managers (23%).

Empowering neurodivergent staff →

TIPS, ADVICE, ACTIONABLES

Build a better, fairer workplace

Hiring neurodiverse talent does not make you an A+ employer. No, it simply means you've successfully cleared one hurdle, after your employee has likely vaulted many. The next bit—that is, helping them thrive in a largely neurotypical work environment—is far harder. Below, our contributors provide some expert guidance, as well as their lived experience.

→ Create a policy

"As many employers don't have reasonable adjustments policies in place, I recently published one—available for free. This will hopefully help start the conversations that need to happen, and would mean people can access the support they need to thrive at work, overcoming the barriers that hold them back, and using the strengths that make them uniquely valuable to the workplace."

Leanne Maskell—Founder of ADHD Works

→ Make adjustments available *for all*

"If you're a HR and leadership team looking to roll out a neurodiversity inclusion policy or framework, ensure that you're going to make all these adjustments available to all your staff members. Do not put in specific support procedures or mechanisms for any protected characteristics—have a list of tools, adjustments and support services that you would offer as standard, as part of your policy."

Jack Dyrhauge—Founder and CEO of Neuropool

→ Don't pretend to be experts (but *do* bring them in)

"When it comes to recommending specific tools or support frameworks for your neurodivergent staff, you should be working with a consultancy, like Neuropool—or Genius Within, or Ambitious about Autism, if you're only focusing on autism—to specifically support your business. Because what might works for JPMorgan, Universal Music or NTT Data is all very different, based on the structure of the business, what they do, and the percentage of neurodivergent staff working there."

Jack Dyrhauge—Founder and CEO of Neuropool

→ Don't forget the basics

"There's not enough data to point to what the average professional with ADHD needs to make their job better. However, open communication, workplace needs assessments or just a 30-minute call to discuss an employee's needs is already 50% of the way there.

"For HR and recruitment teams who aren't working with an expert or a partner organisation in the neurodiversity space, the biggest thing you can start with internally is just speaking to your staff. Next, create an employee resource group and start pushing the subject internally. From there, you'll already be part of the way towards your neurodiversity road map."

Jack Dyrhauge—Founder and CEO of Neuropool

Upskill your managers

"At work, you often have to rely on people's perceptions of you. This makes your manager your main cheerleader, especially when it comes to career progression. That's why it's very important for line managers who have neurodiverse employees to educate themselves.

"Specifically, in relation to dyslexia, it's about teaching managers not to be blindsided by the small things that, actually, don't reflect a lack of intelligence at all."

Armelle McGeachie—Founder of Girls with Dyslexia

Celebrate individual strengths

"A great employer will focus on the positives. What positives can you have from having a dyslexic employee? Yes, you might get spelling mistakes, although it's not a guarantee—every person with dyslexia is different.

"My top strength, because my dyslexia is very intuitive, is that I can read between the lines. Even if I can't always verbalise it, I can connect the dots between things. I remember one six-month stint as a project manager and I think that was the most confident I ever felt in a role, as I was able to link things together and push a project forward because I was dyslexic."

Armelle McGeachie—Founder of Girls with Dyslexia

Don't mistake spelling mistakes for sloppiness

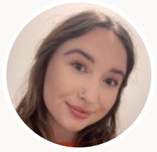
"There's a widespread debate over whether spelling mistakes should be seen as unprofessional or not. I remember watching a segment on *Good Morning Britain*, where [British entrepreneur] Steven Bartlett said he just skips over spelling mistakes. What he really focuses on is the things that matter—whether that person is going to boost productivity, morale and culture.

"It can be quite stifling for employees to always be hounded about the really small things, yet for people to completely neglect their strengths."

Armelle McGeachie—Founder of Girls with Dyslexia

Dyslexia at work: 4 things employers need to know

Yes, it often (though not always) shows up in reading and writing. Yet there are many lesser-known dyslexia traits that people still aren't fully aware of. Below, Armelle McGeachie outlines four factors to look out for.



Word recall

You try to figure out what word to use in a particular scenario, but literally have mind blanks. You could think of something one minute, and the next minute it's gone, and doesn't come back to you. The challenge around that is the social anxiety—maybe you're presenting and just get a mind blank. You have no choice but to go, 'I'm so sorry, I completely forgot what I was about to say'.

Reading and writing

Mind blanks don't just affect memory—you can kind of forget how to read. I sometimes get moments where I just look at something and my brain is like, 'I cannot compute'.

At school, during my A-level exams, I spent so much time figuring out connecting words. For instance: How do I spell 'who'? How do I spell 'what'? This had nothing to do with intelligence, because it wasn't affecting the quality of work. It just affected the time it took to get it on to the page.

Speech

Dyslexics often think quite visually. And because you don't have that word recall, you can't always verbalise something you can visualise. It can be a challenge for us to translate something visual into something verbal, and so it's hard to get our words out and in the right order. Sometimes, this can lead to stuttering.

Interpretation

Dyslexics can be quite literal, because of the way we interpret language. This can create a lot of anxiety—you don't want anyone to laugh at you for not getting the joke. And you don't want people to think you're strange, because you're adding your two cents to a conversation that happened five minutes ago, but you've finally spun the cogs.

"You don't want anyone to laugh at you for not getting the joke."

Adapting to the way people speak can also be a challenge. It doesn't have to be diverse accents—it might simply be the rhythm of someone's voice, if it's different to your own.

"Somebody can still give 100% to their job, without giving 40 hours to it."

→ Rethink commitment

"Giving 100% doesn't look the same for everybody. Like, if I was to sit behind a desk for 40 hours a week in an office, then that would be my whole life. I couldn't do anything in the evening, I couldn't do anything on the weekends.

"Somebody can still give 100% to their job, without giving 40 hours to it. And they still deserve 100% of their salary, because they're still giving 100%."

Ellie Middleton—Neurodiversity advocate & founder of (un)masked

→ Offer flexible working

"Flexibility is a big thing. Before my diagnosis, there's been a couple of times where I've left jobs because I've not felt well enough to do it, but also not known how long I'll need to be off for. In the past I've had to be like, 'I'm just going to leave, because I don't know'.

"I feel if there's flexibility—the ability to morph and change as you ebb and flow— that's really good. I go through stages where I want to be challenged and want to be doing something exciting, but can't commit to it, as I might not feel the same in a couple of months' time. If your hours are flexible, and the work is flexible—to change as and when suits you—is a really helpful thing."

Ellie Middleton—Neurodiversity advocate & founder of (un)masked

Start over: Why it's vital for employers to challenge their assumptions on neurodiversity

Hiring and championing neurodivergent staff is not nearly enough. For real equity, it's time to reset what we *think* we know—as Ellie Middleton explains.

We need to reframe the conversation around neurodiversity. Before my diagnosis, I was under the illusion that if somebody was autistic I would be able to spot it from a mile off. But it can literally be anybody in the room and you might not even know. *They* might not even know.

We're in every sort of person, we're in every walk of life. We're people of all genders—not just men—people of all races, people of all sexualities, and you might not know unless we tell you.

"We're people of all genders—not just men—people of all races, people of all sexualities, and you might not know unless we tell you."

As for ADHD, I would've never considered I had it. The idea that a lot of people have is that it's a bad thing. It's someone that's disorganised, it's someone that's messy. It's someone that's a naughty little schoolboy. This all takes away from your ability to be a good employee.

Whereas, actually, more and more high-flying and successful people are now getting a late diagnosis, and it's their ability to have all these racing thoughts that has allowed them to do that. People like Richard Branson, Matt Haig, Gemma Styles.

So yes, ADHD might mean I'm not as on top of admin tasks, but it does mean that I've got the drive and the ideas and the creativity to achieve amazing things as well. I think it's like seeing it as a whole picture. Okay, we might need more support in these areas, but we are going to really help you in these ones as well.

Everybody in a team is going to have different strengths and different weaknesses—they almost balance each other out. To take it a step further, it's about cognitive diversity—the more different brains you've got in the room and in a team, the more ideas you've got, and the less blind spots you've got as well.

Avoid ableist language

"In terms of racism and homophobia, general society is aware of what's okay and not okay to say. But when it comes to ableism and neurodiversity, the awareness just isn't quite there yet.

"A lot of the time, with ableist microaggressions, nobody else in the room will flag that something wrong has been said. Having to be the one to stand up and say that it's not okay, educate people as to why and advocate for yourself, that's very energy-expensive.

"For example, words like 'crazy', 'mad', 'insane'—these are so ingrained in language that some people don't understand why they're triggering. But, if you've spent your whole life being told you are crazy, then this will probably knock you off guard.

"The main thing here is to try and educate yourself—that responsibility is not on the person who is going to feel triggered. It's hard, because you feel almost guilty for flagging it, like 'They've not meant anything by it. It's just a force of habit that's ingrained in their language'. But I guess you have to remind yourself that, if it was a racist slur, nobody would feel guilty for asking someone not to say it."

Ellie Middleton—Neurodiversity advocate & founder of (un)masked

Cover all bases

"It's important to remember that *everybody* learns in different ways. That's everybody—not just neurodivergent people—but it can be heightened in neurodivergent people.

"For us it's a need, whereas for other people it's something that's useful to have. If you can cover all the bases, you know that whichever way somebody learns, they're still able to get that information.

"For instance, auditory processing can be a problem for people with ADHD—verbal instructions often go in one ear and out the other. But if instructions are given on a call, then followed up with a bullet point list of actions over email, that can make a big difference."

Ellie Middleton—Neurodiversity advocate & founder of (un)masked

"It's not fair that I'm giving up my weekends and my evenings—just to be able to work."

Communicate with clarity

"One line that I really like to use is 'What by when'. So, 'What do you need from me, and when do you need it by?'. Because then everybody's going to benefit from having clear instructions."

Ellie Middleton—Neurodiversity advocate & founder of (un)masked

Understand the draining effect of your office

"I recently realised that while I might be able to keep up with everybody in the office, I then go home, I don't speak, can struggle to eat, and literally have to just decompress by staring at my phone for the rest of the evening. Whereas other people actually go home and live their lives. It's not fair that I'm giving up my weekends and my evenings—just to be able to work."

Ellie Middleton—Neurodiversity advocate & founder of (un)masked

Sensory overload: How autistic staff experience your office

Ellie Middleton unpacks how neurodivergent and neurotypical employees can encounter the same environment in very different ways.

The best way to explain this is 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up' thinking.

Neurotypical people think in a top-down way. If you walk into an office, you understand it's an office, and then pick out the details as and when you need them. You start with that top level of context, and if you need to listen to a conversation, you listen to it. If you need to look at something, you look at it.

Whereas autistic people work bottom-up. When we walk into the office, we absorb all those details, all on the same level. I can hear the chair squeaking, I can smell the packed lunches, I can hear the person having a conversation, and it all comes in at that same level. Most people can pick and choose which bits they need, whereas for us it's, 'Here's the whole lot'.

So it's important to remember that each little thing that's happening—that most people can just block out, or have go over their head—that's all coming in at the same frequency for us. My brain will pay just as much attention to the person next to me having a Zoom call as the task that I am meant to paying attention to. When all the little things take up just as much energy as everything else, it can just leave you feeling quite drained at the end of the day.

"My brain will pay just as much attention to the person next to me having a Zoom call as the task that I am meant to paying attention to."

Things to be aware of: Sound, different smells, lighting—especially if it's those old, fluorescent, really bright lights—all quite draining. So it's about remembering those little details that most people can choose to block out or ignore, we don't have a filter for. It just all comes in at once.

Ellie Middleton is a neurodivergent advocate and the founder of (un)masked. Find out more about Ellie's work here, or follow her on LinkedIn.

Photo credit: Luke Nugent

PROFILE

Leanne Maskell

Founder of ADHD Works & author of ADHD an A-Z

Mask off: The rise and risks of ADHD diagnoses

Before being told she had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), aged 25, Leanne Maskell was pushed to the edge of her mental health. Life—let alone work—often felt impossible. And though knowledge brought clarity, things by no means became easy.

Photo credit: Rankin

Hi Leanne. Your CV is the definition of 'diverse'—with modelling, The Law Society and your own company all on there. Would you mind giving us a quick career rundown?

My mum got me into modelling when I was 13. It wasn't something I really wanted to do—I was not a happy kid, and was bullied for being ugly—but that first job was in *Vogue*, so I ended up doing a lot of modelling.

Later on I modelled alongside studying law at university, and then worked for startups. Modelling is the worst job you could do at the same time, because you don't find out what you're doing until six o'clock the night before. It's like playing the lottery every day. Annoyingly, I was kind of good at it, so I kept getting modelling work and quitting jobs.

I went to Australia, and did the same thing there. I had a job as a marketing manager, worked in a shop, and did modelling as well. I did so many different things at the same time. But I also became really, really suicidal, as I just felt like I didn't fit in anywhere.

Eventually, I managed to see a private psychiatrist in the UK. They were like, 'You've got ADHD'. I said, 'Cool, that's not a real problem. It's actually quite socially acceptable—give me the medication'. They were like, 'We can't give it to you. You have to come back'.

Instead, I went on holiday to Bali, and then ended up spontaneously moving in with someone I met on the beach. Came back like a year later, and even though I didn't get the ADHD diagnosis finished off, I started reading and learning about it.

I also wrote a book about modelling, to try and help other models not have the same experiences I had. That literally started out with a blog post, but the book did really well, and was on the cover of *The Times*, which I did *not* expect.

I then just applied for every random job. Miraculously, I got a job at the Law Society—doing mental health and immigration law—and eventually got the diagnosis finished off.

Your journey *to* diagnosis sounds long and bumpy. Did things improve from there?

No! Things can get a lot worse when you go on medication, because no one gives you the extra information you need—like lifestyle changes. I still didn't understand what ADHD was.

I changed GP eventually, and that GP said to me, 'If you want to change your medication level, you're going to have to get diagnosed again, through the NHS. And the waiting list is seven years'. I was like, 'How does anyone survive?'. Because I wouldn't have. I would be dead.

It was at that point I wrote the book, then didn't touch it for eight months. This was five years ago, so ADHD wasn't a conversation like it is today. So when people I knew asked me questions, I sent them the manuscript. A few people said, 'This has changed my life. You should publish it, so it can help other people'.

I published it, but misspelled the title—'AHD'. I was like, 'Let's never mention the book ever again, this is very, very embarrassing'. But a few months later, someone at Microsoft found it and messaged me, saying, 'Can you come and talk at our company about ADHD?'. My dad was like, 'It's a hoax. Don't reply to them. Don't give them your bank details!'.

I did it, on my lunch break at work, and realised this is something I really want to do full-time.

Is that what inspired you to launch your own company?

Yeah. ADHD coaching has changed my life so much, because it helped me to actually understand my brain. I've stopped trying to be normal, and started being myself, which makes me much happier.

I started the company to try and help people at work, and since starting a year ago, I've been inundated every single day. There are so many people that want it, so I created a course—'Make ADHD Work For You'—and we're doing an ADHD retreat as well.

It will have happened by the time people read this, but what can you tell us about the ADHD retreat? We've read it's the first-of-its-kind in the UK.

I think it is the first one in the world! I coach so many people, and if you don't know anyone else who has ADHD, it can be a very lonely experience. Although the internet gives us the opportunity to be more connected than ever, I feel a lot of us feel disconnected in real life.

A lot of the guys I coach are very similar. I was like, 'You would all be friends', and they wanted to be, but didn't know how. So I arranged a meetup, and it was just amazing to watch them all connect. It sparked the idea of creating something like that in real life.

We've got a house in Camber Sands, and I thought of all these very fun workshops. Half are split over executive functioning skills—because with ADHD, you've got a 30% neurodevelopmental delay in things like memory, problem-solving or self-awareness—and then half is focused on strengths, and harnessing ADHD. So, knowing how your brain works, and then making the most of it. Ultimately, it's giving people the opportunity to experience ADHD as a positive, empowering thing, instead of a 'problem' to be fixed.

Practically speaking, what's the difference between an ADHDer seeing a coach like yourself, versus the more medical route of their GP or a therapist?

If you're seeing an ADHD coach who also has ADHD, it can be really great to connect with someone who 'gets' you. Because your brain works very, very fast, and just having that conversation with someone that can keep up with you is really helpful. Personally, I love coaching because it's very practical, compared to therapy. Therapy is meant to be backwards-looking and about processing emotions, whereas coaching is more about what you do with that.

"ADHD coaching has changed my life so much, because it helped me to understand my brain. I've stopped trying to be normal, and started being myself."

How I usually describe it to people is that, if you're taking ADHD medication, it's like wearing glasses for the first time. For me, when I took the medication, I could literally see dust, where I couldn't before. People around me have always said I'm really messy, and in the past I'd be like, 'But I've *cleaned*. I've made the bed. I've done it'. and they'd say, 'No you haven't—you're not even trying'. When I took the medication, I was like, 'Oh my God, I see what they're saying now'.

But like I said, I had a really bad time in the beginning, because although I could see the mess, I didn't know how to clean. In a metaphorical sense, I didn't have a cleaning routine, or anyone to teach me how to hoover. All I could see was mess, and it was very overwhelming.

To equate that as a metaphor for coaching, the coaching basically steps in and says, 'Now you've got this extra brain power, how are you going to adapt—to learn the strategies that work for you?'.

In *ADHD an A-Z*, you mention that when you saw a doctor as a child, they blamed your difficulty concentrating on build-up of ear wax. How far have we come in our understanding of ADHD since then, and are there any downsides to greater awareness?

It's very interesting. A big part of why I wrote my new book, *The Reality Manifesto*, is because sometimes I'll talk to people who'll say, 'I read an article about ADHD a week ago and couldn't get an appointment with my doctor. So I called a different doctor, spent £1,000, got put on medication and now I'm really ill'. Being diagnosed with anything is a really big, life-changing experience—it's not something you can just ring someone up about, then buy something to fix.

The fact that adults couldn't be diagnosed until 2008 in the UK is a big topic. Basically, I think there are a lot of people who have been born with ADHD—as the neurodevelopmental condition it is—that didn't get the help they needed, but have learned to adapt and develop coping strategies. And only now they're being diagnosed, after their kids have been.

Obviously, you've then got social media, where the whole point is making things as shareable and relatable and bite-sized as possible. So it's like, '*Everyone*'*s* got ADHD!'. The important thing to note is that you get diagnosed because two more areas of your life have been significantly disordered for a long period of time. It's not something that everyone just 'has' when they lose their keys.

It can be really, really debilitating. The risk of suicide is more than five times higher if you've got ADHD. It's not, 'Oh, everyone struggles to concentrate', which is what my first reaction was. No, they're real issues.

Looking at the workplace specifically, what do you feel are the biggest challenges ADHDer staff—and the employers who want to support them—face?

I think companies sometimes take quite a bureaucratic view. Obviously, they are a company and money is involved, but the focus is on doing something. So under the Equality Act, for disability they have to proactively make adjustments, but there's often no quick fix. It's not as straightforward as building a ramp for a wheelchair, it's about trust and emotional vulnerability, because it's invisible. This does not come naturally to many—particularly in high-powered, high-stress jobs, where it's just about getting things done.

On the other side, it's really hard for employees. Again, adults couldn't be diagnosed until 2008 in the UK, so there are so many people being diagnosed now that are like, 'I *can* get help', but they don't know how. So with coaching, I often help people understand what might benefit them to work with their ADHD instead of against it, as everybody is completely different.

Looking ahead, how different would a truly 'neurodiversity friendly' workplace be?

It's a really tricky one. I just coached someone this morning and they were saying how depressing it was looking for a job. Even the way job descriptions are written, it's like they don't understand neurodiversity at all—they're just looking for a cookie-cutter person that can fit into these boxes.

The questions on their assessment were like, 'I prioritise other people's feelings even when inconvenient'. It's like, how is that relevant to your ability to do a job? That is not real. Everyone's got a different conception of what that means.

"You get diagnosed with ADHD because two more areas of your life have been significantly disordered for a long period of time. It's not something that everyone just 'has' when they lose their keys."

I think employers in the future are going to have to really step up with disability and neurodiversity. Not because they want to, necessarily, but I do think that when more tribunal cases go ahead—and because people can get unlimited damages for disability discrimination—employers will start stepping up.

And also, I think we're in a very interesting time, where employees are coming forward and demanding their own rights—it feels like the power is slightly shifting. Work from home, for example, I saw Apple employees wrote an open letter saying the requirement to go back in three days a week was ableist and sexist and all these different things. Basically, that there is no 'one size fits all' solution.

I also think neurodiversity is literally really important for the future, because as people are able to do more and more, and have novel approaches to solving problems, companies will have to keep up to stay relevant.

A big achievement for neurodiversity as a movement is that it's forcing a mindset shift—from seeing conditions like ADHD as a problem, to a potential strength. So, to end on a positive, what's the best thing about being an ADHDer?

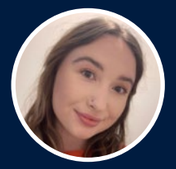
Ooh, I think it's the ability to see possibilities and work through challenges. For example, the emotional dysregulation associated with ADHD can manifest in something called rejection sensitive dysphoria, but the 'official' ADHD symptoms don't even list emotional aspects. Someone said this to me—like, 'It's not diagnostically recognised enough for you to write about it in your book as though it's fact'—and I got quite annoyed. But then I was like, 'Fine, I'll just figure out how to change it'.

So I created a course on rejection sensitive dysphoria. I wrote about it on the internet. Had *hundreds* of people being like, 'This is my experience. This is so important'. And next week I'm meeting with the directors of mental health and health promotion at the WHO about it.

Weirdly, though you might hear someone is sensitive to rejection and think, 'Alright snowflake', in reality, it makes you incredibly resilient. It's thinking differently, not taking no for an answer, and figuring out how to do it yourself. It's diverse problem-solving. That's why I've written three books that didn't exist before.

Dyslexia is not my ‘superpower’. Glorifying the condition can do more harm than good

Armelle McGeachie, founder of Girls with Dyslexia, explains why celebrating dyslexic thinking can be empowering, yet risks turning the condition into a personal issue to ‘conquer’, rather than something all workplaces (and people) should support.



First, I just want to caveat this by saying that I don’t dispel the idea (of dyslexia as a superpower) in its entirety. For kids and teenagers with dyslexia—who feel quite under-served in school—they might need that kind of empowering messaging.

But, in the context of the whole conversation, this may promote the idea that it’s on us. That all of our insecurities come from within ourselves, and it’s up to us to make sure we don’t feel like that.

Yes, speaking about dyslexia openly with our friends and our workplace—and making sure that we can do as much as we can do—is important. But there’s also a lot of structural change that needs to happen as well. We can’t lose sight of the whole picture.

Dyslexia *can* be a fantastic thing. Recently, a paper came out that said dyslexia is evolutionary. Our ancestors’ brains developed in a certain way because they had a certain level of adaption to different environments, and our brain has created its own landscape. But I think glorifying dyslexia too much—without much context for why— is actually quite harmful.

Education and empowerment

Personally, I didn’t get diagnosed until I was 21. I launched Girls with Dyslexia, in part, because I was going through some issues at work. Negative stereotypes were being bandied about, and I had multiple conversations with people who said that, ‘I’m not happy that you haven’t managed out your dyslexia’, or telling me a workplace assessment is the same as a performance improvement plan. (It’s not.)

> “I decided to educate myself more on dyslexia, so I could support myself more in those conversations and be more confident.”

There was this perception of, ‘If you’re dyslexic, you’re not as intelligent’. And that people’s beliefs of what dyslexia was could completely erode what impression they previously had of someone.

I decided to educate myself more on dyslexia, so I could support myself more in those conversations and be more confident. I set up an Instagram page, thinking, ‘If I’m feeling like this, there have to be other people who feel the same’.

What I didn’t quite know was the expanse of challenges that other people were having—especially in that transition phase from university to work. There’s not much support for that.

If you’re in schooling, there’s support. If you’re in uni, there’s support. If you’re in the workplace, there’s support. But all that support looks different. And within the transition periods, there’s some sort of epiphany you have to have, to actually advocate for the support you need. So that was really how, and why, Girls with Dyslexia was born.

A double (or triple) disadvantage

Initially, I set it up as I'm a woman with dyslexia, and I'm talking about my lived experience. I wanted to build that community, because the common denominator we have—as women with neurodiversity—is a double disadvantage in the workplace. (And if you're a dyslexic woman of colour, it's a triple disadvantage.) Not everyone experiences this, but there are still flavours of misogyny in the workplace.

So it's about looking at the intersections that create these disadvantages, then creating content that can raise awareness in the right direction. Because while I think it's great to be broad, to really make people feel heard, you've got to be specific, niche and targeted.

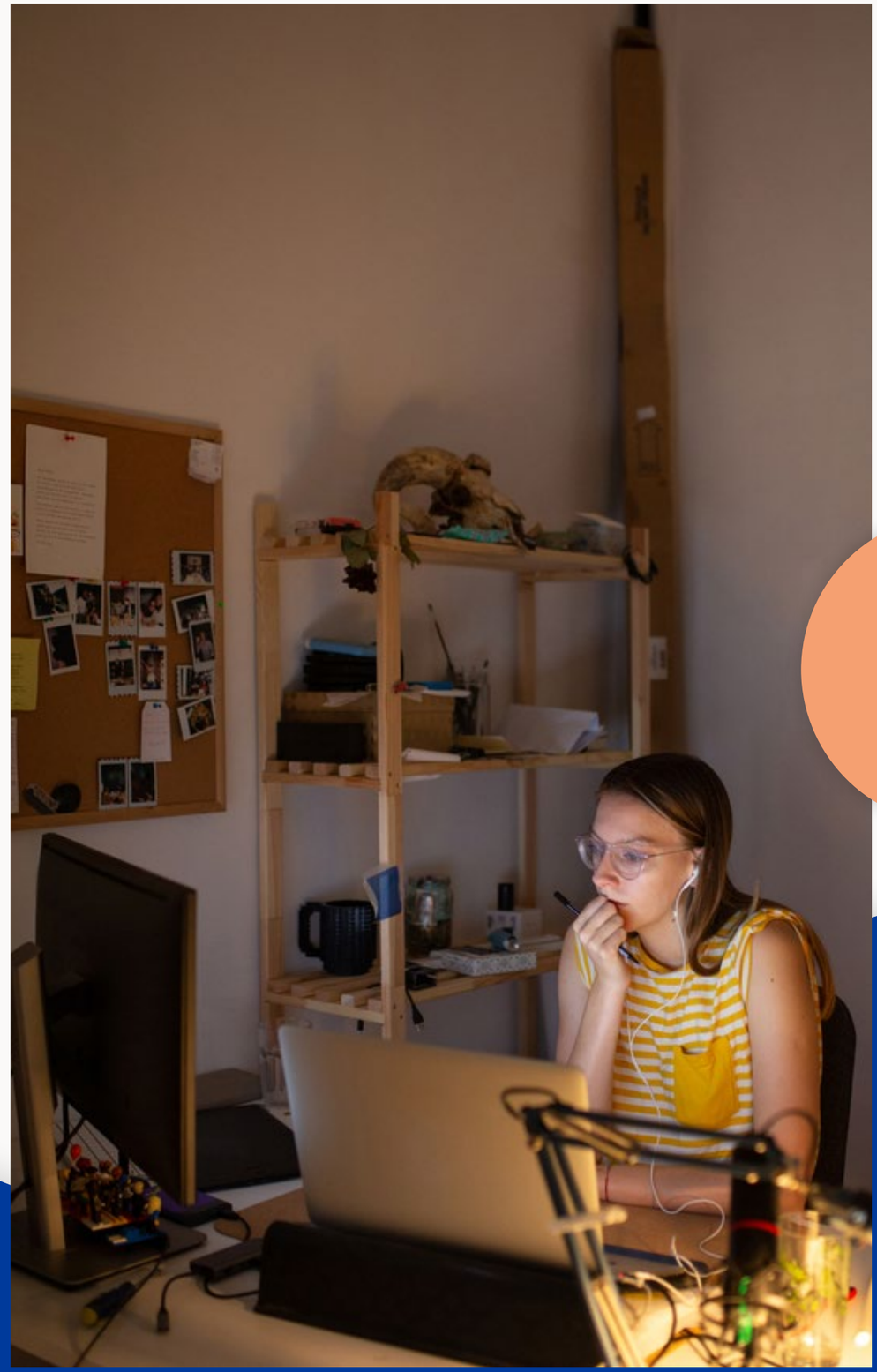
Also, when you're looking at the diagnosis side of things, all the research around dyslexia is based on white boys. There isn't too much on girls with dyslexia, and people often mistake girls having *different* traits (to boys) with them being very good at masking.

> "This is not just a neurodiversity issue, it's a human issue. There are no two brains that are the same, so it's about finding where people with dyslexia fit within the conversation."

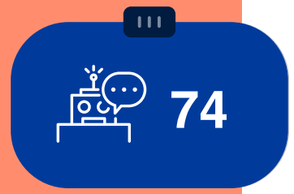
And, because of that lack of research, we're not heard as much as other people with dyslexia.

In reality, this is not just a neurodiversity issue, it's a complete human issue. Ultimately, everyone is neurodiverse. There are no two brains that are the same, so it's about finding where people with dyslexia fit within the conversation.

Armelle McGeachie is a freelance copywriter. For more information about Girls with Dyslexia, click here.



How to drive *real* equity into hiring →



TIPS, ADVICE, ACTIONABLES

ctrl + alt + delete bias: How AI can make unfair hiring obsolete

For years, Jahanzaib Ansari (and countless more like him) was forced to game the system—just to get a fair shot at a job. Then, sick of going by 'Jason' to simply earn a living, Jahanzaib found a *real* solution. Here, he explains the human need for 'just-like-me' hiring, and the future of fair, unbiased recruitment.

A few years ago when I was applying to jobs, I just wouldn't hear back from any employers. I was confused, because I had great work experience and a great CV. It was only when one of my friends was like, 'Why don't you just anglicise your name?' that I realised what was going on. I was being overlooked because of my name.

So I went through a variation—'Jason', 'Jordan', 'Jacob'—and literally, within six weeks, I got a job. Now I'm working at this company, and I'm sitting in a diversity class where it's showing stock photos of multicoloured hands holding up a globe. I was like, 'Man, I had to change my name to get a job here—this is complete BS'.

It really sparked something inside me, because that's when I got together with my co-founder—the same friend, actually, who told me to anglicise my name—alongside an industrial organisational psychologist and a machine learning scientist, to create Knockri.

Rise of the machine learning

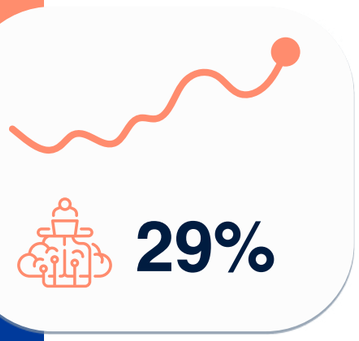
Within HR, there has been a dramatic increase in the need for automation—because of the complexities involved in matching people to the right jobs—with making accurate decisions about people in the hiring process.

Knockri helps on the applicant decision-making side. After applicants apply to a position, interviews are an excellent way to determine if someone has the right skills to meet expectations on the job. For jobs that attract many applicants, the cost and time associated with conducting interviews means organisations typically use interviews on only a small subset of the entire applicant pool. Yet scaling interviewers does not provide a reasonable solution. This is where Knockri comes in.

Knockri is an automated interview assessment tool that helps organisations efficiently scale behavioural interviews into their hiring process. Automation allows thousands of applicants to complete an interview with the company simultaneously. For example, let's say a candidate applies to a job at a well known global consultancy firm. This would trigger a fully custom-branded interview experience for the candidate. Applicants would be notified that the organisation wants to interview them, and are asked to answer three to five questions that measure skills needed for success on the job.

Knockri uses this data to understand the behavioural experience of each candidate, and generate an applicant quality score. This score is used to support a recruiter, in the same way a traditional interview would.

We have a library of assessments that cover 40,000 different job roles, with interview questions that are ready to use. When candidates respond, Knockri uses a contextual understanding of the transcript to identify important, skill-relevant text contained within it.



A level playing field

Traditionally, companies are used to looking at CVs, doing face-to-face interviews, or watching videos of candidates. There's a lot of unconscious bias that can come in that process. Hiring managers see a person's name, their gender, ethnicity, race and more.

What Knockri does is fully remove all that, and instead we produce a candidate score. We then utilise structured behavioural interviews. The industry has been utilising cognitive-based assessments for the longest time, which are shown to create adverse impact for people from a lower socioeconomic background.

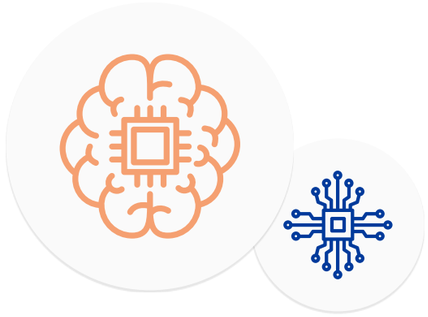
What a structured behavioural interview does is level the playing field. There are no questions about your experiences at college, for example—it's purely based on your previous work experience.

Over time, we've also trained our data, which is incredibly important, as a lot of AI-based technologies use historical data.

You might have heard about the big tech company that had CV screening technology, but the data they fed it was basically just male hiring managers hiring other male hiring managers. So, when they put that into production, it just kept ignoring female candidates.

In our case, we merged industrial, organisational psychology with machine learning. So we're objectively looking at what an attribute means. What does growth mindset mean, *objectively*? And what are those behaviours? That is how the candidates are being shortlisted. Some of our customers include IBM, Shopify and the Department of Defence here in Canada, and there have been significant time and cost savings.

On average, customers see an increase of gender and racial diversity by up to 24% in shortlisted candidates.



The (human) nature of bias

Why does a tool like Knockri need to exist? Because bias lives in all of us. It's a very human thing. Even with unconscious bias training, there are several biases that still live within organisations. Take me, for example. If I like a particular alcohol brand or a particular sport, and so does a candidate, this is going to have a glowing effect that makes me overlook a lot of their flaws.

What we *need* to really look at is, is this person going to perform well at the job role? Not, can we bond over an alcohol drink or a hockey team? We, as humans, still do a lot of that, though it has no correlation to any success predictor. It's simply a like-me effect.

Bias is also about familiarity. If I've grown up in a very Caucasian society, and I've only just seen western names, I might see a bunch of CVs and think, 'Oh yeah, this Jahanzaib guy looks good, but I don't know—I've never seen that name before. He might not even be able to speak English. I'll go with John'.

This is despite the fact Jahanzaib is probably very well qualified for that job role. This bias still exists. Hiring can be a bit like going to a restaurant when you don't have much time. Your eyes are just scanning and you see 'Chicken salad'. You pick that—despite some other options that might be phenomenal—because it's easy.

A more equitable future?

Looking 10, 20, or even 50 years ahead, I believe some level of interview process will exist. However, I do feel that it's going to be a lot more proactive, where candidates are being asked to apply for jobs, with a lot more data on the candidate as well.

Eventually, the interview process may use avatars—to mask your face and their face. This might sound crazy, but this would break down any barriers or biases, throughout the initial screening process. However, eventually you will progress to a person-to-person meeting, where some of those old biases will still exist. That is a very human thing, and so we'll still have to work on it.

To find out more about Knockri, visit the company's website.

TIPS, ADVICE, ACTIONABLES

Is your hiring process (accidentally) discriminatory?

Just because something is the norm, that doesn't mean it's not inequitable. So, if we really want a fairer workplace, that means the whole process of recruitment is ripe for a review. Here, Daniela Herrera outlines five quietly unfair practices, plus five potential fixes.

5 unfair hiring fails

Jargon-filled job ads

Often, job descriptions are filled with uninclusive language. By 'uninclusive', I'm not talking about gender-biased language—which of course is extremely important—I mean a lot of jargon.

When people have been in a particular industry for a long time, they assume everybody understands what they are talking about. But if I come from a completely different background, I don't have a specific degree, if I'm a little bit older, a little bit younger, or if I'm changing careers, I won't understand what a job description means. And if I want to apply, I really need to know what a job is about.

Hiring based on cultural fit

This means hiring someone who looks like you, acts like you, and speaks the same language or jargon. We are asking talent to fit in whatever box *we* have, which could mean something completely different for every company and every person. What recruiters must start doing a little bit more is focus on what people can *add* to your company and culture, instead of asking them to fit into what you already have.

Staff referral programmes

I know not everybody agrees with me here, so I'll try to break it down. First, let's focus on diversity. If your company isn't diverse to begin with—everybody was hired based on cultural fit, everybody looks the same, thinks the same and has the same background—it's extremely likely the people you're going to hire through your referral programme will be based on cultural fit. This means everyone continues to be a similar type of person.

From an equity point of view, a lot of companies have specific policies and systems that mean all referrals must be reviewed within 24 hours. That's inequitable, because you are giving referrals a special treatment that not every single candidate is getting.

There is another layer to inequity, which is about proximity to power. Say I'm the CEO, or maybe a Director, and I refer someone. The recruiters and interviewers are probably not going to say, 'Hey, I didn't like this person', because of the power dynamic. You're not going to jeopardise your role in the company and tell me—CEO or Director—you don't like the person I went to college with. You're not going to say anything, and that person will probably get hired.

Insisting on university degrees

Some companies ask for college degrees for any and every role. Maybe that's not needed. By doing it, we are eliminating a lot of candidates that could be really good at the job. I, for instance, don't have a college degree. Again, it's about looking into what talent could *add* to your company, values and culture, instead of asking people to fit into what you already have.

So many companies ask staff to bring their whole selves to work, but how can they do that if you just hire people that look exactly like you? If someone does then have different interests, they won't be able to bring their whole selves to work, and might even be discriminated against.

Pay offers based on an applicant's previous salary

We know the gender pay gap exists—there is data on it. So if any woman applies for a role, and they don't necessarily know what it's going to pay, what they *think* might be a fair offer, might itself be inequitable. Because, at the end of the day, they could already be underpaid in the job they have now, which means it's extremely likely they were underpaid in the role before that.

Whenever a woman—or anyone from a historically excluded community—gets to the offer stage, they're already at a disadvantage. *Unless*, of course, they know exactly what the market rate is, and how to negotiate. Yet this is sometimes inequitable as well, because in many cultures, negotiating is frowned upon.

5 inclusive hiring fixes

Aim for accessible, jargon-free job listings

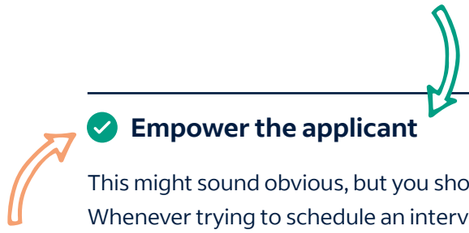
Make sure everything is gender inclusive, and accessible for disabled candidates. Also, make sure the language you are using is not ageist—this happens quite a lot, at both ends of the spectrum.

When you do this—and the job description is clear and concise—*anyone and everyone can understand*. And that means a greater pool of talent.

Base pay on job descriptions, not demographics

Try to make offers based on skills and experience, and not what they are making right now. Ideally, give candidates information about what the salary band is. Sure, I know that many companies worry, like, 'But everybody's going to ask for the top of the bands!'. Yes, that might happen, but it's a conversation you need to have.

It's okay to explain to a candidate, 'You are not at the top of the band because of X, Y and Z', as that's a conversation and career growth framework based on equity, not imbalance.



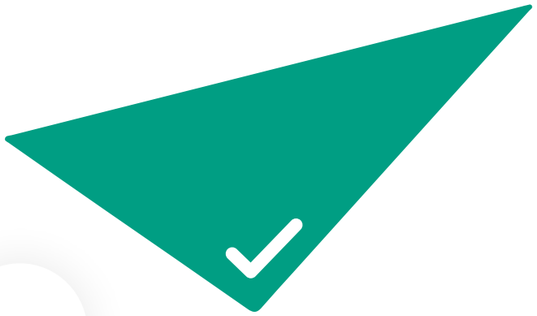
Empower the applicant

This might sound obvious, but you should build an interview process that puts the *candidate* first. Whenever trying to schedule an interview, do it based on the candidate's needs, not what the company or the recruiter says would suit them.

From there, giving everyone the opportunity to choose. Is it a phone call or video call? And if it's a video call, would they prefer video on or off? Make sure you give candidates an agenda for the interview and, if you have the opportunity, always send questions beforehand. This could help everyone, but especially neurodivergent and disabled candidates.

Ensure every step is 100% accessible

Make sure that you, as a company or as a recruiter, are open with your reasonable accommodations, and you're asking candidates what they need to move forward. But don't forget, this also means making sure your website and application form is accessible. Otherwise, how do disabled or neurodivergent candidates apply to begin with?



Just start!

One of the questions I always get asked is, 'How do you even get started?'. What I recommend is, yes, taking the time you need. Doing everything at the same time is great, but that's not a reality for everybody. If you need to break it down, do. Say, 'Okay, in Q1 we are going to focus on making our job descriptions a little bit more inclusive', and go from there.

Simultaneously, you can do smaller things to make the process more inclusive for candidates. Like using a neutral Zoom background for interviews, or turning on closed captioning. There are so many small things we can do to make the process more inclusive while, at the same time, we try to fix the systemic issues.

Daniela Herrera is a diversity and inclusion professional with experience across talent operations, recruitment, leadership and people management. You can find out more by visiting her blog.

Diversity matters →

TIPS, ADVICE, ACTIONABLES

The future is now: Why fairer workplaces can only become a reality with a laser focus on the present

Adah Parris—ex-futurist, now *now-ist*—unpacks some risks that come with only thinking long-term, and why a blend of top-down and bottom-up innovation can drive lasting change.

Why I no longer identify with the tag of 'futurist'

I think that we, as a society, place a lot of emphasis on what somebody is called, and there's a level of expectation around that. There's a perception of who you are, of what you can deliver, of your value, and we get wrapped up in the nuances of that.

This leads to a comparison of perceived value and impact, and a personal comparison to Other. Coming at it from a mental health and wellbeing perspective, I understand the bigger impact of making comparisons to measures of success that aren't our own. I'm more focused on the 'who', the 'what', the 'where', the 'how' and more importantly 'why' of what I do, rather than what I'm called. Anybody can give themselves the *title* of a futurist, but what does it actually mean?

We have all just been through one of the biggest systemic disruptions of our time. An existential crisis of, 'Who am I? What's important?'. With who I am and what I do, I felt I was often being asked to try to predict the future. What I realised was that, when the pandemic happened, many of us weren't actually being present.

I wanted to remove the expectation that I can come along and predict the future. What I *can* do is ask deeper questions, and together we can explore the systemic implications of what we are doing now, and how it is going to impact the future (or various potential futures).

That's where my whole question of, 'What type of ancestor do you want to be?' comes from. It's moving away from this idea that I have a crystal ball, or I'm sitting in an ivory tower telling people, 'This is what the future is'. It's more, 'What are the ripples that you are putting into the world that will impact what that future is, or could be?'. That's what's more important, I think.

> "What I realised was that, when the pandemic happened, many of us weren't actually being present."

This links to Joi Ito's now-ism. Joi Ito has this whole idea of being a now-ist, which is about focusing on how you can innovate *now* to change the future. That's a huge reason why I've moved away from calling myself a futurist. We focus too much on what something (or someone) is called, rather than the underlying ethics, morals and intention.

What I think about when I think about DI&B

I think the origins of it can be good intentions. I *hope* that it's good intentions—that people really mean what they say, and they start on a journey they want to continue on. But I do think, sometimes, people don't recognise the fact that, in order to do it, you are probably going to have to give something up.

Sometimes, people get close to the point of recognising that, 'Oh crap, this means I may have to give up my board seat', '…my bonus', or, 'I may have to change the things that have kept me comfortable', which is also part of the problem. Often, what people say instead is, 'We're going to sponsor this group', 'We're going to go out and get involved in some local community initiative', or whatever it is that makes them feel better.

That's not actually changing anything. Not for those who really need things to change. While it starts off with good intentions, the follow through, the long tail, the ripples have to go further than a lot of organisations recognise, or are willing to go.

When you talk about this stuff, you have to think about what your measures of success are. Who decides what those are. And who's being held accountable for the work. It should be central to everything you do.

I was in a talk once where one of the CEOs in the audience said, 'Yes, but I don't have the budget for EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) this year'. I said, 'So what you're saying is, for this financial year, I cannot turn up in the workplace as a Black woman? I have to leave that side of my identity at home because you can't monetise that part of me?'.

So I turned his comment back towards him, and asked how would he feel if his organisation suddenly said that he could no longer come to work—with all of the privileges afforded to him—as a white man. I think that he and many others in the audience got my point. It made room for a deeper and more transparent discussion around the holistic and systemic implications of DI&B.

People have to recognise that what you're talking about is their very identities. Diversity and inclusion is not just a human resources thing, or a people thing, it's a systemic thing. It's part of the DNA of an organisation. It's innovation. It's technology. It's governance. It's all of those things and more.

Why consistency is key to DI&B

In 2020 we had George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, and a huge groundswell across the world.

People came out and said they were going to do great things and made all these statements. But you've got to be mindful of performative allyship—of doing certain things that look good but where, actually, behind the scenes, your staff don't feel psychologically safe within your organisation.

And then we had Ukraine and Russia. Suddenly, organisations went, 'We're going to make a statement and we're going to do all of this', which undermined all the atrocities in places where People of the Global Majority (People of Colour) come from.

For Israel, Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and many other places, nothing was said. But when it happened in Russia and Ukraine, we only needed to listen to the language used in the media to get the clear message of 'they are civilised' and 'they look like us' to recognise that it made a lot of the People of the Global Majority feel psychologically unsafe and unwelcome—despite previous efforts.

What I proposed, at MHFA England, was writing an ethical business statement that says we abhor all bad behaviour, and this is what we—as leaders of the organisation—are going to do.

Your ethical business statement can cover the whole umbrella—of transgender, menopause, climate change, gender, ableism and more. By using this as your starting point, you can start to think about what your policies are. It means you are creating a boundary under which people can start to think, 'Okay, well at least they're talking about this'. But talk needs to turn into sustainable action.

Otherwise, what happens is—and I've seen it at organisations—when the next thing happens, they'll go, 'Oh, we need to have a statement'. It's not cohesive, it's not tied together, and it becomes quite reactionary. And you also get the counterarguments, of other people going, 'Well, what about us?'.

I understand it's a tricky situation, I understand it's difficult, but I also understand that you have to lean into the fact that it's going to be uncomfortable. Look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and just work out where you are. Are you hitting the line? Are you below it? Use that, and the Global Goals, as a starting point.

How to create a culture of innovation from the bottom-up

Do what I did with one of my clients. They wanted to create an anti-racism strategy, so what I did was create a series of world-building workshops, where I included a representative from every aspect of the business. From volunteers and cleaners right through to the CFO, with no hierarchy.

I created a matrix of the different job functions, and each group had somebody representing them. I asked everyone the same questions: 'What would communication look like?', 'What would training look like?', 'What would technology look like?'.

It becomes a discussion, and you get a holistic understanding of what, really, the issue is. *Then* you can start to build up, because it means that everybody feels a sense of autonomy in co-designing the organisation. And, as leaders, you can work out what you take on, in terms of short, medium and long-term strategies.

You have to have some boundaries, but it means you don't just go in with a top-down approach of, 'We need to do digital transformation in the organisation and this is what it's going to look like', without taking into consideration the fact you're fundamentally shifting the way that people work.

Most people get their sense of purpose through work, so if you come along and shift that, people will be upset, they'll feel unbalanced, and that's when resistance comes in. Because you're taking away something that's like a security blanket. If you involve people in the discussion—of defining what the problem is—and then work towards the solutions, you have a better opportunity to shift things.

You've got to remember that culture represents the collective stories of the people in the organisation. And so it *should* shift. You then can't use the language of, 'We're hiring for cultural fit', because the culture will change according to who's inside it, not the other way around.

Adah Parris is a polymath, anti-disciplinary artist, activist and now-ist. She is also the Chair of Mental Health First Aid England. To learn more about Adah's work, visit her website.

PROFILE

Sophie Williams

Author of Millennial Black & Anti-Racist Ally, TED speaker and equity consultant

Intersectional reality: What barriers stop your staff from succeeding?

As an ex-Netflix leader and ad guru turned anti-racist campaigner, TED talker and acclaimed author, Sophie Williams has a handle on the modern workplace that's as rare as it is far-reaching. Here, she explores the hidden hurdles people in your workplace may be facing.

Hi Sophie. In your (excellent) book, *Millennial Black*, you talk a lot about the 'concrete ceiling'. For those who aren't aware, what is it?

So, most people have heard of the glass ceiling, which is the experience we associate with women in the workplace, whereas the concrete ceiling is basically the counterbalance to that. Because, when you really look at it from an intersectional view, you realise that the glass ceiling is what *white* women experience. For Black women, it is often less like glass, more like concrete.

Working under the glass ceiling is difficult, and I'm not undermining it, but also there's a lightness. You look up and you see glass, you see the sky and you see opportunity. And you don't know what you *can't* achieve until you physically bash up against it.

With the concrete ceiling, you're in the darkness from the outset. You're not able to look up and see things you want to achieve, because you're not seeing them represented as something that's possible for you at all, or in anyone you can see yourself in.

Photo credit: Rebecca Petts

What does this look like in practice?

For example, Black women in America earn the highest number of bachelor's degrees of any group, yet this is where the pay gap *is widest*. Black women with degrees earn 36% less, on average, than white men with the same education level, while those with only a high school diploma face a 31% pay gap, compared to white men with the same level of educational achievement.

It means we are still being told we have to do more. We still have to prove ourselves, and we still find ourselves having to take jobs at a lower position than other people with the same credentials. It's a frustrating tension, because if you've done the work, you have the same qualifications and you are equally placed, you should be able to access the same jobs, opportunities and pay.

Similarly, a lot of your work (and a 2021 TED talk) focuses on the 'glass cliff'. What does this mean?

The glass cliff is what happens when people who have been underrepresented in business leadership positions manage to break through the glass ceiling. The glass cliff doesn't only impact women, it's anyone who doesn't represent a traditional leader. That is, both women and racially marginalised men. Essentially, anyone who's not both white and male.

I think, as a society, we have this vision where, if someone is able to break through the glass ceiling, it's like, 'Job done, sky's the limit, off we go, let's rule the world'. In reality, that's not quite what happens. Generally, businesses tend to appoint underrepresented leaders—anyone who's not both white and male—when they've already been in a consistent period of poor performance. That could be anything from a slip in market valuations to a loss of profit, or a reputational scandal.

At that point, businesses bring someone in who they perceive to have good soft skills—someone who's going to reengage a disengaged workforce and just get the vibe back up. So what we see is, consciously or not, they bring in people from underrepresented backgrounds, but don't give them the same tools, the same time, or the same access they give to a more traditional leader.

So, when a business passes into the leadership of a Black woman, an Asian man, a disabled person—whoever it is—their chances of success are limited from the beginning. That's because of the position that the business already finds itself in, as well as the lack of interval investment, tools and time. And so, they're often not able to make those appointments to those positions successful.

The story we get pushed back to us is that these businesses fail under their leadership. In turn, companies then become more reluctant to put someone from an underrepresented group into those positions. Because they believe they've got the data, and they can see that those people don't succeed.

There are various issues to dig into here, but is a big one that people draw the *wrong* conclusion from the underrepresented person's leadership?

Exactly. Because people don't look at the early data—how that business was performing before they made that appointment—they misread the outcomes. And this can reinforce their own biases and their own negative stereotypes.

"We made a trade-off—exchanging dangerous, laborious, difficult, physically draining work for a knowledge economy."

Importantly, when that new leader is seen to have failed—pushed to the edge and off the glass cliff—they're more likely than not to be replaced by a new white, male leader. That's a move known as the saviour effect. This signals to employees, the market, investors and everyone else that they're back to business as usual, with a 'safe' pair of hands.

You see it everywhere. Like Theresa May taking on Boris Johnson's Brexit plan, trying to implement it, then being forced to resign.

***Millennial Black* is great in its exploration of how intersectionality plays out at work. Yet millennials remain a punchbag (to the point of parody) to many. As a Black, female millennial, what do you feel employers get wrong?**

I think millennials and Gen Z are unique generations in the workplace. We have the types of jobs that our parents don't understand, and couldn't prepare us for. I graduated in 2008, in the middle of a recession, and we've just spent the last three years working from home—not having office relationships. These are not experiences our parents and grandparents can relate to.

In the book, I talk about the example of being down a mine. It's hard, it's back-breaking, it's terrible. Now, I'm not saying that having to be on Slack all day is comparable, but I am saying you're probably not going to get called up to go down the mine at two in the morning, whereas you *might* have to jump on a call at that time. We don't have the possibility of separation between our home and working lives and selves. We made a trade-off—exchanging dangerous, laborious, difficult, physically draining work for a knowledge economy. But it's a knowledge economy that expects us to always be available and, essentially, always be a brand. That's really difficult.

What extra challenges do Black millennials face at work, do you think?

I think it's interesting to be a millennial and a Black person in the workplace now, and trying to navigate feeling like you belong in that space. Historically, racism was much more overt. It would have been a slur shouted across the office, or something you could pin down and take to HR. Now, when we talk about microaggressions, a lack of opportunity, a lack of promotion, a lack of feeling safe, a lack of belonging—all these things are really hard to express, hard to explain and hard to put words to. And that's because racism has changed to become more coded—I believe, by design.

While some people might say that's good—no one wants to be called a slur across the office—it's also true that no one wants to feel unsafe, no one wants to feel uncomfortable, and not have the words to be able to express that and be believed.

From when Obama became US president, up until 2020, people loved telling us racism was over. People loved telling us everything was okay, because the US has got a Black president, so how can racism still exist? I'm sure it's about to happen here, now we've got a brown prime minister.

It's hard to essentially be gaslit, and be told everything's fine when you're saying, 'It's not—this is happening to me'. I think that is quite a millennial experience. That tension of, 'Does this mean everything's okay, or does it mean no one's going to listen to me any more?'. I think that's why things were so shocking for white people in 2020. They were like, 'What do you mean? We fixed this.' You didn't, you just rebranded it.

I think the expectation of always being on, the belief that racism was over, and the coded changes to how racism is expressed are all things millennials have to battle, in ways that maybe previous generations haven't.

"I think being a part of something, and feeling part of a community that could have said no—but did say yes—is really important."

Finally, throughout *Millennial Black* you ask contributors their favourite thing about being a Black woman. What's yours?

My favourite thing about being a Black woman is the community. Really, as a mixed race person, I in theory could have identified as Black, white, or mixed race. However, white people will never see me as white, and Black people could have been exactly the same. But they're not. They recognise and accept that variety and that difference and that nuance. I think for me, that community, that acceptance is what I like most about being a Black woman. That manifests itself in how people will stand up and speak out for each other. If you walk down the road and see another Black woman—particularly for me, another Black woman with natural hair—there will be eye contact, there'll be a smile, or there'll be an acknowledgement. I think being a part of something, and feeling part of a community that could have said no—but did say yes—is really important.

PROFILE

Rachel Charlton-Dailey

Founder of *The Unwritten*

Accessibility check: Why disabled people want your respect, not sympathy

Rachel Charlton-Dailey feared the media was ignoring disabled voices. So she created her own platform, then drove change from inside-out.

Hi Rachel. *The Unwritten* describes itself as 'a publication for disabled people by disabled people'. What inspired you to launch it?

It was born out of frustration. But it wasn't just my frustration, it was my best friend's frustration, too. I was ranting to her pretty much every day—about how disabled people are covered in the media—and in the end, she was like, 'Right, why don't you start your own publication?'. So that's exactly what I did.

I got a little group of my disabled writer friends together, and started tentatively putting it out on Twitter. I was like, 'Hypothetically, would anybody be interested in this?'. It got a massive response. I think part of it was because people knew that while I said 'hypothetically', I was definitely going to do it.

I didn't realise how much of a need there was. There was such a massive outpouring, that when we did eventually launch, we had articles ready to go. It's one of the things that I happy-cry about on a daily basis.

***The Unwritten*'s tagline is 'Disabled stories. Not motivation'. This is quite different to how some UK outlets frame disability—something you've called 'inspiration' or 'trauma porn'. For those not in-the-know, what is this?**

'Inspiration porn' was coined by Stella Young—an Australian activist who sadly died a few years ago. It's basically when non-disabled people look at disabled people from the guise of, 'Oh, look at this *amazing* disabled person. They're going to school, they're running marathons. If they're doing this, what's stopping you?'.

On the other side, trauma porn is when disabled people are forced to plug into our deepest traumas. It's a very manipulative practice used by a lot of editors, because it's what sells papers and gets clicks.

They ask you to use the traumatic details of really horrible things about your past—like medical diagnosis, injuries, or how you became disabled and how it made you feel. 'Did you feel suicidal?'—stuff like that.

And, just in case it's not clear, why is *only* covering disability in this way a problem?

Because there's no nuance. There's no 'in the middle'—of disabled people just living their lives. It misses out things like disabled people in relationships, disabled people discovering who they are, and just representation across the board. It misses out so much, which is what we wanted to give a space to.

Your writing career pre-dates your focus on disability. Yet your disability diagnoses pre-date both. Was there a particular moment you chose to devote your career to this?

So I've got lupus, endometriosis, osteoporosis, arthritis, chronic migraines, dyspraxia, depression and anxiety. I was diagnosed from the age of 10 to my 20s, but it was only really in my mid-20s that I began accepting my disabilities, and then started writing about them.

It was in my late 20s that I started thinking, 'Ok, there are a lot of people who don't have a voice. I think I could be helping'. I started writing more, doing the freelance stuff, and it all spiralled from there.

Then Covid happened. Did this underline the importance of what you were doing, or make it much, much harder?

Well, it was *especially* the pandemic that made me realise it was so important. It was affecting such a big portion of the disabled community, and there was a stat we were trying to get out—that 6 in 10 people that were dying were disabled—but nobody cared.

I was being told, as a disabled writer, 'Oh, this is not relevant. This isn't a newsworthy story'. I was like, 'Why is this not the front page of every single newspaper?'.

Thankfully, your fighting paid off. Alongside *The Unwritten*, you recently teamed with a national newspaper for a week-long campaign: Disabled Britain. How did it come about?

Nick Webster—features editor of the *Daily Mirror*—got in touch with me, because he'd heard about *The Unwritten* and wanted to launch a series with disabled writers. I was like, 'This is absolutely great, but what you really need to make a series properly, is to have disabled people at every level, and you need a disabled editor. What a coincidence—I'm a disabled editor!'. I never expected him to say, 'That will be great. Come on board as our guest editor', but he did.

I was pretty much across everything. All the pictures, who we featured, even the celebrities we involved. If I didn't like the message a particular celebrity was spreading—if it was a bit too inspirational porny—I could say so.

It sounds like a real collaboration.

It was. Right down to IT—there were people doing accessibility stuff—and even things like approving headlines. It was unreal, because I've never been given that much power, and I never expected to have that much power. I expected to be brought on as more of a figurehead, but everything went through me.

Is there a power in partnering with a mainstream paper, like *The Mirror*, to reach a wider audience, and cover disability in the right way?

The main thing we wanted to do was change people's minds. Our big slogan of the week was: 'We don't want sympathy, we want empathy'. I was really proud of that one. We wanted to show that disabled people aren't objects of pity, and disabled people aren't inspirational. We wanted to show a broad range of what disabled people can do when we're given the chance.

"It's all well and good saying, 'We have this many disabled employees', but how many *happy* disabled employees do you have? That's what really counts."

Finally, looking at the workplace, what do you want employers reading this to think about, or be aware of?

Employers need to realise that disability encompasses so much. There are so many different types of disability, and there are so many types of disabled people. There needs to be more research, and there also needs to be more nuance in how you look after disabled people.

If you want disabled people in your company, you need to sit down and not only think, 'How are we going to have disabled people in our company?', but 'How are we going to *keep* disabled people in our company?'.

It's not just about having them there as a tick box, it's about making sure they're well looked after. It's all well and good saying, 'We have this many disabled employees', but how many *happy* disabled employees do you have? That's what really counts.

Equity in action

Rachel Charlton-Dailey outlines four (free and easy) measures that companies can take to better support disabled staff

Make flexible work less rigid

Covid has proven just how great working from home can work. Apart from how horrific the pandemic's been, it's been the best three years of my career, and brought me and my disabled friends so many opportunities that we'd never had previously.

But, even now, companies need to be more flexible and stop having such stringent rules. A lot of organisations offer working from home on certain days of the week, but this needs to be allowed all the time. Chronic illness and disability doesn't work to a fixed timetable.

Rethink professionalism

I do most of my meetings from bed. For a lot of companies—say, if I worked in the City of London—that wouldn't be acceptable. To fully embrace flexibility, we have to change our mind frame around what we see as professional.

Just because somebody isn't able-bodied, isn't able to go to the office and isn't able to sit in an office chair for eight hours a day, that doesn't mean they're not professional.

Professional can be taking meetings from bed, or saying, 'I'm going to do this when I feel better'. It doesn't mean someone is lazy, simply that they'll get to it when they are able to.

Trust your staff

As well as freedom, you've got to give people trust. I still feel like there's a lot of distrust when it comes to working from home.

Something I like, when working for clients, is when they ask me what my working hours are. I really value it, because I work any time between 8am and 6pm, but it isn't stringent. Some days I can do 8 to about 11 in the morning, and some days I can start at 12 and then work till about 4-ish. It just depends on how I'm feeling on the day.

I think employers need to wake up to that a bit more, and realise you don't have to be strict on specific hours—you just need to listen to your employees more, and let them do what works for them.

Don't default to Zoom

Zoom, Google Hangouts and all the rest of them have been great, but things don't always have to be face-to-face. Some things are better done by phone, over email, or using instant messaging like Slack.

I've got a friend who, for the most part, can only work lying down. But, because of her condition—where she can't regulate her temperature—a lot of the time she has to be naked. This doesn't stop her doing her job but, obviously, it's not great for Zoom.

TIPS, ADVICE, ACTIONABLES

Reasonable adjustment: Why equity for neurodivergent jobseekers means rethinking how you hire

After endless jobs in various industries—from sales and banking to bar and boat work—Jack Dyrhauge realised: he wasn't the problem, the workplace was. Now, as Founder and CEO of Neuropool, he is determined to change it, for *good*.

My story starts at age six, when I was diagnosed with ADHD and put on Ritalin. But, sadly, that just made me more aggressive and more uncontrollable.

I was always getting into fights, didn't have a father figure, and was just very disruptive. All the other kids would be sat there getting on with things. 'Sit still' did not work for me. Three years after my diagnosis with ADHD, nothing was improving—I was just causing chaos.

I went back to the doctor, who was like, 'Oh, you've got autism'. These days, you'd be told to try this or that approach, but 20 years ago, it was more, 'He's autistic—he doesn't get it'.

Back then, the main idea people had about autism was from Dustin Hoffman, acting as an autistic man, in *Rain Man*. We've made a lot of progress over the last 30 years, but people still say, 'Oh yes, autism—*Rain Man*', so we need a few more films that bring it out in a positive light.

There were also kid dynamics—I was an English kid in a French school, who got wound up and turned red really easily. People would tease me, I'd go hit someone, and they'd find that really funny.

I wasn't a victim, don't get me wrong, this is just my story. School kept on getting worse and worse throughout my teen years, as testosterone and puberty came in.

I got expelled from six schools in two and a half years. I dropped out at 15, then went back at 17—as I realised I needed GCSEs to actually do anything in life. So I got my GCSEs, did my A-levels and went to university briefly to do business.

I'd worked since the age of 11. From washing cars to working in bars and on boats, before finally getting into recruitment and sales at 19. I must've had 15 jobs before I finally realised I needed to start a business and work for myself.

Often, I'd sit down at a new job and within 20 minutes, be like, 'Oh God, how is this my life?'. This was pre-Covid, so you had to go in from 8 or 9 till 5 or 6. No complaints, just do it, otherwise your job's gone.

In that time, I experienced a whole bunch of learning and failure, before realising that neurodivergent people are not meant for the current, neurotypical workplace. That's when I set out to create Neuropool.

Neuropool is an ecosystem of employers, universities and the world's fastest-growing neurodivergent talent community. For corporates, we serve FTSE 500 employers by meeting their talent needs and helping mobilise their neurodiversity strategy and roadmaps. For universities and our community, we provide candidates with employment and accelerator programmes to engage them, upskill them, then connect them to our client network.

Almost 80% of autistic people are unemployed. That has a direct impact, not only on them and their families, but the whole UK economy. You've got half a million people at home on benefits, or unable to work more than one or two days a week because they'd then *lose* their benefits.

This is not just a huge workforce, it's an untapped talent pool of people. Neurodivergent people just need an equal chance of landing a role with an employer.

What do I mean by equal? Well, are there any form of adjustments offered to the candidate, when interviewed? And before they've even applied, what route did they have to take without a diagnosis or the right support—in particular, from the age of 15 to 21?

Because if you're ADHD, dyslexic or autistic, and you went through your whole academic life without any adjustment or support, you worked really hard to get there. I'm not saying you worked *harder* than other people—but if you had to make yourself concentrate, without any assisted technology, or extra exam time, and you *still* got good grades, well done.

The best way we can make an impact for neurodivergent people is by connecting them to meaningful opportunities. We can do that through a recruitment arm of our business—and we do—but actually, the most important and valuable thing for the entire community is mentoring and trust.

Anybody can go to a business and say, 'Hey, I'm autistic and dyslexic, can I apply to your sales role?'. But if the recruitment manager isn't informed about neurodiversity, they'll probably put them in the 'B' or 'C' shortlist. Why? Because there'll be several candidates who are perfectly abled—or require no adjustments—and will just get on with the job, and that's what you need in a business.

"We don't want favourable adjustments, we just want an equal chance. But you also need to realise that autistic people are eight times more likely than the average person to be unemployed and out of work."

We know that even if we mentored all of our candidates perfectly, and had a recruitment business that got them into jobs with clients, that's only going to impact so many businesses, so many people, so many clients.

Our plan is to make this work with education, government *and* businesses. They all have to accept they need to pay for mentoring, extra support and training support frameworks. Also, company buy-in is so important. Because if this is just an initiative run by HR or recruitment teams, it's not really going to work.

To drive real equity into hiring neurodivergent people, you need to have buy-in from leadership, learning and development, HR *and* recruitment. And that's before you even try and launch a company-wide initiative.

Otherwise, it'll just stagnate—like most diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Next, think about pre-application. What does a neurodivergent candidate see when they look at your website? Do they see anything about neurodiversity—for example, employee resource groups? Does anybody identify as neurodivergent openly, and say 'I have ADHD. I work here'. If not, then that's already one step.

So if the first stage is about how people from the neurodivergent community perceive you, the second stage is what happens when a neurodivergent applicant applies. After I've submitted my CV, and answered all your tests, has there been any offer of adjustment, or a list of what adjustments you have? And do I have to *prove* I'm neurodivergent to get them, or do you offer this to everybody?

We don't want favourable adjustments, we just want an equal chance. But you also need to realise that autistic people are eight times more likely than the average person to be unemployed and out of work.

Being neurodivergent doesn't mean you get a free handout or easy access to a job. What we will do is make sure you're competing against 10 other neurodivergent people in that interview process, and the best person will get the job. That removes any questions—it just means that autistic person was just better than you.

We put the right people into roles, and the client gets the candidate they've chosen—not a handout. And, on the client side, it's free!

Find out more about what Neuropool can do—for candidates, companies and universities alike—by visiting the website.

Fostering belonging →

PROFILE

Bruce Daisley

Podcaster, speaker and bestselling author

The cultural architect

Bruce Daisley had the classic 'rags-to-riches' career arc. He grew up on a council estate, flipped burgers to pay for uni (the first in his family to go, of course), and soared to the apex of tech. But then he walked away—setting his fairytale CV ablaze, to focus on what makes the workplace tick. Find out why, and how everything you thought you knew about resilience is a fiction.

Hey Bruce. What inspired you to quit tech to focus on workplace culture?

When you feel a sense of burnout—especially low-level burnout—you don't necessarily recognise yourself. You feel constantly exhausted. At one stage, I had a notebook that had a countdown in it, like 150 days, which was how long I was going to keep going until I resigned. I showed it to someone, and they said, 'Wow, if you feel like *that*, maybe you should resign now'.

Those jobs are so demanding that you can do them for a period of time, but you need to almost bribe yourself into believing that, 'Okay, this is a trade-off. Keep doing this, but you're not going to do it forever'. For me, it was all about escaping that sense of being constantly exhausted.

Is there an irony in that, by amassing all this insight about work, you're now the ultimate boss, with no team to lead?

[laughs] Well, I was fixated on those things while I was a boss. Generally, what I used to say to the managers who worked for me was, 'Look, our goal is that, in five or 10 years, people will say this was their favourite ever job'.

Often, it was about helping people feel they had the autonomy to get their job done—like red tape was being cut away so they could do stuff—that's where you get so much of your mojo. It's not about having a really demoralising job, but you go back to your desk and you laugh really heartily. That's dissatisfying, and feels compensatory.

Laughter is something you explore in great detail in your first book, *The Joy of Work*. Just how important is humour to team belonging?

For me, it's the most important thing. Laughter signals safety. I had a wonderful conversation with some firefighters, who said, 'We laugh every day'. I asked if they went home and told their partners, and one was like, 'If I told my partner what we laughed about today, she'd never talk to me again'. Specifically, I think these firefighters had been told to go and clear up after a train had crashed into a car—really grim, macabre stuff—and they used humour as a way to cope.

Laughter's also incredibly protective. And whether it's true that it creates a better sense of wellbeing or not, certainly—a day that you've spent laughing just feels like the knot inside of you is untied, and the challenges you had seem alleviated.

The reason I became obsessed with workplace culture was that I used to love going home at the end of a day thinking, 'I've laughed a lot today'. That gave me the greatest delight. It's not the sort of thing they teach you in business school books or on MBA courses, but the world seems a happier place when people are able to get their job done and are laughing a lot. There just seems to be something magical about it.

How much of a challenge is it to foster team belonging in the age of hybrid work?

I think we are entering an era of work where the connection between colleagues is slightly smaller. We're bridging from a relationship with work that was like school—that is, really tight and cohesive. If you missed a day at school, it felt like you'd missed an episode of your favourite show, and you'd never catch up on the gossip.

Now, we're moving to something that's a bit looser. You can witness this in resignation rates—initially people might have styled it as 'The Great Resignation', but it's starting to feel like a norm, where people are just less attached, and are staying at jobs for a shorter tenure. What that means is that good organisations are going to have to work harder to make sure the connection between people is a tight one.

How can employers strengthen those connections?

So, in the times that we are together, it's thinking about how do you create strong bonds between people. I chatted recently to The Moth—they run storytelling evenings all around the world, and their podcast is listened to two million times a year—and they've introduced storytelling courses for companies.

I was like, 'Okay, so is this basically to try and make everyone a TED talker?'. And they said, 'No, far from it. What we find is if one colleague tells a really meaningful story about themselves to another, it seems to transform the relationship they have. Now they understand each other, they understand their motivations, they understand something fundamental that happened, and they start rooting for each other'. I thought, 'Wow there's something in that'.

Actually, if organisations are going to spend a day a week or a day a month together, whatever it is, if they can feel like, 'Okay, I really like that person', it's probably going to forge a closer sense of synchrony, a closer sense of connection. I think that's the interesting thing for me—some organisations are going to set about doing this in a very different way to others.

So-called 'quiet quitting' remains a trending topic. Should companies be worried, or is this simply a case of employees setting healthy boundaries?

I think it's worth reflecting on exactly how our lives have become enmeshed with work. There was one survey in the US that said that 60% of workers who used mobile phones were giving about 13-and-a-half hours of availability to their firm every day, and five hours at the weekend. In total, it added up to about 70 hours of thinking about work. I'm not convinced that's in service of us doing a better job.

If all you're thinking about is work, then issues you've got at work become this cloud that follows you around. I think we get our best creative thoughts when we've got an opportunity to switch off, and allow ideas to percolate.

So it really is about boundaries?

To my mind, drawing boundaries is a really critical thing. Ultimately, if your employer wants you to do more, there's a conversation to be had that's, 'Okay, how can we reward you for that?', rather than expect extra unpaid work.

The big concern I've got is that, broadly, we've reached a situation now where the deal presented by work isn't a good deal for people. For a lot of people, it's not a reasonable aspiration to own their own home. And they are presented with student loans that are inescapable, because they don't have enough money to pay them off. That's a pretty grim setup.

If someone says, 'Well, this appears to be very transactional and I'm just going to fulfil my side of the transaction', I don't think we should label that quiet quitting. We should see it as a reasonable participation in a clear transaction.

Where do you stand on 'purpose' in relation to work. Should people aspire to connect with their careers in this way, or does it leave employees open to dangers like overwork and burnout?

I'll be honest with you, I tend to think that purpose is a bit of a red herring. It's frustrating, because I've seen a lot of firms stand up and say what their purpose is, and I'm not convinced it's true.

I chatted to one management theorist, and he said, 'The only way most people can survive in modern work is in a state of managed irony'. So basically, you pretend to go along with all the bull****. You don't believe the bull****. And if your mum asked you about the bull****, you'd be reluctant to even tell her what the bull**** is. If your partner asked, you'd mumble, 'Don't worry about what our mission is'. You're just in a state of managed irony—where you pretend to the bosses you believe it. You don't really, but it's just easier to pretend.

That managed irony, I think, is possibly a sign that things aren't right. If you said, 'Look, we've got pride about doing a good job here. In the space, sector and category of the market we're in, we just want to do a good job'. I think most people buy into that. For me, identity's far more important than purpose.

"Knowing that people generally feel more resilient when they feel they've got other people around them who are in the same situation, is really helpful."

You've explored the power of diverse teams in your work. Beyond the business case—which is well-known by now—why is this so important?

I think the most critical thing is to understand that diversity is often uncomfortable. One CEO said to me last week, 'Oh yeah, our biggest definer when it comes to recruitment is whether you could sit for seven hours on a transatlantic flight with this person' … but, if what you're saying is, you only want to hire someone who's not going to annoy you, what you lose through that is diversity. You lose people who are different.

Understanding that diversity is often learning to accommodate people who are maybe slightly different to you is a really critical thing. If you optimise to minimise those frictions, then possibly, silently, you choke out diversity from your approach.

Your new book, *Fortitude*, debunks many myths around resilience. First, would you warn employers against courses based on 'grit' or 'growth mindset'? And second, what is resilience *really*?

Well, I am certainly calling for a pause on those things, because I think the evidence at best is heavily curated. It's adapted to try and present the case that's there. For me, I think the most critical lesson about resilience is understanding that it's the strength we draw from each other. Knowing that people generally feel more resilient when they feel they've got other people around them who are in the same situation, is really helpful.

Actually, as soon as you understand that, you start to recognise, 'Oh, that's why the people in Ukraine are so resilient'. It's because they feel united in doing something together. It's a really powerful lesson. In a time when many of us feel more isolated than ever before, knowing that we can feel connected to other people is a really helpful resource.

TIPS, ADVICE, ACTIONABLES

Not a binary issue: How to boost belonging among gender non-conforming staff

Eleanor Snare explains why, in their experience, being non-binary at work is not about receiving a “magical, special hat.” Sometimes, equality is about being just as invisible as everyone else.

A lot of our world is distinguished by binaries. You’re either employed or unemployed; a stay-at-home parent or working. It’s very black-and-white thinking. Increasingly, particularly from an HR perspective, I think people are more interested in a multifaceted way of working. So, working part-time, or working flexible hours. And it’s the same with gender identity.

Gender non-conforming people are not a new invention. They’ve been around since human beings have been around. But the visibility and the labelling—or the self-naming—of them is maybe something people are more willing to do now, especially among younger people. I think that’s probably born off the back of visibility of non-heterosexual people. As the visibility of homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, asexual people has risen historically, so has gender non-conforming.

A lack of understanding, or imagination?

This is going to sound bizarre, but I think the main reason people don’t understand gender non-conformity is not because they don’t get it. Usually, people just haven’t stopped to consider the potential, or the possibility, that is outside the gender binary. Yet it’s something I’m not surprised by—people have got other things to think about.

I think there’s a failure of imagination, which is a big problem for most workplaces at the moment. A failure of imagination to understand things like degrowth, or deconsumption, or what could it look like if we cared more about the environment, or had a board that was more diverse.

It’s also just exposure. People don’t know people who are gender non-conforming. Lots of people still don’t know people who are not heterosexual. It’s a bubble thing.

Not up for discussion

One big issue is that some people think being non-binary is ‘a conversation’. So many of us—whether you’re gender non-conforming or have a sexuality that has been historically oppressed—have been taught to justify our existence. We go in expecting to have dialogues, whereas I think if we went and made statements, things would be quite different.

The analogy that comes to mind is when I once went on a date with someone, and he just couldn’t get his head around the fact I was non-binary. He wanted to argue with me about it. I was just like, ‘No, it’s not up for discussion. This is what it is—you either get on board or you don’t’.

When I first socially transitioned, I was a lot more nervous about it. I wouldn’t correct people. Now, I feel much more confident, and I think workplaces need to be aware of that. Because, if you’ve got a gender non-conforming kid who recognised they were non-binary when they were 10, by the time they get to 21, they’re not going to take any s*** from you. There’s not going to be a dialogue. And if someone in your organisation doesn’t understand, that’s their problem. It’s not the job of the oppressed people to educate the oppressor.

Creating a culture of belonging

This is going to sound bizarre, but being non-binary is not a big deal. At the end of the day, my gender identity is a tiny portion of who I am. I want to feel comfortable where I work, I want to feel accepted, and I want to feel like I belong. But everyone wants that. It's not just a special thing for non-binary people—that's everybody.

"This is going to sound bizarre, but being non-binary is not a big deal. My gender identity is a tiny portion of who I am. I want to feel comfortable where I work, I want to feel accepted, and I want to feel like I belong. Everyone wants that."

You can put things like training or awareness in place, but these are mainly useful for people who are struggling to get their head around it. To be honest, most people just want to get on with their job. That's what I want, anyway.

The reason my workplace knew I was non-binary was because I applied for a new job and put my pronouns on there. They literally said nothing, and just started using the pronouns. That for me was the best result, because I just want to get on with my job. I want to carry on, I want to feel good, I want to belong, and I want people to use the right pronouns for me.

I don't need a party, or some magical, special hat. Sure, it would be really cool if there was a big thing every International Non-Binary Day, but it'd be really cool if we did that for every type of person and every celebration.

Otherwise, you become the representative. When I worked at an agency, I always used to get wheeled out as the cool, young, edgy one. It's like, 'Seriously, I'm really boring. I like trains and watching s*** telly'. I think there's a fine line between celebrating, embracing, and giving people that space and visibility if they want it, and people becoming poster children for a cause in a way they may not like, or feel is relevant to talk about in a professional sphere.

Ultimately, I think having a culture of belonging is just about normalising that people are different, they have different experiences, and that's fine. The energy and the money should be spent on addressing people who consistently don't get it, and who cause conflict because of their lack of understanding. Not the people who are just doing their job, that just happen to be 'they/them'.

Eleanor Snare is a speaker, author and creator. Find out more by joining their mailing list, connecting on LinkedIn, or buying their eBook: Finding Your Professional Purpose.

Photo credit: Ashley Karrell

To real equity *and beyond*: 4 steps towards a better workplace

What comes next may not be pretty. Permacrises rarely are. Yet you—yes you, *reading these words*—can help bring about the upbeat bit. That is, a workplace custom-built around fair treatment for every employee. Here's how.

1. Drive the change people wish to see

DI&B is not a fleeting workplace trend, and our YouGov data shows it. Year-on-year, a majority of the UK workforce has said that diversity and inclusion matters to them personally. This suggests these are hard-wired beliefs. So, beyond the obvious moral imperative (of doing right by every staffer), employers who neglect the importance of DI&B initiatives are effectively ignoring their people.

2. Take a stand on the things that matter

Action can't stop at diversity schemes. In our survey, a majority of every audience agreed businesses should have a stance on key issues affecting the UK. Just 1 in 3 said companies should steer clear of speaking out.

Of course, there's a thick line between taking 'a stance' and 'a *stand*', and it's this latter part where change happens. After all, why be yet another company that tweaks its company logo to mark Pride or Black History Month—but does nothing to actually support the relevant cause or affected employees? Instead, be the one that bounds towards net zero, or sees significant cultural events as a chance to *invest*, as well as advance the conversation.

3. Appraise every part of the recruitment process

Hiring staff for cultural fit? Rewarding workmates who refer their pals? Using a jobseeker's current salary as a starting point? If you answered 'yes' to any of these, there's a chance your recruitment is tinged with unfairness. (And, if it was yeses all round, that's a real problem.)

Reimagining recruitment doesn't have mean destroying everything that came before, however. Equity *can* be more evolution than revolution. To get started, revisit Dani Herrera's advice (page 98), then explore whether AI could be your ally (page 82 and 60).

4. Redouble your efforts on belonging

Maybe the most frightening finding in our whole survey: twice as many people think remote work has a negative impact on company culture than a positive one. So, while there are several WFH wins to speak of, as *part* of the DI&B debate—with working parents, disabled staff and introverted workers just three well-known beneficiaries—beware it could come at a cost of belonging.

How to fix this? Invest time (and yes, money) to boost workplace belonging. This might be ERGs, workmates swapping stories (see page 86), or "world-building workshops" (see page 64) that give reps from every level of your organisation the power to rewrite your company's culture.

We’re all in this together

Indeed for Enterprises

Inclusive hiring

Recruit a diverse workforce, create an inclusive environment and help foster belonging.

Solutions for any hiring challenge

We offer a suite of produts, from advertising to interviewing. so you can build great teams at scale.

Visit uk.indeed.com/employers/enterprises

indeed

RECENTLY RELEASED

Future of compensation: Pay, benefits and equity in the UK workplace.

Download the report today

uk.indeed.com/lead/future-of-compensation-2022-report

YouGov® | indeed