

We're in this together

Inclusion – rather than diversity – is the term to best adhere to within in the sector, as **Karen Grave** explains

'Better together' – that's a slogan that's been used in a number of different connotations, sometimes successfully and just as often not (I swear, I'm really determined not to use the B-word in this issue...).

Having said that, I very much hope by the time you finish reading the articles in this month's *PPMA Focus*, you will understand why I've chosen that theme for this first edition of the new year.

In this supplement we're focusing on 'inclusion'. Those of you who have been kind enough to read my previous musings on this critical area will know I'm not a fan at all of the term 'diversity' – in my view it's become an ever more politicised term and from an HR and OD perspective that's deeply damaging to a key workforce priority.

It's always worth a reminder that the purpose of legislation in this area is to ensure the playing field is levelled so talented people are not held back because of bias – whether conscious or unconscious. This is important when you look at how that plays out on the ground for many of us.

We've typically thought about diversity and inclusion in the context of protected characteristics. But depending on where we are in public services, we also think about inclusion in terms of developing policies that benefit all of our citizens. This is surely the best way of delivering citizen representation.

In talking to many of you and non-HR colleagues, it's clear that the broader issue of representation (which is political) is sometimes conflated with our HR and OD workforce responsibility. That can cause us real issues and very often it makes our already tough agenda even harder.

I've said in the context of work on the 21st Century Public Servant that our society is better for having well-funded and well-run public service organisations. The older I get the more fervently I hold that view and the more impatient I get when we don't deliver well run organisations. I don't think anyone would take



issue with it being easier in today's world political climate to see the consequences of a loss of trust and confidence in government and public service institutions.

We can't (sadly) influence the funding issue. BUT we definitely can influence how well our organisations are led and how well we develop our workforces.

If we don't want to develop all our workforces – every single colleague – so that we are all capable of and focused on designing, delivering and innovating services for all of our citizens then we probably need to be thinking about a different career.

Thinking about how we tackle this issue then is ever more important. And managing this complex and challenging subject credibly is critical if our organisations are going to deliver positive and sustainable change.

We shouldn't make the mistake by the way of pretending that it isn't complex – it involves deeply held cultural experiences and the not-

small matter of history. And human nature – which doesn't always see nuance, doesn't always welcome change, doesn't always want to see through the eyes of others and often finds it easier to remain single-issue focused.

We can't (sadly) influence the funding issue. BUT we definitely can influence how well our organisations are led and how well we develop our workforces

Diversity initiatives that are not handled well lead to people feeling disadvantaged and marginalised and that can be deeply corrosive. It's the very opposite of what we're trying to deliver. The other danger, equally as corrosive, is that the desire to deliver diversity just becomes a tick box exercise. Unconscious bias training is important but only if we take it

seriously and ensure we don't leave people feeling insulted, patronised and no wiser as to how real change is going to be delivered.

Another important consideration is that of evidence. A laser focus on evidence-based practice is critical in terms of HR and OD demonstrating its value. We must be honest and recognise that our evidence base in this area isn't as strong as we need it to be.

There is good material out there, but it's not complete. You can find important work done by Green Park in their annual leadership surveys showing the representation of BAME and gender in public sector leadership. The World Economic Forum is also helping us in terms of producing data that shows the benefits of better representation – although even here this is mostly focused on gender.

The numbers matter but the language we use is perhaps more important. At a recent *The MJ* Green Park Roundtable, colleagues and I

discussed the reality that creating distinct forums for protected characteristics is often reinforcing difference and not breaking down barriers.

So for me, inclusion is increasingly the lens that I want to encourage us to look through. I hope by the time you read the rest of these articles you will feel the same.

There is something deeply moving and profound in hearing the very human stories of people who have not felt included. These stories are very often more powerful as methodology, data and training courses.

We are graced in this edition with deeply personal, honest and brave contributions from some wonderful people. I am very proud of them and very grateful that they have trusted PPMA to share their stories.

Karen Grave is PPMA President



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MHR



Taking three steps to a more inclusive council

Jessica Dolphin outlines how Leeds City Council has taken bold steps to improve inclusion and diversity at the organisation

We are proud of how far we have come at Leeds in recent years on inclusion, we have put it at the centre of our strategies to use as a driving force for change. There are three key factors that have helped this move forward: strong leadership both politically and from senior officers; empowering our staff networks to be important allies in the organisation and recognising the importance of the built environment in the inclusion journey.

Our council values by their nature are inclusive in that we strive to treat people fairly and be open and honest in everything that we do. It is one of our strengths that our values are well embedded throughout our organisation, as commented on by our most recent peer review.

Leadership

One of the most important things that has helped us achieve the shift forwards toward a truly inclusive culture is ownership from the top.

Our corporate leadership team all have personal objectives in their appraisal around inclusion and diversity and regularly feedback progress on this to an inclusion and diversity steering group. The group is made up of elected members, chief officer HR and the chief officer communities.

The focus is on external and internal objectives – how we are supporting the citizens of Leeds and also how we are supporting and championing diversity within our staff teams, so that our employees can be their best.

We are also encouraging staff to say 'I feel I

count' by encouraging our staff to 'bring their whole self to work' by disclosing their equality information.

Our 'member champions' – elected members from the current council leadership – have taken a front role on different protected characteristics. They have linked up with staff networks to drive change at all levels in organisation and to be visible leaders on this agenda.

Staff networks

We have invested in our seven staff networks to ensure they flourish, including elected member and senior officer champions to help support their strategic direction. As a key driver of change and the voice of our employees, staff networks have been allies to the HR service while still providing necessary challenge.

Comprising of representatives from front line and office based staff, the networks really do represent a cross-section of our workforce. Some networks have developed to link up with the community hub structure we have in the city, creating really strong and effective working relationships between communities within the city and the workforce.

The networks are playing an important role supporting the organisation to deliver change by supporting events such as International Women's Day and International Day of Disabilities, co-delivering these events and championing the message of the inclusive organisation. The networks have created a partnership to work together on challenges they have in common.

The partnership have agreed three priorities for

the next 12 months to work collectively towards, using monthly meetings and quarterly newsletters to communicate a joint message out to all network members and employees. These are:

- Career progression and equity of opportunity,
- Inclusive workplaces, where individuality is acknowledged and respected,
- Challenging the digital divide & increasing engagement with front line colleagues.

Working together on these challenges, with support from HR and the communities team, has created a powerful message for inclusion in the organisation, as well as evidencing the important role of our staff networks.

One of the most important things that has helped us achieve the shift forwards toward a truly inclusive culture is ownership from the top

The built environment

In 2018 we opened Merrion House, our flagship building that had been refurbished. As advocates for inclusion the HR team played an important role in producing a document *Integrating diversity and inclusion in to the built environment* that was passed through the council's executive board and now serves as a blueprint for the minimum standards Leeds City Council expects for its new and refurbished buildings.

This recognises the importance and the impact of the environment in creating an inclusive workplace. Plans for the building went through extensive consultation, including staff networks and community hubs, to ensure the building was inclusive and adaptable as it could be both for staff and members of the public.

Features include hearing loops in every room, non-gendered toilets on alternate floors and the ground floor includes changing places toilets and quiet contemplation rooms for staff and members of the public. The colours of the desk were also selected while considering those with visual impairments, resulting in a change of furniture contractor to make sure they best suited the needs of our staff.

Our senior leaders then spoke to a focus group of staff after they had moved in to the building and heard that working in Merrion has increased morale, made them feel more valued and feeling more professional in a building better suiting their needs.

Merrion House won the 'Best Inclusive Building' award at the West Yorkshire LABC Building Excellence Awards 2018 which is a fantastic recognition of the building itself, but also the collaboration between council services, networks and communities that we are striving to replicate wherever possible.

Jessica Dolphin is HR Service Manager at Leeds City Council



Embrace the difference – achieve the impossible

A change of mindset is vital if a positive culture of inclusivity and diversity is to be achieved – particularly involving the BAME workforce – as **Lorissa Page** explains

Aesthetically different – I have been told my power is in who I am, a strong, young black woman. I'll take the 'young' thank you very much – I am older than I look. However, with this difference comes struggle, having to overcome those misconceptions, justified and massaged by the subconscious of those in positions of privilege and entitlement. I could go on about this particular issue but there is nothing new here, this is a recognised and familiar issue and reality for many.

Many leaders talk about creating an inclusive culture and there is certainly passion for and within this debate. So, why has so little changed?

Talent, ability and promotion should not be the sole possession of one group to the exclusion of another

I believe it's because the conceptual tools that people work with are inadequate and not up to the complex task of creating truly inclusive organisations.

Creating cultures in which people from a range of backgrounds can enter, feel valued, treated fairly, recognised for their brilliance and career aspirations realised, isn't contingent on just systems and tools. I also think that a fundamental shift in mindset is required, challenging our own sometimes hidden pre-conceived notions of what a leader is – what they look like, their age, gender, disability or ethnicity. Inspirational leaders aren't inspirational because of what they look like, it's their spirit, authenticity, their very essence of being that sets them apart.

Talent, ability and promotion should not be the sole possession of one group to the exclusion of another. In *Inclusive Talent Management, How Business can Thrive in an Age of Diversity* Stephen Frost and Danny Kalman reference the addiction to likeness or sameness in an age of diversity, they caution that assimilation can kill difference and innovation and stress the need to achieve balance. Furthermore, they highlight the value in embracing diversity and developing inclusive organisational cultures, not least because it improves productivity, increases organisational resilience, decreases risk and makes for a happier workplace.

The disconnect between espoused aspirations concerning equality and the experience of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people is noted in the absence of BAME board members, it is self-evident that sameness doesn't apply here. Are there other reasons afoot to explain why the BAME workforce aren't considered to be the 'right fit' for leadership positions?

When a BAME person tackles conflict or a challenging situation it isn't viewed as brave and considered, it is deemed combative. However, it is the history of inequality experienced by BAME people, the struggle and desire to break through that makes them a more effective leader in terms of resilience, adaptability and the potential to recognise the struggles of others. It's this ability to tackle issues and conflict head on that creates space for growth and enlightenment.

If we truly want to see a change in the demographic make-up of boards that reflect the communities they serve, leadership teams need to take equal ownership and responsibility for diversity and inclusion strategy in the same vein as developing organisational strategy. This shift in culture requires system wide, integrated approaches that focus not on ticking boxes and following policy, but a system set on empowering all of the workforce to perform and achieve outstanding results through inclusivity and diversity of thought.

There are so many talented BAME people working in our public sector organisations that struggle to breakthrough. My advice to you is value your worth and seek out those that value it too. To leaders my advice to you is embrace the difference, for through it the impossible can be achieved.



Lorissa Page is Director of specialist OD and HR services at LP Consulting



In my first council job I was asked: 'Are you queer?'

Leatham Green examines his career in local government, and looks for continued progress towards ending discrimination and homophobia in the workplace

This is a very personal reflection as a gay man of my experience working in local government for over 30 years having enjoyed a reasonably successful career.

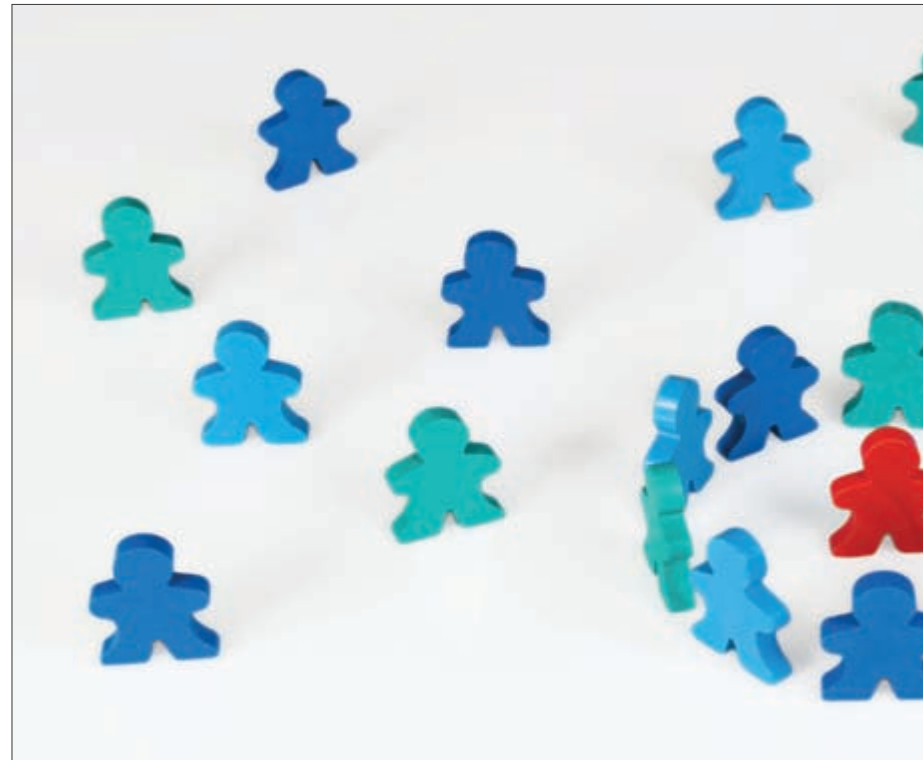
I was brought up in a pit village in the North East during the 1960s and 70s; it was very challenging for a young gay man where attitudes towards homosexuality were unequivocally negative. I became conditioned to homophobic bullying, and learned how to survive the challenges my sexuality presented.

After graduating from university I initially

worked in the private sector before joining the NHS and I don't recall my sexual orientation being an issue at work until I joined local government.

Last year marked 30 years since Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government introduced its divisive and discriminating Clause 28 legislation.

This clause, part of the Local Government Act 1988, banned the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities and in Britain's schools, prohibiting teachers from



even discussing with students the possibility of same-sex relationships.

Libraries were prohibited from stocking literature or films with gay or lesbian themes,

Busting the myths of

Can we safely and fairly include ex-offenders in our public sector workforce? **Jacob Hill**

When you hear the word ex-offender, what image comes to mind? Andy Dufresne from *Shawshank*? The Kray Twins? Or even Clint Eastwood in *Alcatraz*?

No? Well how about a homeless youth; a third of benefit claimants or one-in-three adult males between the ages of 18 and 52?

When I heard these figures in a recent talk by Dominic Headley and Associates, I was shocked. He later went on to reveal that the current estimation of people with a criminal conviction in England and Wales is around 11 million people.

Think about that... 11 million real people. That is huge and they are not all violent or sexual offenders.

In fact, much to people's shock, points on a driving licence for speeding are actually considered a criminal conviction too. I wonder if you, the reader, have some points on your licence or know someone who does? Should you be considered an 'ex-offender' and should your employment come into question based on this new information?

Hopefully not. This is the importance of understanding what an 'ex-offender'

Only bad people have criminal convictions, right?

Wrong, there are an estimated 11 million people with criminal convictions in England. Of these, not all crimes have criminal intent and a good portion of people with convictions want to put their past behind them. It is estimated that 1 in 3 adult males between the ages of 18 and 52 may have a criminal conviction.

How will safety and the reputation of my business be affected by employing someone with a criminal conviction?

Large employers like DHL, the Civil Service, Virgin and Timpsons all benefit from positive press around recruiting people with convictions. Robust recruitment procedures and support from Offploy can help make the recruitment process simple, safe and fair.

actually is and assessing the risks on a 'case-by-case' basis.

As the son of two police officers, I grew up privileged. As a kid, I would go to karate lessons, drama school, air cadets – the works. I had a wonderful upbringing.

It wasn't until I was 21 when faced with more than £250,000 of debt from a failed business that I was arrested for selling drugs at a music festival.

I was an idiot. My whole world came crashing down and I was rightly sentenced to 28 months in prison. This was a real eye-opener and my perception of an 'ex-offender' was challenged on a daily basis.

While in custody I did meet some 'Hollywood-esque' ex-offenders – people who were in for murder, people in from gangs and prolific offenders. I also met some

individuals such as accountants who were caught drink driving, tutors who illicitly claimed expenses, people who abused their authority and were caught, as well as younger people who were coerced into activities.

The point I am trying to make is that I met people from all walks of life in custody and now I cannot tell you what a 'typical' ex-offender looks like. Nor would I now take a blanket approach to recruiting people with criminal convictions.

In fact, on our application form we do not ask the question 'Do you have any unspent criminal convictions?', instead, we have registered as a 'Ban The Box' employer. This means we now only ask the question at the interview stage, which offers candidates the opportunity to prepare a structured disclosure letter.

I formed Offploy.org to help people with

I met people from all walks of life in custody and now I cannot tell you what a 'typical' ex-offender looks like

convictions secure employment. Readers of this article may think it is obvious that Offploy would 'ban the box' – However, we were actually inspired to do this because

Does having a criminal conviction mean you have been to prison?

No, less than 32% of people sentenced each year go to prison. Others may serve community sentences or pay a fine.

Do speeding points count as a criminal conviction?

Yes! Over 50% of convictions are for driving related offences. Penalty points are classified as an unspent conviction for five years and must be declared when asked by an employer.

less assuming, statutory organisations such as Bristol City Council and the Civil Service have removed the question from their application form.

Current advice from Nacro in their *Recruiting Safely and Fairly* guide offers a wealth of practical advice on considering the suitability of a person with a criminal record on a case-by-case basis. We recommend reviewing the below questions from the guide which will help you understand someone's conviction so much more than one line on an application form ever will:

1. Have the individual's circumstances changed since the offence(s)? If so, how?
2. Are the offence(s) relevant to the post?
3. Is the individual taking part in a special remedial/action programme?
4. Does the nature of the role present any opportunities for the post-holder to reoffend in the place of work?
5. Does the post involve regular one-to-



forcing young people to seek alternative sources for unbiased educational material,

while the education system forced themes of difference to the margins, popular culture and TV took up the baton of alternative readings in soaps and teen magazines. The destructive influence of Clause 28 unquestionably played a significant part in legitimising hate and reinforcing playground homophobia and bullying. From my experience discrimination certainly over-spilled into the workplace.

I have had the pleasure to work with some amazing people throughout my career in local government both locally to the council and more latterly on the national stage. However, the presence of homophobia was never far away at all levels in my career.

My first day joining local government in 1991 required me to meet with the Head of Department who very directly said to me: 'Are you queer?' – which was a complete shock. I asked if this was a question he asked of all new employees as part of their induction and he stated that 'queers' were not welcome in local government'. I was horrified by this reception and but for the support of my line manager and my personal commitment to my duties I would certainly not have continued with my employment or chosen career as a public servant.

This backdrop of legitimising homophobic discrimination manifested itself in behaviour that was belittling and marginalising – often sabotaging my work.

Despite great objection, Clause 28 endured

until it was repealed in Scotland on 21 June 2001 and in the rest of the UK on 18 November 2003.

I don't recall my sexual orientation being an issue at work until I joined local government

During my career, there have been multiple instances of inappropriate behaviour. The ones I can particularly remember include hearing a senior officer say that the organisation was very lucky to be able to benefit from recruiting the 'creative types' who lived in Brighton – a euphemism for the fact that Brighton has a large gay community. This declaration was met with embarrassed laughter but no official objection. Additionally, over the years I've been asked: 'What role do you perform in your relationship, the man or the woman?'; and it's also been said to me: 'I see you are wearing pink today which is no coincidence.'

None of these comments of course have any connection to my ability to do my job.

The legislative backdrop did improve with the introduction of the Equalities Act 2010 which provided legal protection to (among others) gay people in the workplace from harassment – whereby people cannot be

treated in a way that violates their dignity, or creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

The ability to hide behind the excuse of making discriminatory comments as jokes or banter should be consigned to the past.

I guess it is sadly inevitable any organisation will have employees who hold views that are discriminatory. The importance for the organisation is how they respond to such offensive behaviour and what support do they extend to their employees when such ignorant and often hostile behaviour is demonstrated.

It takes great strength and courage to speak out against discrimination in any form. Many people feel really afraid to speak out and we have to change this. The reality is that until and unless we have leaders who are prepared to address such homophobic behaviour and discrimination in all of its forms little will change.

After 30 years working in local government, that such outmoded, narrow-minded and – frankly speaking – unlawful behaviour still prevails fills me with sadness. As my grandmother often reminded me: 'Fine words butter no parsnips.'



Leatham Green is interim Executive Director at the PPMA and founder of The Mindful HR Centre

ex-offenders at work

shares Offplay's journey in opening the door to recruiting people with criminal convictions



What are my options when an applicant declares an unspent conviction?

data protection legislation which employers must take into account, as well as support and advocacy from the likes of Businesses In The Community, the Ministry of Justice and the Recruitment and Employment Confederation who are all advocating for the inclusive recruitment of people with criminal convictions. The big question is, in a nation suffering from a chronic skills shortage, how can we not consider people with criminal convictions for our vacancies?

Considering this represents 11 million people, where more than 50% of whom are convicted on driving-related offences, is your application tick-box putting talent off from even applying?

So when we assess the suitability of ex-offenders in the workforce, it is really important to look at the bigger picture of someone's offence, their background, the circumstances and how it relates to the role we're hiring for.

On 16 May I will be hosting a workshop at the PPMA's annual conference where I will be sharing our journey and practical steps to openly recruiting people with criminal convictions.



Jacob Hill is Managing Director of Offplay

one/ unsupervised contact with vulnerable people?
6. Does the post involve direct contact with the public?

7. Does the post involve direct responsibility for finance or items of value?
8. Does the post involve a significant level of trust i.e. nursing or caring for people?

9. Is the individual barred from working in regulated activity? (If applicable)
If you are reading this article, it is possible you work within the public sector and I can already picture the nightmare in your head around implementing something like this with existing policies and the layers of management that would never sign off on something so 'high-risk'.

Thankfully, there have been changes to

BAN THE BOX Do I have to ask about criminal convictions when considering candidates?

For most roles, no. Over 100 employers, including the civil service, have 'Banned the Box' and only ask about criminal convictions at the interview stage instead of the application stage.



'My soup is too hot'

Nick Hecksher gives an overview of the impact of autism spectrum disorders and Aspergers while offering the business case for employing people with these symptoms

As a young child, I ripped off the wrapping paper to utter the now enshrined-in-family-folklore words 'Just what I didn't want!' An inability to manipulate the truth has accompanied me throughout my personal and professional life, possibly borne out of a difficulty predicting how others might feel, rendering consideration for their likely emotional response unproductive.

Writing these words is somewhat nerve-racking... admitting difficulty in reading other's emotions feels like such a weakness relative to the trustworthiness and authenticity upsides that accompany it. I find some comfort in the knowledge I'd rather hear the truth from relatives/friends/colleagues than a message constructed to mitigate, or worse still, increase impact for the recipient. Maybe my own self-awareness trumps the (perceived) flaw? Maybe the current world of work needs a little more unfiltered truth? Maybe these days society is a little more tolerant of difference?

I spent most of my career in sales and have recently realised that what motivates me is helping people think differently. In recent months I have been leading a community interest company – ASPIERATIONS – whose mission is to help improve employment outcomes for those with Aspergers and high-functioning autism. I was drawn to the diversity of thought among ASPIERATIONS' target audience, which is highly intelligent, largely unsupported, and inherently wired to think differently!

The case for businesses to employ neurodiverse talent has never been stronger:

- In today's disrupted business environment organisations require different thinking and perspectives to constantly re-invent themselves
- Those with an autism spectrum difference (ASD) often have extremely high-functioning capability in a range of skills which are very much in demand today and in the workplace of the future.
- The culture needed for autistic talent to thrive – clarity of purpose, trust and authenticity – is a culture which helps everyone's wellbeing, whether neurodiverse or neurotypical.

Simultaneously the need to improve employment outcomes for those on the autism spectrum is urgent:

- At least 1.2% of the UK population know they have an ASD and many more haven't yet been diagnosed.
- Often an invisible condition, many with an ASD seek to hide it, creating unnecessary stress and situations often leading to other health and wellbeing issues.
- Employment rates among those with a diagnosis are the lowest of any minority group at a shocking 16%.

Increasing awareness is our first priority. As organisations realise the extreme talents often possessed by those with an ASD, they are questioning how roles are designed. The nature of autism often translates to high competence in

a narrow range of skills, typically accompanied with material challenges in other areas. If we can design roles to capitalise on the strengths, and teams to accommodate the challenges, it is possible to improve average performance across all areas.

To achieve this requires different recruitment processes. If logical processing and analytical skills are the strengths being sought, how do we move beyond selection processes that reward social skills and an ability to sell oneself?

'My soup is too hot' are reported to be the first words spoken by Albert Einstein. Did Einstein have Aspergers? Does it matter?

Finally, we need to create cultures within which difference can thrive. For someone with an ASD to talk openly about their challenges requires a cultural acceptance that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Too often, today's workplaces are dominated by the illusion of competence. Interestingly, this same illusion of competence inhibits innovation, as individuals strive to both conform and not to fail.

The cultural ingredients sought by those with an ASD correspond very closely with those needed for innovation. Authenticity, honesty, acknowledgement of individual strengths and

weakness, create a climate within which people can experiment. We cannot innovate while fear of failure dominates our cultures and we certainly can't innovate without difference.

'My soup is too hot' are reported to be the first words spoken by Albert Einstein. Young Albert had caused his parents a great deal of concern by reaching the age of four without speaking. On hearing him speak for the first time, his parents, no doubt wrestling with a myriad of emotions (delight that their son could speak, concern for his burnt palate, bemusement that he'd waited until now to communicate, shock that his first words were a well-formed coherent sentence) asked Albert why he hadn't spoken previously?

'Because, up to now everything was in order,' was the answer.

Did Einstein have Aspergers? Does it matter? Clearly, his brain worked differently to most of us, and society is better off for the difference.

Nick Heckscher is Sales and Operations Director at ASPIERATIONS



• ASPIERATIONS is a community interest company promoting awareness of the benefits of employing those with an ASD through a membership network and consulting services. We also design and manage recruitment projects where work or teams are pre-disposed to those with an ASD. For more information, contact nick@aspirations.org

The silent revolution

The future is bright – the future is cognitive diversity, as **Bob Athwal** reveals

If I've caught your attention you might well be wondering whether or not you need another perspective on social mobility. There are plenty of expert views out there, so what makes this different?

Well, I'm not an expert. And I don't class myself as I commentator either. Like many of you out there I am someone who is passionate about 'closing the gap'.

Making it the focus of my PhD I'm interested in the 'hidden stories'. And my research aims to understand the narrative that aids social mobility in the graduate labour market. However, like many PhDs my own views and thoughts are being challenged. And what's clear is that the old rules to getting ahead – whatever they really were – just don't apply like they used to. Why?

Because a silent revolution is taking place right now. And Millennials and Generation Z don't have to put up with the constraints many generations have had to endure. Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting social mobility is fixed or that poverty doesn't have a profound effect on life chances. But a new order is emerging, one which is digital and – crucially – more accessible

This might sound dramatic but social mobility is seen by many as having no social or cultural capital. But as a dear friend of mine said: 'Be careful who's cultural capital are you referring to.' She was right. 'Who' are we measuring the deficit against? Every person has a heritage that should be



recognised and as global citizens we should recognise the opportunities our differences – our diversity – create.

This works both ways too. The term 'pale stale male' almost characterises a generation but we all know this isn't the case, there is experience and wisdom in us all and high performing teams are made up of mixed minds. Your race, class, gender, age religion, and sexuality are not restraints, they're assets.

At the heart of this new world is a 'cognitive diversity' that we have never seen before but the sad truth is that we have a long way to go before we achieve environments that are truly inclusive. Ones that don't just welcome diversity but create environments in which this can thrive. Unfortunately too many people head down a path that can be predicted. And crucially, fail to realise their potential.

This doesn't mean that those of us who want to make a difference have failed. It just

means there's more work for us to do. Where do we start?

While the differences in people can be social and cultural, the unseen barrier is confidence. Building this has to start in our schools, but it's not just our education system that can take this forward. Any organisation can embrace a wider spectrum of talent by asking itself some key questions:

- Are you targeting opportunities to gain experience as widely as possible? Are you speaking with schools so that their pupils can gain an insight into what you do? What about your internships? Would you say you're doing everything you can to engage a wider pool of talent?
- Are you offering support throughout the recruitment process? Organisations leading the way in this area support potential candidates and will even host workshops and events to engage talent and encourage their applications.
- Are you coaching your talent?

There are some great examples already happening that are helping to build a culture of confidence amongst early careers and schools and I encourage you to start discovering and looking at your practices.

Bob Athwal is Chief Disrupter at Disruptive Graduate Consulting



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Is digital the way to manage the public sector optimally?

New research found that HR functions within the public sector are struggling to realise the benefits of new technology in the workplace, with over 50% of HR leaders struggling to drive this change. **Paul Friday** summarises the findings

50% of HR professionals feel prevented from using technology to drive new ways of working
A study by the PPMA and MHR looked at the ways in which technology such as analytics, automation, and AI are currently being used within organisations. It focused on the problems of implementing technology, as well as how effective it may be for HR teams to improve current organisational processes – taking into account the role of public sector workers today.

OK, I know I need to transform...but how do I make it happen?

Digital transformation is an important journey for the whole public sector not least local authorities, but with employees familiar with the same systems for years, it's crucial you get implementation and change right to get everyone on-board, ensuring continuity and ensuring the workforce embrace change. This is a key challenge that should be owned by the executive team and led by HR.

Collaboration and communication

The research found one of the key reasons technological change was so difficult for HR to lead was that it's not seen as their usual area of expertise. Many respondents felt powerless to lead technological change due to outdated



IT infrastructure and restrictions imposed by different departments, (as well as a resistance to change).

Additionally, our research found that communicating technology changes can often create half the problem. Even when forums or polls are used to gather opinions, they're often too full of technical talk or jargon for employees to engage with, leading to a lack of responses and negative bias.

Without effective communication, successful collaboration becomes almost impossible.

Changing the focus to digital

One of the key takeaways from the research was that any organisational changes must now be focused on digital in order to avoid being left with ineffective processes. With 95% of respondents stating HR should be driving change and new ways of working.

Here are some tips for doing that effectively:

- 1. Communicate the key benefits of digital transformation to the whole organisation throughout the transformation journey:** If people can't visualise the benefits of the temporary extra work they need to put into learning new processes, they're unlikely to have the right attitude. Pointing out this will lead to less effort for them is a good place to start.
- 2. Assemble a transformation team:** Rather than telling everyone what to do, make them part of the transformation process, taking on board their feedback – they know their jobs inside out, so it's important to listen.
- 3. Include key personnel from both IT and HR departments:** Central to your transformation team should be IT and HR. These employees play a crucial role for the wellbeing of all in your organisation, so keep them informed over the new systems and processes they will be in charge of.
- 4. Assess what's working, what needs to change and communicate this to everyone:** Consult your team, work out what needs to change and what is going well, then review with a transformation expert – this will make you be better placed to make the right decisions for your organisation.

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