



Creating a disability-smart
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Reassessing Workplace Diversity Measurement: Are Current Methods Inclusive?

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Forum

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The problem: So much data collection but...

Diversity, inclusion, organisational culture, neurodiversity, mental health – all of this is more ‘on the agenda’ than ever, but disabled employees’ experiences are not getting a whole lot better:

- **1 in 4** disabled employees are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their work situation.
- **30 per cent** of disabled employees feel stressed at work most of the time.
- **28 per cent** of disabled employees are considering leaving their current employer because they don’t feel they have been treated well.
- Just **19 per cent** of disabled employees said they have enough time to manage their conditions and do everything they need to do in their job.
- Just **19 per cent** said their adjustments remove all disability related barriers in the workplace for them.

Policy solution – the Equality (Race and Disability) Bill

To “make work pay” for disabled people, the Bill provides for employers with over 250 employees to report:

- Their declaration rate
- How many disabled people they employ
- Their organisation’s disability pay gap

Does this measure diversity or inclusion – and is one more important than the other?

The urge to diagnose, box, and categorise

- It is instinct for humans to categorise and it is more comfortable to deal with definitives – **“There’s a policy for *that*”**.
- Open-ended, broad, and neutral is hard to locate and get a figure that our Boards and regulators crave. But it can be exclusive: **“I’m a great big queer and there are lots of boxes here”**.
- What we want is not always what we need: people who got their ND diagnosis said, **“It confirmed what I already knew”**.
- Cultural nuances of a ‘diagnosis’ being a ‘power over’ approach instead of ‘knowing yourself’: **“Just tell someone what you need, care for yourself”**.
- Assertiveness comes with experience? **“I’m a grumpy older woman and happy to call out bad stuff” and “I just say what I need”**. **58 per cent** said getting what they needed was due to how assertive and confident they are at work to ask for what they need.
- ‘Intrusive’ and ‘invasive’ questions can feel ‘unsafe’ to people with neurodiverse conditions.

Key problems with categorising disability and neurodiversity

- Measuring diversity often means setting categories that suit the **organisation** and its systems and processes rather than **individuals**. Diversity is therefore measured by an organisations' phrases, not an individuals' identity.
 - This makes sense as a researcher – you need to resource your analysis.
 - But it doesn't make sense from a policy or workplace practice perspective – because it doesn't capture people's experiences when you don't let them use their own language.
- Organisations set the categories and employers have to do the work to make themselves fit into them by indicating the closest 'description' possible for their situation.
- Categories of disability and conditions are not neat:
 - Down's syndrome can be a genetic condition and a learning disability.
 - Epilepsy and stroke can be cardiovascular and neurological.
 - MS can be a neurological condition and mobility related condition.
 - A brain injury can be neurological and 'neurodiversity'.

The 'untidiness' of categories: Neurodiversity as an example

Common conditions considered **by employers** as neurodiversity:

- Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Autism
- ADHD
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- Tourette's (sometimes)
- Sensory Processing Disorder (sometimes)
- Irlen's Syndrome (sometimes)

And the conditions employees have who associate with the terms “neuro-inclusion”, “neurodiverse” or “neuro-processing”

- Mental health
- Stroke
- Brain injury
- Stammer and stutter
- Neurological conditions - migraine, epilepsy, aphasia
- Energy limiting conditions – inclusion ME/CFS, Fibromyalgia
- Long covid
- Menopause
- Sleep disorders

Where employers improve inclusion, their diversity figures fall

- “We don’t need to know if an employee has a disability. We want to make every employee’s job easier.”
- "If we have good processes, we actually don't need employees to disclose".
- “Our ambition is to make our employees’ lives better”.

The outcome:

- The number of employees who told the organisation they had a disability **fell**. Why? Because they didn't have to ‘bargain’ with their data before their employer treated them well. Employees didn’t have to say they have a disability before they get adjustments.
- These employers are not prioritising disclosures and data collection, they are prioritizing employee experience – and the two don’t always sync.

Side-stepping inclusion to achieve a narrowing pay gap figure

- **55 per cent** would like to consider decreasing their hours in their current job to help them get a good work-life balance while managing their disability or condition.
- **31 per cent** would like to consider decreasing the amount of responsibility (including management, deadlines, and targets) in their current job to help them get a good work-life balance while managing their disability or condition.

“I have declined those adjustments because it would affect our organisation’s disability pay gap”.

Employers who do the following have **wider disability pay gaps**:

- Change someone’s job to reduce seniority and responsibilities.
- Reduce their hours.
- Job carving/crafting.
- Job schemes for people with learning disabilities and autism.

What measures inclusion?

Disabled employees told us:

- Do you have all the adjustments and support you need?
- How long did it take to get what you need?
- How valued do you feel for who you are as you are at work?
- Does the organisation identify and remove disability-related barriers in the organisation?
- How far do you feel ableist and discriminatory banter and bullying identified and dealt with as a 'zero tolerance' behavior?
- How are management's perceptions of disability inclusion different from disabled employees' perceptions of how included they feel?

Good employers will collect beyond what the Equality Bill will mandate (diversity) and have a method for constantly understanding where the barriers are in their organisations and how employees' experiences of the organisation are improving (inclusion).

Get in touch – and some links you may find interesting

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In case of interest:

- My blog on the draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill: [Why disability pay gap reporting may not lead to increasing employment opportunities for disabled people - Business Disability Forum](#)
- Our disability workforce and pay gap hub: <https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/resource/disability-workforce-reporting/>
- Our research on disability workforce and pay gap reporting: <https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/resource/towards-meaningful-disability-workforce-and-pay-gap-reporting/>
- The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey hub: <https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/policy-and-research/the-great-big-workplace-adjustments-survey-2023/> including the chapter on intersectional experiences of getting adjustments at work: <https://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/policy-and-research/the-great-big-workplace-adjustments-survey-2023/intersectional-experiences-at-work/>