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# **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT WORK**

**Facing up to the  
business case**



**Report**

June 2018



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## Report

# Diversity and inclusion at work: facing up to the business case

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# 1 Introduction

Despite equality legislation and a recognition by many organisations that diversity and inclusion is important, we know that inequality still exists in the workplace. For example, in the UK, gender pay gap reporting has shone a light on the structural barriers to progression in organisations for women, including a lack of senior role models and flexible working. We also know that racial background can affect both access to work and the opportunities received for progression (CIPD 2017a). Furthermore, research tells us that discrimination still very much exists, both in its blatant form and via unconscious bias, which impacts numerous minority groups (Jones et al 2017, Talaska et al 2008).

Positively, diversity and inclusion is rising up the agenda in many organisations. However, the pace of progress towards realising equality of opportunity is still painfully slow. We need more evidence of what works to help guide organisations' efforts and galvanise action to remove barriers to equality.

## **The moral case for diversity and inclusion**

There is a compelling moral case for diversity and inclusion in the workplace and beyond. Ensuring everyone is treated equally, with dignity and has their fair share of resources (whether that be access to work or equitable pay) is simply the right thing to do. Work is a key aspect of our lives, so when work is not good for everyone it has the ability to create barriers, such as marginalisation and discrimination that impact on different groups in society (Hocking 2017).

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Therefore, organisations have a key part to play in tackling inequality, encouraging diversity and creating an inclusive workplace culture. An inclusive organisation (and indeed labour market) enables anyone, regardless of their identity, background and circumstance, to thrive at work and have equal access to jobs that positively benefit them. People matter, and we all should have equal opportunity to develop, progress, and be rewarded and recognised at work. Organisations must ensure that their people management practices champion this fundamental principle.

## **The business case for diversity and inclusion**

There is also still the need to provide a financially driven business case for action for some business leaders (although the moral case should be sufficient). This business case for diversity focuses on what diversity can do for organisational performance, built on the widely accepted belief that diversity and inclusion yields positive performance outcomes for organisations.

It is important to understand the relationship between diversity and performance, and under what conditions diversity can lead to positive outcomes. But, by being inclusive and supporting diversity, organisations (and importantly, the individuals within them) may benefit in a variety of ways that are not typically measured, such as retention of diverse talent, employee satisfaction and well-being. Previous research has also highlighted that the link between diversity and performance is not conclusive – but this does not mean

organisations should be deterred from pursuing diversity (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2013). This research aims to uncover the evidence behind the business case argument, while highlighting that there is a need to challenge this traditional notion of the 'business case' that focuses only on financial, rather than human, outcomes and other business outcomes such as corporate reputation. Despite an often over-reliance of business leaders and default focus on the narrow business case, we argue that any business case for diversity should hold these outcomes in balance and recognise the benefits at not only an organisational level but from an individual and societal perspective. We believe the people profession must champion a progressive perspective on the creation of value that considers a broad range of stakeholders and challenges a narrow focus on maximising shareholder value (CIPD 2018).

### **Limited progress and a lack of evidence**

It is evident that people management practices, alongside the culture and values of an organisation, hold the key to unlocking truly inclusive working practices that add value beyond compliance with equality legislation. People professionals have a key part to play in ensuring that what is espoused in policies is acted out in practice, ensuring fairness and encouraging diverse voices to be heard.

Unfortunately, while many organisations prioritise diversity and inclusion, action is often not guided by clear knowledge of what works, and under what conditions. We need this knowledge to take informed, evidence-based action, and to be able to examine what will make a difference as well as what organisational factors are unhelpfully serving to maintain the status quo.

To help address the issues outlined above, this research aims to answer the following questions as a basis for this evidence-based action:

- 1 What are the outcomes of diversity?
- 2 What factors keep inequality in place at work?
- 3 What supports greater inclusion and diversity in the workplace?

To answer these questions, we conducted a rapid evidence assessment (REA). As described in Box 1, this is a systematic method of identifying the best available evidence on these questions, drawing on published scientific research.

#### **Box 1: The rapid evidence assessment (REA) methodology**

A rapid evidence assessment is conducted to find the best available evidence on certain topics. By best available evidence, we mean the evidence that can identify, at best, a causal relationship between two variables of interest and potential moderators and mediators of that relationship. As part of this, the quality of studies identified in a literature search are assessed and only included if they use specific types of research methodology that are appropriate and trustworthy.

While no research findings are infallible, several indicators can be used to assess how valid and reliable, and therefore trustworthy, the evidence is. In other words, does the study measure what it sets out to measure, and would the same results occur if the same study was conducted again? These are all indicators of methodological quality in experimental and cross-sectional research.

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In addition, the method of the study is important when we want to answer a cause and effect question (does A lead to B, and under which conditions?).

A randomised, controlled trial examining the relationship between two factors are the 'gold standard' for causal research questions – and going one step further, meta-analytic or systemic reviews that bring together the results of multiple randomised controlled trials are 'even better'. However, this sort of evidence is not readily available on all topics, so further classification of the best available evidence is needed. In addition, a meta-analysis of several studies could be less than optimal if the studies it included were of limited quality.

The REA method aims to be rapid, so the results are not an exhaustive search of the literature – while we identified a vast array of studies, there is a possibility that not all research is represented here. Meta-analyses are trustworthy sources of evidence and the findings here provide a good overview of the evidence base – however, a causal link between diversity and organisational outcomes can't be proven.

Publication bias should also be considered. This refers to a tendency for statistically significant research results to be published, leaving insignificant, but equally valid, results 'in the file drawer', which can over-inflate the potential effects found in research.

Notwithstanding, the findings of an REA can be considered a synthesis of the best available evidence on a topic, although it is not an exhaustive search.

This report discusses the rationale and current thinking behind our research questions (section 2), then outlines findings for each of these questions in turn, highlighting the implications for people professionals and policy-makers, with a focus on UK policy issues, although the research findings we draw on in this report cover a variety of regions (section 3–5). In section 6, we conclude by discussing what's next when it comes to diversity and inclusion: how can business leaders and people professionals drive change in this area and where should future research focus to inform this change?

Further information on the methodology and details on each study outlined in this report can be found in the accompanying technical report, which can be found at [cipd.co.uk/diversityinclusion](http://cipd.co.uk/diversityinclusion).

## 2 Why focus on diversity and inclusion?

In the following section, we explain the rationale behind each of our three research questions and discuss current thinking in these areas.

### **What are the outcomes of diversity and inclusion?**

Our first question concerns the outcomes of workforce diversity and inclusion. However we make the case for diversity, it is important to understand whether there is a direct relationship between diversity and a range of outcomes – whether financial or impacts on individuals, and if they are linked indirectly, by both being related to a common factor.

The current evidence base for diversity often uses correlational data to demonstrate that diversity enhances performance. For example, the fact that better performing businesses tend to be more diverse is often used as part of the business case (for example Hunt et al 2015). In the absence of research that controls for other factors, this is a classic case of where ‘correlation does not imply causation’; the link between the two may be better explained by other factors. In the case of diversity it may well be that a common cause – for example a broadly progressive approach to people management – has a dual effect, leading to both greater workforce diversity and improved performance.

If there is a direct relationship between having a diverse pool of employees and positive organisational performance outcomes (whether financial returns or team performance), it appears to be inconsistent. For example, a previous review conducted by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) finds inconsistent evidence of the relationship between diversity and financial and/or team performance. The review concludes that some evidence exists to support the idea that businesses benefit from equality and diversity, but not across all types of business.

Despite a wish to prove diversity is positive for organisational outcomes, it is important for research integrity to examine the evidence for diversity outcomes in a neutral manner. We can then better understand when diversity at work leads to positive outcomes and the conditions that foster diversity and inclusion (Eagly 2016).

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It should be noted that research into diversity outcomes is wide-ranging and contains multiple definitions of both ‘diversity’ and ‘outcomes’. For example, one piece of research may examine the effect of gender diversity on boards, and another the impact of diverse project teams on creativity. This is a nuanced area, so generalisations are likely to oversimplify the relationship. In this report we will outline high-level findings and how this should inform practice as far as possible, while including relevant details of studies (for example, what outcomes are measured).

In addition, we must pay attention to inclusion at work. Whereas diversity remains a description of how different or similar people are within a workforce, inclusion refers to the cultural norms that surround and influence diversity – the extent to which people feel valued and able to contribute irrespective of their background or personal characteristics.<sup>1</sup> We all benefit when we embrace different ideas and ways of thinking and working; true inclusion extends beyond protected characteristics and encompasses personality differences and values. However, our evidence assessment highlights there is little controlled, systematic research in the scientific literature (for example, randomised controlled studies or meta-analyses) into how inclusion is supported at work and what outcomes this leads to, although we highlight the evidence and provide recommendations where possible.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a suite of British standards based on principles for valuing people: BS 76000 Valuing people in organizations (2015); BS 76005 Valuing people through diversity and inclusion (2017); PD 76006 A guide to learning and development (2017).

### **What factors keep inequality in place?**

Our second question concerns what factors keep inequalities in place. This is important to consider in its own right, as they can be qualitatively different from factors that promote diversity and inclusion. Despite legislation such as the Equality Act in the UK, coupled with many organisations increasing their focus on diversity and inclusion, we know that inequality and discrimination still remains.

In particular, it is evident that women and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups are still underrepresented in senior management in the UK (Davies 2015, Alexander 2017, Parker 2016, McGregor-Smith 2017). These inequalities are not just a question of numbers; they can be felt acutely. For example, BAME employees are more likely than white British employees to say their career progression to date has failed to meet their expectations, and often believe a contributing factor to this is discrimination (CIPD 2017a).

Clearly, while discrimination is illegal, forms of discrimination still exist in the workplace, whether unconscious or not. To understand how to tackle these issues, we must understand what they are and why they exist.

### **What supports greater inclusion and diversity?**

Our third question focuses on what practical measures are most effective at increasing diversity and reducing inequality. With organisations looking for ways to increase diversity and support inclusion, we want to uncover the evidence on how we address the factors keeping inequality in place. It is important to highlight what does work when it comes to diversity, so organisations can focus their efforts in a way that will deliver the best outcomes. How can the people profession and the wider business drive much needed change in this area so the future of work allows everyone, regardless of their background, circumstances or individual characteristics, to thrive at work?

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For example, many organisations undertake diversity training. However, the effectiveness of training initiatives has been called into question (Behavioural Insights Team 2017).

Name-blind recruitment is also receiving a lot of attention as a potential way of taking a degree of bias out of the hiring process (CIPD 2015). While this is a good first step in minimising bias from the hiring process, this alone will not remove barriers to work for minority groups, or solve the issue of bias itself.

When it comes to policies, organisations may design policies for specific groups or adopt a flexible approach, for example for people with caring responsibilities. CIPD research exploring the experiences of carers at work highlighted that creating an inclusive culture where employees feel supported and able to respond to their caring responsibilities as far as possible is more useful than a hand-holding approach (CIPD 2016).

It is clear that there are a variety of policies and initiatives that aim to make organisations more inclusive and diverse. We need to ask what works when it comes to workplace intervention that aims to minimise barriers (such as diversity training) or targets specific groups to ensure they have access to work (such as workplace accommodation for people with disabilities), so the people profession and the wider business can drive change.



### 3 What are the outcomes of diversity?

This section and those that follow outline the key findings and implications of each of our REA questions, along with providing key recommendations for policy and practice.

Our evidence assessment identified a vast amount of literature on the outcomes of diversity on various aspects of organisational performance – but very little on the outcomes for employees. Most studies are meta-analyses of multiple research findings that are cross-sectional or longitudinal in nature, meaning the relationship between diversity and outcomes should be seen as an association, rather than a proven causal relationship.

Our research question originally aimed to explore the relationship between inclusion and outcomes (as well as diversity and outcomes) – however, surprisingly, little research on inclusion outcomes for employees or organisations of appropriate methodology was found in our search. Our findings are therefore focused on the effects of diversity.

Overall, we find that:

- Diversity is a broad term and different aspects of diversity have different effects on outcomes:
  - For example, team tenure is associated with efficiency, but not creativity, whereas cultural diversity has been associated with creativity.
  - There is conflicting evidence that diversity of demographic factors such as gender, age and ethnicity are associated with positive team performance.
- Effects of diversity on performance are moderated by aspects of the organisation context such as industry and inclusiveness of the organisation climate.
- Research examines the relationship between diversity and organisation-level outcomes (for example financial performance or team performance) but has largely neglected individual-level outcomes such as well-being and employee satisfaction.
- Research tends to focus on a small number of characteristics (such as gender) and discrete outcomes, such as team performance.
- This approach to research means that intersectionality – that we all have multiple, overlapping identities – is rarely a feature in this literature. Research focuses on sole protected characteristics, so does not consider individual differences in the round – for example, how the experience of a white man differs from a black woman.

#### **Box 2: How is diversity described in research?**

Within the scientific literature, there are two overarching conceptualisations of diversity: ‘surface’ characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity, and ‘deep-level’ characteristics such as education and job tenure, all of which encompass different experiences and beliefs (Horwitz and Horwitz 2007).

**Deep-level diversity** concerns facets of individual differences related to diversity at work such as occupational background, occupational tenure and values that may not be immediately obvious but impact on workplace outcomes. In diversity research taking place in a work context, this is sometimes referred to as job-related diversity.

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**Surface-level diversity** relates to aspects of diversity such as gender and age that are outwardly visible and often relate to our innate characteristics – in other words, are observable. This is also referred to as biodiversity or demographic diversity.

How these ‘types’ of diversity affect team processes is the subject of debate; the hypotheses relating to this form the basis of much research (Stahl et al 2010):

- Do teams with differing values and occupational backgrounds (in other words, **deep-level diversity**) stand to benefit from fresh ideas and perspective or will these differences lead to conflict?
- Similarly, **surface-level diversity** attributes such as gender, age and ethnicity are thought to have the ability to have immediate and obvious impact on team dynamics because of individuals’ tendency to categorise others, and research investigates whether this impact is negative, positive or neutral.

Our review finds that examining the link between diversity and performance is not a straightforward task. Studies differ by the type of diversity examined, with each occupying a diversity ‘niche’, typically one characteristic, and the type of outcome, which makes it difficult to draw conclusions between studies. Precision is needed when measuring diversity outcomes because in research, types of performance and facets of diversity are often conflated (Horwitz and Horwitz 2007). This meta-analysis finds positive relationships between task-related job factors (such as tenure – see Box 2) and team performance, but no relationship between demographic factors and team performance. They find that self-reported measures of performance enhanced this relationship, suggesting individuals may enhance their own performance ratings in comparison with manager ratings. On the other hand, this could suggest that managers may inadvertently give lower ratings to diverse individuals or teams.<sup>2</sup> Further research is needed to explain this difference between manager and self-ratings of performance, which was found in multiple studies in our review. The following sections discuss the positive and negative outcomes of diversity in more detail, and highlight the importance of context in understanding this relationship.

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### **Diversity is associated with corporate performance and social reputation**

Meta-analytic findings, bringing together results from multiple studies, find several positive organisational outcomes associated with diversity.

With calls for increasing representation of women in senior and board-level positions, Byron and Post (2016) examine the relationship between women’s board representation

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<sup>2</sup> In this meta-analysis, studies that provided both team performance and individual performance ratings aggregated to the team level were included.

on a firm's corporate social responsibility (CSR). Overall, women's board representation is positively associated with CSR<sup>3</sup> and social reputation. This relationship is enhanced by the extent of shareholder protection in the country (for example, how easy it is to bring directors to account for misconduct) and gender parity in the country. In other words, female representation on boards is positively related to CSR, especially when women already have 'a seat at the table' and board transparency is already present.

Research has also identified positive associations between top management team diversity and corporate performance (Homberg and Bui 2013). They find that functional, educational and tenure differences in top management teams are positively related to corporate performance<sup>4</sup> – suggesting that diverse backgrounds and experience may foster more effective decision-making rather than detract from this. Again, it should be noted that this study can't confirm cause and effect and other factors could explain the relationship and the authors note that publication bias (that positive results are more likely to be published) may mean the relationship is overstated.

### **Diversity can be positive and negative for team performance**

Some research identifies potential negative associations between diversity and performance outcomes. Stahl et al (2010) examine the idea that cultural diversity (such as ethnicity or differing values) can be beneficial and detrimental to teams, depending on the outcomes of team divergence and convergence (see Box 3). They find that cultural diversity is associated with higher creativity and satisfaction, but also task conflict and lower social integration – depending on the context. Essentially, diversity may lead to conflict and lower social integration, but satisfaction and creativity benefit. However, the larger the team, the less communication and satisfaction benefit from diversity.

#### **Box 3: What are divergent and convergent team processes?**

**Team divergence:** Divergent processes occur when differing ideas and values are present in a team, and are contrasted against each other (Davison et al 2004). This is thought to have beneficial effects for outcomes such as creativity but potentially lead to more conflict within teams.

**Team convergence:** Convergent processes occur when a team is aligned to common objectives and commitments, aiding social integration and group cohesion, but potentially leading to groupthink.

Schneid et al (2016) also find that team size influences the relationship between diversity and team outcomes, with larger team size minimising the impact of age diversity on team effectiveness. They also find no significant relationships between age diversity and creativity.

Team tenure can also influence outcomes, and has been positively associated with efficiency but not associated with innovation (although comparatively few studies examine innovation). In contrast, demographic variables such as gender and ethnicity variety (meaning the number of represented groups in the team) were negatively associated with team performance (Bell et al 2011).

<sup>3</sup> CSR was measured in a variety of ways across studies. Some examples of corporate social responsibility include measures of charitable giving, having a code of ethics and ratings of CSR based on audits.

<sup>4</sup> The study examined quantitative (such as stock market returns) and qualitative performance measures (such as ratings of quality of decision-making).

When it comes to gender, Schneid et al (2015) conclude that both objective and subjective task performance are not negatively affected by gender diversity. However, gender diversity has a negative effect on contextual performance (activities relating to co-operation and other discretionary behaviours).

Webber et al (2001) suggest that different diversity attributes will relate differently to outcomes – for example job-related diversity such as industry background, versus gender, ethnicity and race. The authors find that job-related diversity did not have a stronger positive relationship with performance or cohesion than other diversity attributes such as age, but any effects are more pronounced in lower-level teams and top management teams.

Mor Barak et al (2016) find no adverse outcomes of surface-level diversity characteristics such as age or race. However, results were more mixed when individuals are part of an ‘outgroup’ (part of a minority in that context – whether a team at work or the wider labour market), meaning those in the minority group may have the fewest benefits from diversity. The study finds that a positive perception of organisational diversity management initiatives and an inclusion climate positively correlates with good work outcomes; the authors suggest that organisations should focus on developing supportive policies and practices rather than diversity representation per se.

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These mixed findings highlights the need to take a holistic view of how diversity impacts performance; team processes are influenced by many factors including ‘deep’ diversity dimensions such as team tenure (see Box 2). Increasing diversity is more than hiring someone who differs on a surface characteristic level and hoping this will increase team innovation; we need to consider other aspects of the team too. Undoubtedly, whether the context supports diverse opinions will influence whether diversity leads to positive outcomes.

### **Work context is key**

Haas (2010) investigates a variety of diversity characteristics and various organisational outcomes. They too find a mixed picture of results, further supporting the idea that the relationship between diversity and organisational outcomes is highly dependent on the organisational context and how diversity is operationalised. For example, the research found that any negative outcomes related to diversity were more likely to be found in larger teams, meaning the team context is a key enabler of team processes. Who rates performance also influences this relationship – managers tend to have less favourable performance ratings in diverse teams than individuals they manage.

Joshi and Roh (2009) conducted a comprehensive study examining the contextual factors that influence the relationship between diversity dimensions and performance outcomes. Specifically, they find that in industries that are typically male-dominated, or contexts with predominantly white employees, gender and ethnic diversity may be associated with negative performance outcomes. This shines a light on the need for employers to be mindful of the team processes that occur in diverse organisations, especially when diversity is not the norm. That is not to say diversity shouldn’t be encouraged, rather that hiring a female into an all-male team in a male-dominated industry will not automatically make that team inclusive.

## Summary

The research base highlights that the relationship between diversity and organisational outcomes is not a straightforward one. Not only does the relationship differ depending on how one defines performance (creativity versus financial, for example), the organisational context must support diversity too. How does this align with the business case for diversity? These findings shouldn't deter organisations from pursuing diversity. Instead, we argue that organisations should understand that diversity is necessary, but the organisational context needs to support that diversity and be inclusive, in order to see positive outcomes for the business and individuals. However, research focuses heavily on organisational outcomes; there is little research on individual outcomes (such as well-being or progression).

*'These findings shouldn't deter organisations from pursuing diversity. Instead, we argue that organisations should understand that diversity is necessary, but the organisational context needs to support that diversity and be inclusive, in order to see positive outcomes for the business and individuals.'*

This REA aimed to explore the effects of inclusive work environments, for employees and organisations. However, there is also scarce research on the outcomes of inclusion. Research tends to focus on diversity factors and performance outcomes, but there is very little robust research that explores the outcomes for organisations of having an inclusive culture, that is, where all individuals and groups are valued, treated equally and are included in decision-making. However, this may reflect the difficulty of conducting such research rather than the lack of a connection, and positively, there is a growing recognition of the importance of inclusion as a way to reap the benefits of diversity (Nishii 2013). Inclusion should not be ignored – organisations must think not only of minority group representation in their workplace, but understand their own inclusion climate (see Box 4).

While there is little research taking an intersectional approach, perhaps because it is challenging, this is imperative to gain a holistic understanding of how diversity and inclusion influence outcomes at work. For example, while exploring the relationship between gender and board performance is useful, this can oversimplify the relationships and team processes that lead to outcomes as well as not take into account aspects of diversity such as ethnicity and educational background.

### **Box 4: What about inclusion?**

Nishii (2013) creates a measure of inclusion climate, to bridge the gap between research on diversity outcomes and the lack of research on inclusion outcomes. The measure of inclusion climate includes three aspects: (1) ensure policies and procedures are fairly implemented and reduce bias to create a level playing field; (2) recognise and embrace differences, so individuals can bring their whole self to work without fear of recourse; and (3) include all individuals in decision-making, even if alternative ideas are different from the current state of play.

In this single study inclusive climates were associated with reduction in interpersonal gender bias and minimised conflict.

### Implications for policy<sup>5</sup>

- 1 The lack of research on intersectionality – the fact we all have multiple identities and they overlap – highlights the need for a more holistic view of diversity. While it is important to focus policy on specific issues, this should not be to the detriment of the wider picture. For example, in his report into the ethnic diversity of UK boards, Sir John Parker concludes that, *'It is clear that the recent emphasis on gender diversity in the UK Boardroom has not benefited women of colour to the same extent as it has women who are not ethnic minorities. Of the appointments made following the Davies Review, a relatively small number of those Board positions have gone to women of colour'* (2016, p21).
- 2 Questions about intersectionality have come to the fore in discussions about pay gap reporting. The focus so far has been on gender pay gap reporting, but with the possibility of race pay gap reporting (proposed by Baroness Ruby McGregor-Smith (2017) in her independent review of race in the workplace). It is as yet unclear how reporting on the two dimensions of diversity could sit together.

### Implications for people professionals

- 1 People professionals should be mindful of the lack of conclusive evidence for the diversity 'business case', with both positive and negative outcomes of diverse teams being a possibility. The case for diversity must be a holistic one, taking into account the benefits of diversity (such as enhanced employer brand, contribution to society, and corporate reputation) alongside the benefits for individuals at work.
- 2 Intersectionality is important to understand team processes; we all have multiple identities that influence how we interact with others. HR professionals need to be mindful that a focus on one group, for example women, may not benefit everyone within that group. Other characteristics will affect the opportunities people are given at work – for example, does being a woman from an ethnic minority background mean you have more equal opportunities through progress on gender, but are still at a disadvantage at work because of being from a minority ethnic group?
- 3 Context is important to understand where diverse teams may be challenged – for example, in male-dominated industries or regions where gender parity is low, gender-diverse teams may have specific challenges, and manager ratings of diverse teams and individuals may be subject to bias. People professionals must be aware of the context their organisation operates in, and adapt their approach accordingly.
- 4 Given that context factors are also implicated in the relationship between diversity and performance, organisations should be cognisant of their own organisational climate when it comes to inclusion. Inclusive climates will be necessary to realise the benefits of diversity and ensure a diverse workforce is supported to perform at its best; focusing on understanding the inclusion climate within an organisation is needed alongside collecting data on representation and pay gap reporting.

To be able to offer organisations more practical guidance on realising the benefits from a diverse workforce, we need to look at the knowledge base about what's preventing workplace equality. Otherwise, no matter how diverse a workforce is, there is a risk that structural, cultural and behavioural factors will prevent the benefits of such a workforce make-up being realised. The next section will therefore discuss the factors that keep inequality in place in organisations.

<sup>5</sup> These implications, and further policy recommendations in the following sections, focus on UK policy issues, although the research findings we draw on in this report cover a variety of regions.

## 4 What factors keep inequality in place at work?

Despite equality legislation and diversity initiatives in organisations, inequality remains. This section outlines several issues that act as a barrier to diversity and inclusion at work. The first of these is discrimination, followed by structural and procedural barriers at work. Lastly, we highlight the touchpoints in the employee lifecycle where such barriers are prominent and provide recommendations for people professionals to address these.

This section outlines findings from meta-analysis data covering multiple cross-sectional studies, meaning the relationships discussed are not causal but imply an association. We also discuss single studies that employ controlled research methods that can identify causal relationships. However, overall there are few pieces of randomised or controlled pieces of research in scientific literature that test the effectiveness of initiatives or policies designed to minimise these barriers, highlighting an area for future research focus.

Overall, we find that:

- Prejudice and bias (whether unconscious or not) still exists in the workplace, and this is associated with discrimination. This in turn is associated with negative outcomes for employees.
- Many issues contribute to inequality, from lack of women in leadership positions to perceptions of disabled job applicants.
- The factors maintaining inequality begin at the first touchpoint of the employee lifecycle: access to jobs. Multiple pieces of evidence shine a light on the issue of bias in recruitment, from job advert wording to call-back rates for interview.
- Performance evaluations for different groups may be biased; whether this be so-called benevolent discrimination (giving overly positive ratings to certain groups), or biased ratings from managers who believe that diverse teams are not as cohesive and therefore will have lower performance.
- Throughout the employee lifecycle, bias and stigma may influence an individual's experience at work, with research shining a light on the barriers faced by those with disabilities.

*'While legislation and policy prohibits discrimination at work, individual attitudes, prejudices and bias (both conscious and unconscious) do exist. Unfortunately, these attitudes can lead to discrimination.'*

### **Discrimination in today's workplace**

While legislation and policy prohibits discrimination at work, individual attitudes, prejudices and bias (both conscious and unconscious) do exist. Unfortunately, these attitudes can lead to discrimination. Talaska et al (2008) find that there is a moderate relationship between attitudes and discrimination, with emotional prejudices being more closely linked to racial discrimination than stereotypes and beliefs. In addition, emotional prejudice relates to discrimination rated by self and others, but stereotypes and beliefs only tend to be related to self-reported discrimination, suggesting that underlying emotional prejudice is a powerful factor in discrimination. Worryingly, research on training outcomes tells us that emotions and attitudes are hard to influence (Alhejji et al 2016).

How does this translate to the workplace? Jones et al (2017) find that prejudices such as racism, sexism and ageism are differentially related to overall workplace discrimination. Racism and ageism were implicated in recruitment and selection decisions, but sexism was not. In addition, racism was significantly related to biased performance evaluations. In addition, some forms of prejudice (namely ageism and racism) were related to opposition of diversity policies – in other words, those who report these sorts of prejudice are more likely to oppose diversity policies that benefit the subjects of prejudice. While hostile sexism (see Box 5) was not related to overall discrimination, they found benevolent sexism was negatively associated with overall workplace discrimination. Of course, this does not mean either type of sexism should be condoned; it suggests ‘benevolent’ biases may be at play that influence female experiences at work but are not yet understood.

These so-called ‘subtle’ forms of discrimination have equally negative outcomes for individuals as overt discrimination (Jones et al 2016). They find that both overt and subtle forms of discrimination are negatively related to workplace outcomes for individuals, as well as physical and psychological outcomes (although the slightly larger effect sizes were found for overt discrimination). They suggest more needs to be done to tackle subtle discrimination, as legislation fails to target this.

**Box 5: Are there different types of sexism?**

**Hostile sexism:** Relates to outright, misogynistic negative evaluation of females.

**Benevolent sexism:** Refers to seemingly positive perceptions of women that nonetheless downplay their status – in a workplace context, this could be an overly positive performance evaluation of a female that does not aid their development.

Glick and Fiske (1997)

Triana et al (2015) examine the outcomes of perceived racial discrimination, finding that discrimination is negatively linked to job attitudes, physical and psychological health, organisational citizenship behaviour and perception of diversity climate – and increases coping behaviour. This effect was strongest for women and minority groups, suggesting that perceived discrimination is most prevalent in these groups.

*‘Many of these pieces of research do not examine how intersectionality influences outcomes, and what barriers are faced by those who are part of multiple “outgroups” or minority groups.’*

These findings shine a light on discrimination at work; clearly, prejudice and discrimination exist in organisations, with obvious impacts on individual well-being. Many of these pieces of research do not examine how intersectionality influences outcomes, and what barriers are faced by those who are part of multiple ‘outgroups’, or minority groups. Kvasny et al (2009) conducted qualitative research that focuses on the experiences of black women in the IT industry (or taking IT qualifications) in order to unpack how multiple identities influence experience at work. The research explores the attitudinal and opportunity barriers, including class factors. Both covert and overt oppression was reported (from racism at university to mistreatment by male supervisors), and factors such as differences in affluent and non-affluent educational experiences means opportunity is not equal, and highlights the importance of taking an intersectional approach when it comes to diversity.



### **Structural barriers at work**

Structural issues can also be a barrier to equality, with many studies examining longitudinal data to understand how the labour market influences the experience of different groups – with a focus on gender. For example, studies find that inequality in pay and progression exists, even in female-dominated professions. Lane and Flowers (2015) identify that of 27 studies identified between 1960 and 2006, 21 found wage salary in favour of men in social work. They found evidence for the quicker career advancement of men, and over-representation of men in leadership positions. Other studies found that women with children tended to have more casework (therefore lower-paid) positions, but this varied across studies. How women are supported and perceived if they have children is an important factor to gender parity at work.

Other analysis of labour market movement for men and women highlights further structural barriers that exist beyond social work. Epple et al (2014) use data from the Swiss Labour Force Survey to examine men's and women's experiences in the labour market through the lens of probability of employment and working hours, and the effect of parenthood. They found that women tend to be most negatively impacted by parenthood in terms of job progression and opportunity, with women with children less likely to be in employment than men with children. Availability of childcare minimised this relationship, suggesting that lack of childcare provision and the underlying cultural expectation that women will take the role of primary caregiver hinders employment for women. Within a work context, this also suggests that employers can do more to ensure they support flexible working and make provisions for working parents.

Johnston and Lee (2012) challenge the idea that difference in job progression for men and women can be accounted for by women's preference for valuing non-financial rewards at work (such as flexible working). Using data from the Australian Household Data Survey, they find that women are less likely to be promoted than men, and receive less of a salary increase when they are promoted, but find little evidence that this can be accounted for by females valuing non-financial rewards.

### **Access to work is a key barrier to inequality in the employee lifecycle**

We have highlighted overarching issues that keep inequality in place, such as prejudice and structural issues (although research in this area focuses on gender, the underlying structural issues such as bias are likely to impact other groups). However, it is important to also understand the touchpoints in the employee lifecycle that are particularly impactful, as it's people management practices and the way they're enacted that will impact both access to jobs and minority group progression.

Many studies find evidence that those in minority groups are at a disadvantage when it comes to job applications. One study used call-back rates from field experiments to track hiring discrimination against African-Americans and Latinos over time as a direct measure of discrimination. They find no change in recruitment discrimination against African-Americans since 1989, but some evidence that recruitment discrimination against Latinos is declining (Quillian et al 2017).

The organisations in these studies are unlikely to all have purposefully discriminatory hiring policies – suggesting that bias within individuals, whether unconscious or conscious, does have a real impact in the hiring process. Worryingly, similar findings have been replicated across location and minority groups by several single studies. For example, Drydakis (2015) finds evidence that UK undergraduate job-seekers are disadvantaged if their CVs indicated lesbian or gay union membership; they received fewer invitations to interview, and slightly lower estimated entry-level salaries, and King and Ahmad (2010) find evidence of lower

call-back rates for Muslim job applicants, potentially due to perceptions of religious expression at work (King et al 2017).

In an experimental study, Dietz et al (2015) demonstrate that skilled migrants may be less preferred than local, equally skilled workers in an experimental setting. However, this effect was minimised if a diverse hiring policy was presented to participants, or when it was emphasised that the clientele of the business was diverse. This provides support for the positive benefits of hiring policies that emphasise the importance of diversity and the benefits to a diverse client base (although this should be tested in field settings). Resourcing professionals need to work with hiring managers to ensure diversity hiring policies are put into practice.

*'Gaucher et al (2011) suggest that job adverts with gendered wording maintain and increase skewed gender representation in typically gendered industries ... This shines a light on the importance of wording in job advertisements, where there is a risk that organisations could inadvertently put off a diverse range of candidates before they even apply for roles.'*

It's not just call-back rates that organisations must pay attention to. One study in our review finds that gendered wording in adverts may perpetuate stereotypes of certain industries. Gaucher et al (2011) suggest that job adverts with gendered wording maintain and increase skewed gender representation in typically gendered industries. In two field studies, they find that male-dominated industry job adverts tend to include more 'male' words, but the same difference was not found in female-dominated industries (essentially, female-dominated industry adverts don't automatically include female-gendered wording). They also found that when masculine wording existed in a job advert, participants predicted more men would be in that role, regardless of whether the occupation was known to have a gender skew. Next, women found female-gendered adverts more appealing than male-gendered adverts. This shines a light on the importance of wording in job advertisements, where there is a risk that organisations could inadvertently put off a diverse range of candidates before they even apply for roles.

Many organisations use the recruitment pages of their website to highlight organisational diversity initiatives to position themselves as an inclusive employer. Dover et al (2016) examine the effects of pro-diversity messages on potential job applications. In an experimental setting, non-white respondents reported more concern about organisational fairness when recruitment sites had no diversity messages. This highlights that organisations would do well to call out pro-diversity messages if they wish to recruit a diverse pool of talent. On the other hand, they find that high-status groups (specifically, white men) may perceive pro-diversity company messages as threatening. This may occur where individuals may perceive that opportunity for others means less opportunity for their own group.

Once individuals enter the next stage of the hiring process, we must still pay attention to the potential for bias. In an experimental study in a university setting, McLaughlin et al (2004) measured stigma towards different types of disabilities, and how stigma is associated with judgements of how effective a person will be at their job. They found that stigma (the perception of a disability) mediates the relationship between disability and performance ratings, suggesting that organisational intervention to minimise stigma and challenge misconceptions of disabilities could be effective.

Brohan et al (2012) study the effect that disclosure of a mental health issue has on employment outcomes using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative evidence. They identify that from an employer perspective, there is some evidence that potential candidates with mental health issues were perceived as less employable. From an employee perspective, several studies identified that candidates felt they would not be hired if they disclosed a mental health issue. This raises the issue of disclosure and reasonable adjustments; employers cannot make reasonable adjustments and support employees if they do not know about mental health issues, but without creating a safe environment and challenging employer perceptions of mental health issues, this will remain a challenge.

Perceptions of working mothers is also an area where bias can hinder access to employment. For example, a field experiment (Morgan et al 2013) found that pregnant women were treated with more hostility and were less likely to be offered an application form than non-pregnant applicants – signalling that employers may be unwilling to make accommodations. The study took place in the USA, where clear legislation is in place around maternity discrimination, highlighting that legislation is not enough. The researchers also found the low call-back rate was reduced where the potential applicant's commitment and flexibility was emphasised, which means that intervention could potentially target employer perceptions in order to minimise bias – however, this responsibility should not lie with the job applicant.

Structured interviews are often used to minimise bias, but Miceli et al (2001) call into question the positive effects of the structured interview in removing bias for disabled applicants and those with child caring responsibilities. They find that despite candidates with disabilities receiving similarly favourable ratings in the hiring process, they are still disadvantaged in hiring intentions, suggesting structured interviews can reduce bias in assessments but not in actual hiring decisions.

This highlights the pervasive nature of bias. Structured interviews may be used as part of a fair hiring process, but despite policy and procedure, barriers to work still exist.

### **Diverse teams and evaluation bias**

Subtle and unconscious types of bias may inadvertently lead to discrimination in performance evaluations. Ren et al (2008) find performance evaluations are actually higher for those with disability, despite lower performance expectations. Despite this, hiring intentions were still lower for those with disabilities, and this effect was more pronounced for those with mental disabilities than physical ones. This suggests that unconscious (or indeed conscious) bias is powerful. Further research should uncover whether organisational policies and hiring strategy can influence these outcomes. A policy might explicitly condemn discrimination, as does employment legislation (in the UK, the Equality Act references both direct and indirect discrimination), but this study highlights how individual views and belief can still influence an individual's experience at work, or access to work.

Interestingly, our review of the literature on diversity and performance highlights that performance ratings of diverse teams differ between objective and subjective measures, suggesting that managers must be mindful of their own biases when it comes to performance ratings, and identifying good and bad performance of teams.<sup>6</sup> For example, Van Dijk et al (2012) find that when team performance is rated subjectively, less positive relationships between demographic diversity and performance are found. When objective measures are used, this relationship is smaller, or does not exist – so negative relationships found may be due to rater bias rather than reflecting true performance.

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<sup>6</sup> As explained in the previous section.

In addition, Lount et al (2015) find some evidence that diverse teams are evaluated differently from homogenous teams. Over two randomised laboratory studies, the authors found that racially diverse teams were perceived to have more conflict than homogenous teams. In addition, participants were less likely to give resources to diverse teams. This provides food for thought and a potential factor to consider when explaining the differences noted in previous sections of manager and self-ratings of performance in diverse teams. It also suggests that managers who have preconceived ideas of potential conflict in diverse teams may be less supportive of those teams, thus minimising their chance of success.

### Summary

It is clear that discrimination still exists in the modern workplace. We can't ignore both subtle and overt forms of discrimination, as both negatively impact on employee health and satisfaction, and impede an organisation's ability to be inclusive.

These biases may contribute to structural barriers, such as difficulty in job progression for females, for example assuming a working mother may value flexibility over a promotion, thus favouring male applicants (this also raises questions about how senior roles can be seen as flexible). Clearly, this will impact on the opportunities different groups receive at work, contributing to inequality.

*'As well as structural issues, there are several points in the employee lifecycle that may be particularly susceptible to bias. There is a large evidence base that highlights issues with recruitment – from attracting applicants to interview stage.'*

As well as structural issues, there are several points in the employee lifecycle that may be particularly susceptible to bias. There is a large evidence base that highlights issues with recruitment – from attracting applicants to interview stage. There are few randomised or controlled pieces of research in the scientific literature that demonstrate how to minimise bias at different areas of the employee lifecycle, or how cultural and policy changes within an organisation context can reduce inequality and increase diversity, highlighting an area for future research.

Two areas where research does focus are on the effectiveness of diversity training and the effectiveness of workplace accommodation and return-to-work support for people with disabilities. The next section will highlight some of the evidence of 'what works' when it comes to supporting diversity and inclusion at work.

### Implications for policy

- 1 In the UK, Baroness McGregor-Smith (2017) commissioned a review of obstacles faced by BAME employees at work, which stated, *'There is discrimination and bias at every stage of an individual's career, and even before it begins. From networks to recruitment and then in the workforce, it is there.'* We welcome the firm stance she takes to move on from the established rhetoric and make real change happen on racial equality. However, our search of existing evidence highlighted a significant lack of knowledge about what works to effect change, which is where policy-maker attention needs to focus.
- 2 Gender pay gap reporting in the UK has shone a light on gender parity, focusing business leader attention on the structural, cultural and behavioural issues undermining equality of opportunity in their organisation. Policy-makers should also consider 'where to next' with gender pay gap reporting: what lessons can be learned from the gender pay gap and how can we use this to galvanise reporting for other groups?

3 We know that a lack of flexible working is one of the structural and cultural barriers keeping inequalities in place. In the UK, the Taylor Review (Taylor et al 2017) called on the Government to consider how to further promote genuine flexibility in the workplace as a key part of enhancing the quality of jobs. The CIPD has been invited to co-chair the Government's new Flexible Working Task Force. The task force has been established by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to promote wider understanding and implementation of inclusive flexible work and working practices. With the right to request flexible working regulation up for review in 2019, considering how flexible working can aid organisations in becoming inclusive is key.

### **Implications for people professionals**

One of our overarching findings is that individuals may experience bias and stigma at every stage of the employee lifecycle. There is clear evidence of bias in hiring processes, from call-back rates to hiring decisions. People professionals and hiring managers need to be mindful of these biases and consider initiatives that alleviate bias. For example, name-blind recruitment is one way organisations are trying to mitigate bias at the application stage (although this alone will not bring equal access to work):

- 1 Attracting diverse candidates requires different approaches, such as highlighting inclusion and diversity during the hiring process (such as recruitment webpages). In addition, research suggests that pro-diversity messaging in favour of one group may have negative impacts, so it is important that diversity policies emphasise they are for the benefit for all. Job adverts, and the way they are worded, can also signal how an organisation operates – ensuring that job adverts don't inadvertently put off applicants because of gendered wording is also important.
- 2 Understanding bias once an individual gets to interview stage is also important, as research suggests biases about making accommodations for employees, competence and potential performance are influenced by factors such as disability or maternity. This should not be the case in a modern workplace where policies and legislation prohibit this; organisations should ensure hiring managers understand how to make adjustments to working environments and understand where flexible working arrangements may be needed – and importantly, be aware of their own assumptions and biases that may influence their hiring decisions.
- 3 Monitoring recruitment processes and diversity of applicants at different stages may pinpoint where issues lie and interventions can be targeted. However, a truly open recruitment process will be underpinned by a wider culture of inclusion in the organisation where difference is embraced.

Biases and discrimination are a key issue that impede progress towards diversity and inclusion. To tackle this challenge, many organisations look to training and awareness-raising of unconscious bias. In the next section, we review the evidence for diversity interventions and training, highlighting how organisations can remove some of these barriers.

## 5 What supports greater inclusion and diversity in the workplace?

Structures, systems and processes all have a part to play in enabling inclusion and diversity. However, there are few examples in the scientific literature of the effectiveness of initiatives (such as support for women returners) on reducing inequality. Still, there are two areas where research has been conducted (including meta-analyses): diversity training and workplace accommodation for people with disabilities. In addition, we identified two studies that examine the relationship between an inclusion climate, policies, and inclusion and diversity more holistically.

Overall, we find that:

- Diversity training can be effective in promoting knowledge and skills when certain conditions are met, namely: training takes place over multiple sessions, both awareness and skills are part of the training content, and it is part of wider organisation initiatives.
- That being said, while diversity training is often well received by participants and can have short-term results, the sustained impact of such training on behaviour and emotional prejudice over time is not clear.
- Training is not sufficient to create a diverse and inclusive organisation.
- When it comes to creating an inclusive environment for people with disabilities, financial support from government and accommodations such as changes in work schedules can aid return to employment; however, there is a lack of awareness amongst employers of such resources.
- There is little research within the scientific literature for specific initiatives that promote inclusion, such as mentoring for minority groups – further research is required.
- Overall, organisational inclusion climate and support for diverse groups is likely to underlie the success of any diversity initiatives.

### **The evidence for diversity training is mixed**

Diversity training is a popular initiative undertaken by organisations, from education to targeted unconscious bias training. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives has been called into question.

*‘Diversity training is a popular initiative undertaken by organisations, from education to targeted unconscious bias training. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives has been called into question.’*

Bezrukova et al (2016) undertook a comprehensive meta-analysis of diversity training outcomes, exploring the relationship between diversity training and cognitive, behavioural or attitude outcomes, alongside reaction to training (see Box 6). Overall, while diversity training was associated with positive emotional reactions of participants, learning tends to be minimised after the training. However, training is more effective over time when it increases knowledge of different cultures as well as diversity awareness – in other words, addresses knowledge and skills.

Context is also key, with the design of training strengthening or decreasing the association between diversity training and outcomes – for example, having multiple

training methods had a positive impact on trainee reactions. In addition, the effect of training is stronger when part of wider initiatives. Overall, while diversity training is often well received by participants and can have short-term results, the sustained impact of such training on behaviour and emotional prejudice over time is not clear.

**Box 6: Diversity training outcomes**

Training may seek to influence a number of outcomes, from awareness of other cultures and beliefs to addressing bias. Outcomes are often defined as: cognitive (such as verbal knowledge), skill-based (changes in behaviour), attitude (such as self-efficacy and motivation), and emotional outcomes (such as reaction to training – did participants find it worthwhile?).

Kalinowski et al (2013) investigate the cognitive and skill-based outcomes of diversity training. Overall, diversity training had a positive effect on cognitive, skill-based and attitude outcomes, but with larger effect sizes for skill and cognitive-based outcomes than attitude outcomes. Social interaction, active instructions and distributed training all contributed to positive outcomes. In other words, well-designed training initiatives that aren't a one-off exercise can enhance the knowledge and skills of participants when it comes to diversity, but attitudes are harder to change. How to tackle attitudes and biases at work, however, is an important avenue for future research given the association between prejudice and discrimination.

Alhejji et al (2016) explore the positive impact of diversity training from three perspectives: the business case, learning outcomes, and social justice. While the relationship between training and outcomes such as business performance is not proven, diversity training can lead to enhancement of knowledge, skills and abilities when it comes to diversity. In other words, a direct 'business case' for diversity training isn't clear, but it can impact positively on participants' capabilities providing evidence that diversity training can be effective in some respects. The authors also suggest standalone training is unlikely to lead to attitude change. Organisations wishing to use diversity training as part of their inclusion initiatives would do well to ensure training is not a one-off for sustained learning, and embed training as part of wider schemes.

A key barrier identified in the previous section is bias and discrimination towards disabled people. Phillips et al (2016) find limited evidence for the effectiveness of disability diversity training, but have an overarching finding relevant to those designing training: they must take into account participant needs and information. This points to the importance of understanding the individual when it comes to training, being flexible rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

**Workplace accommodation and reasonable adjustments can enable access to work**

Workplace accommodations and reasonable adjustments are key aspects of ensuring diverse groups are supported to remain in work. Gensby et al (2014) reviewed evidence on the nature and effectiveness of workplace disability management and return-to-work programmes. They conclude that there is not sufficient evidence to support or detract from the effectiveness of such programmes provided by employers to increase return to work. Specifically, the evidence does not allow us to conclude what components, or what combination of components, lead to effectiveness.

Other studies find moderate evidence for specific types of workplace accommodation, such as vocational counselling and guidance, education and self-advocacy, help of others, changes in work schedules, work organisation, and special transportation. These types of accommodation can promote employment among physically disabled people (Nevala et al 2015).

At a government level, Clayton et al (2011) evaluate major governmental approaches in OECD countries<sup>7</sup> aimed at helping chronically ill or people with disabilities into, or return to, work. In particular they examine anti-discrimination legislation, reasonable adjustments, employee subsidies and return-to-work planning. They suggest the most promising types of intervention target both the organisation and individual. For example, financial incentives to support employers and supporting employers to make reasonable adjustments is effective, alongside collaborative return-to-work planning (with health/social service professionals). However, they identified lack of awareness amongst employers and employees and low take-up has resulted in low impact across the population. With the UK Government setting an ambitious target to halve the disability employment gap (the difference between employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people), it is important that employers are aware of the provisions available to them to support people with disabilities.

### **Inclusion climate and policies support good outcomes**

We only identified two studies of sufficient quality that examine inclusion in detail, signalling further work must be done in this area. Future research needs to consider how diversity policies and practices influence workplace outcomes. It should also consider how these policies and practices are enacted by line managers and the associated outcomes for individuals, as we know line management has a significant impact on individual experience at work. A shift towards considering inclusion as well as diversity is also needed.

Pearson et al (2007) find that healthcare organisations must undertake a number of initiatives, both targeted and holistic, to ensure workforce diversity exists, for the benefit of patients and employees. They highlight that: training and education should be available; staff must have the right skills; patients must be provided with culturally relevant information; and diverse staff must be recruited and retained to embed cultural competence into organisational processes. This results in better care for culturally diverse service users and provides support for employees. They note that to be effective, cultural competence must be embedded in a variety of ways – for example, providing training but also paying attention to the retention of diverse staff through an inclusive climate.

*‘If organisations focus only on increasing minority representation in their workplace, there is a danger of neglecting the underlying climate of support and inclusion that will have a positive effect on employee outcomes.’*

When it comes to inclusion, the workplace inclusion climate has been linked to better outcomes, over and above having diversity and inclusion policies in place. Webster et al (2018) examine the relationships between three sets of workplace contextual supports and LGBT outcomes: work attitudes, psychological strain, disclosure, and perceived discrimination. They find that formal LGBT policies and practices were most weakly related to the four outcomes, whereas LGBT supportive climate was most strongly related to both

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<sup>7</sup> Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the UK.



disclosure and discrimination, followed by work attitudes and strain. Supportive workplace relationships were the strongest predictor of work attitudes and stress or well-being. This highlights that diversity and inclusion require more than policies and procedures. If organisations focus only on increasing minority representation in their workplace, there is a danger of neglecting the underlying climate of support and inclusion that will have a positive effect on employee outcomes.

### **Summary**

Diversity training can be effective in promoting knowledge and skills in the short term when certain conditions are met, namely: training is distributed, and both awareness and skills are part of the training content. However, diversity is less impactful on long-term and attitudinal change, suggesting training is not an effective way to combat emotional prejudices. In addition, it is more effective as part of wider efforts to promote diversity at work and should not be used as a standalone tool.

Workplace accommodation and return-to-work programmes are supported by moderate evidence, with particularly positive outcomes related to financial support for employers, support to make reasonable adjustments and support from others being particularly important.

There is limited research that explores how policies and climate are associated with actual shifts in inclusion and diversity. It is clear from these studies, however, that embedding cultural competence and an inclusion climate is key for positive outcomes for individuals, organisations and service users.

Research has identified that the relationship between diversity and performance is strongly related to the organisational context – without an inclusion climate and support, one-off training or a policy will not have an impact. In other words, policies will only be enacted when the organisational climate supports this, and individuals and managers understand what inclusion feels like. One-off interventions are unlikely to lead to sustained change or remove barriers to diversity.

Research tells us that diversity is linked to performance in certain contexts, and by ignoring these contextual factors we fail to discuss what true inclusion means. In fact, our research assessment found little evidence on inclusion and what works when it comes to inclusion at work – suggesting there is a need for research to think less about what diversity can do for organisations and focus on the processes and factors that support inclusion and diversity at an individual level.

### **Implications for policy**

- 1 Evidence suggests that a key way to support workplace accommodation and reasonable adjustment is financial support from government bodies. As well as this, in its response to the UK Work, Health and Disability Green Paper consultation response, the CIPD highlights that we need a considerable step-change in employment practice relating to the management of people with a disability and/or health condition if we are to have 1 million more people with a disability or long-term condition in work by 2027, as targeted by the Government. Despite awareness of workplace health issues, there remains a stubborn implementation gap for health and well-being initiatives at work.
- 2 To address this, a major, ongoing and well-resourced publicity and education campaign to raise awareness and encourage a culture of inclusion among employers is needed, alongside a 'one-stop shop' for employers to make it easier to navigate the many sources of information, advice and guidance available.

### Implications for people professionals

- 1 Workplace accommodation research also highlights that collaborative planning for return to work and making reasonable adjustments such as transportation and flexible work schedules can aid access or return to work.
- 2 Flexible working is key to unlocking employment and progression opportunities across a number of minority groups in the labour market. For example, recruitment initiatives targeting particular groups may bring more diverse applicants into the process, but if hiring managers do not understand the support required, they are unlikely to hire them or support their access or return to work. Resourcing professionals should monitor recruitment data to understand where bias may be impacting on recruitment processes, and hiring managers must understand provision for reasonable adjustment.
- 3 While diversity training, when well designed, can have some influence on knowledge and behaviours, organisations must pay attention to diversity and inclusion in the round. Evidence suggests that embedding cultural competence and having supportive, inclusive workplace environments are key contributors to employee outcomes. People professionals would do well to focus on wider initiatives and understanding how inclusive their organisation is by using internal data and targeting intervention accordingly.

## 6 Diversity and inclusion at work: where to next?

Our research on diversity and inclusion at work aimed to uncover the outcomes of diversity and inclusion at work, what factors keep inequality in place, and how organisations can tackle these barriers.

### The evidence for diversity and inclusion at work

Our results identify a wide evidence base that focuses on the outcomes of diversity at the organisation level, and much less on how diversity benefits individuals. Similarly, research into the beneficial outcomes of inclusion is limited. This is not to say that these positive benefits do not exist for individuals, but simply that research focuses on the 'business case' argument for diversity. However, there is a growing recognition that inclusion is likely to underlie the success of diverse teams and be a key factor in ensuring equal opportunity for all (Nishii 2013).

*'Any business case for diversity should hold these outcomes in balance and recognise the benefits at not only an organisational level but from an individual and societal perspective.'*

There are many factors that contribute to the relationship between diversity in workplaces and organisational outcomes, such as financial performance, innovation and team performance, and we found mixed results for the outcomes of diversity, meaning the 'business case' is not clear. This should not deter us from promoting diversity and championing inclusive practices. Inclusive and diverse environments are likely to have a multitude of beneficial effects not captured in traditional research, for both individuals, their employers and wider society. Any business case for diversity should hold these outcomes in balance and recognise the benefits at not only an organisational level but from an individual and societal perspective.

### **Many factors keep inequality in place**

It is clear prejudice and bias (whether unconscious or not) still exists in the workplace, and this is associated with discrimination. In turn, this creates a negative work environment for individuals that can impact on health. These contribute to structural issues (such as failing to promote women to leadership positions or not enabling working parents to succeed at work), which in turn contribute to inequality.

We also need to pay attention to various points of the employment lifecycle. Barriers to work exist at the beginning: access to jobs. Multiple pieces of evidence shine a light on issues with bias in recruitment. Bias and stigma may influence an individual's experience at work once they are hired – from biased performance evaluations to benevolent sexism.

### **Mixed support for diversity initiatives**

Lastly, organisations need to understand how they can reduce inequality. There is plenty of evidence for and against diversity training, but less on other initiatives such as mentoring for minority groups or wider culture change programmes. Evidence suggests that diversity training can be effective in promoting knowledge and skills in the short term when certain conditions are met, namely: training is distributed, it is well designed and is designed to enhance knowledge and skills.

However, while training can have some impact, it is not enough to truly remove barriers to inclusion and diversity. One-off initiatives cannot address structural issues and a lack of inclusion in an organisation. Workplace accommodation, truly flexible approaches to recruitment, working patterns and job design, coupled with a supportive work environment with an inclusive climate is key to unlocking the potential of diversity, for individuals and the wider business.

### **What's missing from the research base?**

Research examining the relationship between diversity factors, such as ethnicity, age and race, and business outcomes is widely available. There is also a dearth of research on inclusion, arguably a key factor in understanding when and how diverse teams will thrive.

Research also tends to focus on discrete financial and team performance measures, but there are other areas where diversity can impact. For example, outcomes such as employee well-being or satisfaction, wider organisational measures such as a corporate reputation and ability to attract and retain a diverse talent pool may be influenced by diversity. In addition, there is a wider value for society when organisations tap into underrepresented groups.

*'We recognise that researching intersectionality is a complex task, and that it is necessary to surface issues faced by particular groups. That being said, inclusion research should be more inclusive, and appreciate individuals' multiple identities both in research and practice.'*

In addition, most research focuses on gender, ethnicity and age, while other important aspects such as LGBT, religion and maternity discrimination is less widely researched. We recognise that researching intersectionality is a complex task, and that it is necessary to surface issues faced by particular groups. That being said, inclusion research should be more inclusive, and appreciate individuals' multiple identities both in research and practice.

Lastly, we did not find systematic research on the effectiveness of specific initiatives such as mentoring for minority groups, or targeting job applications at specific groups. Further research should aim to uncover what works when it comes to these initiatives, so people professionals can ensure any initiatives have successful outcomes. In order to uncover the

causal mechanisms that lead to the best outcomes, randomised studies and controlled studies would be a prudent area of focus.

### **How can people professionals and business leaders drive change?**

Research highlights that the organisational context is key for diverse groups to succeed, so diversity policies and research must go beyond representation of minority groups (although this is undoubtedly important and necessary) and go one step further and focus on inclusion.

People professionals must ensure organisations' practices are fair and encourage diverse voices to be heard and supported. However, people management practices must also recognise that being inclusive goes beyond policy and ensures that everyone is valued and supported as an individual. There are key points within the employee lifecycle where action can be taken to enable this.

### **Attracting candidates**

Context is key; for those operating in industries that are typically male-dominated, for example, particular attention should be paid to job advert wording and attraction of diverse candidates and how to tap into less represented groups (although this is a pertinent step for any organisation). People professionals can:

- Review job adverts for gendered or other biased wording (for example, how might noting a company culture is 'work hard, play hard' deter a diverse range of candidates applying?) and amend where needed.
- Review talent attraction methods, including recruitment webpages and other employer branding resources. Do such resources signal that diversity and inclusion is on the organisation's agenda, and does it emphasise a holistic approach, emphasising the benefits for all?

### **Candidate selection**

There is clear evidence that recruitment processes are subject to bias. How best to tackle our own unconscious biases is not clear; however, paying attention to the touchpoints in recruitment and understanding where intervention might be required is a good place to start. People professionals can:

- Examine recruitment data to understand how diverse the talent pool is at each stage of the selection process, where possible. For example, do a variety of candidates make it to shortlist but not final interview? Could selection methods be reviewed or checks and balances be added to the recruitment process to minimise bias?
- Ensure hiring managers understand provision for reasonable adjustment and are confident in being able to apply this, and are provided with support to put these into place.

### **Flexible working**

One key way to support inclusion at work is taking a flexible approach, appreciating that we all have multiple identities that influence our experience inside and outside of work. This means flexible work arrangements must themselves be flexible. As well as making hiring managers aware of reasonable adjustments and equal opportunities legislation, people professionals can:

- Review flexible working policies and review take-up of flexible working, if offered. If flexible work is available, but not used, what barriers are at play? For example, do senior leaders support flexibility and are there role models in the organisation that demonstrate the organisation's commitment to flexible working? Further information can be found in the CIPD's *Flexible Working Practices* factsheet.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Available at: [www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/factsheet](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/factsheet)

- Ensure job design allows flexibility and think creatively about how jobs can be flexible; as well as flexi-time and part-time working, are options such as job-sharing and self-rostering feasible?
- Challenge what we mean by *flexible*; making work flexible goes beyond allowing full-time jobs to be conducted from home or with flexible start and finish times (although undoubtedly this is important). Flexibility recognises that throughout their working life, individuals have different needs when it comes to flexible working.

### **Inclusion climate**

An inclusive organisation is one that supports the whole of its workforce and takes a holistic approach to diversity. Alongside collecting data on diversity representation and areas required by law (such as gender pay gap reporting in the UK), other types of data will be necessary to understand how inclusive an organisation is; employee feedback is a key avenue through which to understand whether employees feel supported. People professionals can:

- Review existing data (such as employee surveys and culture measures) or collect additional data to understand whether employees feel the organisation is inclusive and values individual differences, values and beliefs. For example, do employees feel they can bring their whole self to work without negative consequences, and can individuals influence decision-making and challenge the status quo (Nishii 2013)?
- Review organisational policies to ensure they treat everyone fairly, taking into account an intersectional approach. It is often necessary to have policies to support specific groups (such as working carers), but the needs of other groups should also be noted.
- Recognise that diversity training alone will not lead to diversity, and pinpoint where support is really needed, for example line manager support of difference, supportive work relationships and an overall inclusion climate is imperative. For more, see the CIPD's *Diversity and Inclusion* factsheet.<sup>9</sup>

### **Facing up to the business case**

We need to challenge the traditional notion of the 'business case' for diversity that focuses only on business, rather than human, outcomes; there should not need to be a bottom-line business case in order to treat individuals with dignity and respect at work. Business leaders and people professionals have the opportunity to champion the case for diversity, moving from narrow outcomes such as financial returns, and highlight the numerous benefits that diversity and inclusion can bring – not least that it is simply the right thing to do.

*'We need to challenge the traditional notion of the "business case" for diversity that focuses only on business, rather than human, outcomes; there should not need to be a bottom-line business case in order to treat individuals with dignity and respect at work.'*

In addition, people professionals and business leaders should be mindful that evidence for the diversity 'business case' is not conclusive, with both positive and negative performance outcomes of diverse teams being a possibility. The case for diversity must be a holistic one, taking into account organisational benefits of diversity (such as enhanced employer brand, contribution to society, and corporate reputation) alongside the benefits for individuals. It is also important to recognise that diverse teams, like any other, need support to be successful.

<sup>9</sup> Available at: [www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/factsheet](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/factsheet)

This wider value perspective will enhance diversity and inclusion strategy. Working towards a wider goal of inclusion for the benefit of all parties, alongside a goal of diversity representation (for example, gender equality in senior leadership teams) should promote a focus on individual outcomes. Solely focusing on diversity statistics (although this is of course important to monitor and promote) will not make an organisation inclusive – whereas using these measures alongside promoting an open and supportive organisational climate will.

Positively, more and more organisations are recognising that people bring intrinsic value to business and should stand to gain value themselves. This shift means that businesses must recognise that employees are legitimate stakeholders of an organisation alongside shareholders and customers. The potential long-term benefits of this are clear. In relation to diversity, this means that we must recognise individuals' unique contribution to organisations brought about by their unique set of skills, knowledge and abilities, and promote organisational environments that allow these individual attributes to flourish (CIPD 2017b, 2018).

The people profession must champion this shared value perspective and work with the wider business to move the case for diversity and inclusion from business performance focused to a focus on the gains for individuals, organisations and wider society.

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