



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Iosifidis, P. (2025). Guest Editorial: The disability inclusion challenge. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*,

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/34661/>

Link to published version:

Copyright: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

Reuse: Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.



ISSN 2040-7549
Volume 00 Number 00 2018



Guest Editorial: The disability inclusion challenge

Journal:	<i>Equality, diversity and inclusion: An international journal</i>
Manuscript ID	EDI-01-2025-0064
Manuscript Type:	Editorial (for journal staff only)

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal

Guest Editorial: The disability inclusion challenge

The idea for this special issue of *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* was born out of various conversations between the journal editors and the guest-editor who hosted the 16th Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) International Conference at City St George's, University of London, 10-11 July 2023. The conference theme was '(dis)ability'. It drew particular attention to this concept because an estimated 1.3 billion people – or 1 in 6 people worldwide - experience significant disability (WHO, 2022). The WHO report showed that while some progress has been made in recent years, the world is still far from realizing that people with disabilities have the right to the highest attainable standard of health as those without disabilities. Persons with disabilities continue to die earlier, have poorer health, and experience more limitations in everyday functioning than others. These poor health outcomes are due to unfair conditions faced by persons with disabilities in all facets of life, including in the health system itself. In a nutshell, the WHO report provided a gloomy picture by claiming that people with disabilities still face barriers including stigma, discrimination, exclusion from education and employment, among others.

These findings are backed up by other studies. A 2023 World Bank report stated that barriers to full social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities include inaccessible physical environments and transportation, the unavailability of assistive devices and technologies, non-adapted means of communication, gaps in service delivery, and discriminatory prejudice and stigma in society (see <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>). A UN 2018 report (United Nations, Disability and Development Report, 2018 at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/07/disability-report-chapter2.pdf>), reflecting on overall progress towards the sustainable development goals from the perspective of persons with disabilities like poverty, hunger and nutrition, found that the gap between persons with and without disabilities is not closing. Recent research at a national level (see UK Parliament motion, 16 May 2024 at <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/challenges-faced-by-people-with-disabilities/>) confirms the challenges faced by people with disabilities, such as inaccessible online services, infrastructure that can be physically inaccessible, and attitudinal barriers.

1
2
3 On a more personal level, I have experienced physical and mental challenges faced by myself
4 and colleagues in my institution. As a disabled media sociologist myself, I started conducting
5 research that revolves around EDI issues in relation to the information society, namely,
6 participatory policies and access to information in the internet era with the intended impact to
7 influence government policies. Apart from my professional role, I have a deep personal
8 commitment to tackling EDI issues and this has motivated me to take on the roles of Associate
9 Dean EDI in my School and Co-Chair for City St George's Disability Network. City St George's has
10 changed radically in the course of time I have been here and many improvements have been
11 made, but certainly many more things should be done in the workplace to accommodate the
12 needs of disabled staff and students. The conference that I organised intended to raise
13 awareness of such issues.

14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24 The objectives of the conference were to:

- 25 • Determine if disability today is considered as part of being human and whether it is
26 integral to the human experience.
- 27 • Promote the assembly, exchange and dissemination of good practice for the
28 promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.
- 29 • Assess the treatment and the opportunities for active inclusion and full participation
30 of the disabled community in different parts of the world.
- 31 • Check if people with disabilities can take advantage of new technologies and tools in
32 the digital and information society, e.g., through the assistive technology service
33 delivery.

34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45 The papers presented in the conference addressed a wide range of disability issues, including
46 disability and intimate partner violence, disability and gender, social construction of disability
47 identity, disability and the (post-) pandemic workplace, cultural variation in hiring people with
48 disabilities. However, the conference went well beyond the issue of disability to tackle wider
49 EDI issues, such as law and inclusion, neurodiversity and assistive technologies,
50 neurodivergent academics, women and work, mental health and the effect of the Covid-19
51 pandemic, experiences of sexual and gender identity minorities, diversity and emotional
52 labour in the gig economy, impact of workplace networks on minorities career advancement,
53 etc. Therefore, this special issue publishes a selection of papers that were presented in the
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 conference that make robust empirical, theoretical or methodological contributions to a wide
4 range of EDI matters, as well as experiences of policy makers and practitioners. It serves as a
5 strong request to governments, policymakers, scholars, civic society. It underscores the
6 necessity to acknowledge the nuanced understandings of the systemic nature of disability and
7 wider EDI issues and their impact on practices and policies.
8
9
10
11
12
13

14 **Overview of the papers in this special issue**

15
16
17

18 This special issue aims to bring together scholars researching disability as well as a
19 wide range of related EDI issues. These scholars gave insightful presentations in the 16th EDI
20 International Conference at City St George's, University of London, in July 2023. In this special
21 issue, I hope to challenge the assertions that disability has been addressed satisfactorily,
22 highlight the diverse and intersecting realities faced by disabled people across geographical
23 and cultural boundaries, and explore the potential of what to do differently for creating a
24 more equitable, inclusive and just society. Above all, there is a belief that we must direct more
25 energy to changing the structural base of organisations, alongside raising the awareness of
26 the staff. This way can result in more inclusive behaviours and attitudes that will ultimately
27 become part of the organisational culture.
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37 The first article, titled 'Cultural Variation in Hiring People with Disabilities: A Theory
38 and Preliminary Test' and authored by Aminat Muibi, David Thomas, Anna Hsu, Bjørn Ekelund,
39 Mathea Wasvik and Cordula Barzantny, claims that Persons with disabilities (PWD) do not
40 have their equal rights recognized to the same extent as other groups. Although the UN
41 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified by 187 countries,
42 nevertheless PWD continue to experience barriers when attempting to gain and maintain
43 employment. The authors refer to several published studies that confirm that, even to this
44 day, PWD are universally underemployed as compared to the base employment rate. This
45 means that, despite the broad adoption of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with
46 Disabilities, there is a wide range of the employment rates and significant variability in the
47 treatment of PWD around the world.
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56

57 The article acknowledges that the vast majority of research with regard to PWD
58 involves a supply side approach that focusses on providing medical, psychological,
59
60

1
2
3 educational, and vocational services to PWD to improve their functioning, stamina, and jobs
4 skills. However, the authors cite works revealing that these models overlook factors related
5 to employer demand and the societal environment. There are several reasons impacting on
6 the treatment of PWD in organizations, including the socio-political context, the climate of
7 the organization, and managerial viewpoints toward PWD. The study in hand looked at the
8 extent to which the socio-cultural context influences hiring of PWD through its effect on the
9 disability inclusion climate of organizations. In keeping with institutional theory, it
10 investigated how people in specific national contexts are influenced by the cognitive (social
11 construction process), normative (mechanism of social obligation) and regulative (through
12 rules, laws and sanctions) aspects of institutions.

13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22 The authors suggested that societal culture affects the disability inclusion culture of
23 the organization through two processes. The first, referring to the regulatory aspect, is that
24 the societal context impacts on the social institutions through their objectives, the way and
25 manner they operate, and the logic for their policies. In particular, the exact implementation
26 of legislation regarding PWD across countries may have an effect on the individual's
27 legitimacy judgment (i.e., the evaluations that assess specific actions or decisions as
28 desirable or appropriate within a specific context. Borrowing from existing literature, the
29 authors claim that the disability inclusion environment of the organization is less the
30 product of conscious adherence to legislation than it is what is considered legitimate in
31 society. The second mechanism of cultural influence, relating to the normative approach,
32 suggests that the disability inclusion climate is a symptom or manifestation of culturally
33 based norms reflected in the values and attitudes of managers. The disability inclusion
34 climate may be the key driver of hiring PWD, however the authors acknowledge that both
35 supply side (e.g., the characteristics of PWD) and demand side factors (e.g., the societal and
36 organizational environments) would potentially moderate this relationship.

37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49 Building on existing literature, the article concluded that a key factor in the actual
50 treatment of PWD in organizations is the organizational culture. However, having focused
51 on the wider cultural and socio-economic environment as sources of country level variation
52 in the treatment of PWD, it suggested that future research could include both supply side
53 and other demand side characteristics in order to build a more comprehensive picture of
54 the influence of the socio-cultural context. As the authors mentioned in their study both the
55 age and gender of participants influenced some responses, so the age and gender of
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 decisions makers should be considered demand side moderators. Disability is a very broad
4 concept and much research reports variation of treatment of PWD based type of disability,
5 making it an important supply side moderator. Finally, the work claims that, from a practical
6 perspective, organizations can benefit from understanding the connection between the
7 societal context and the climate in their organization. For instance, at the societal level, it is
8 crucial to be conscious of the intermediate factors that influence the effect of legislation on
9 the organizational treatment of PWD and acknowledge that organizations can respond to
10 legislation in many ways.
11
12

13
14
15
16
17
18 The second article, titled 'Diversity and Emotional Labor in the Gig Economy' and
19 authored by Ifeyimika Ajaiyeoba, deals with the current debates concerning the gig
20 economy or gig work, that is, work-tasks performed for money, but without a formal
21 employment arrangement. The author cites works that verify that the vast majority of such
22 tasks are carried out via internet applications referred to as gig companies or platforms
23 within the gig economy. And continue that despite most gig tasks are short-lived, lasting
24 mere minutes, the gig economy is currently booming. Of course, the gig economy has
25 broken apart and effectively eroded the robust links that exist in standard employment
26 settings between employers and employees. Such disintegration has led to a so-called 'thin'
27 or weak employment relationships. According to the author, this means the abandonment
28 of organizational responsibility towards employees in favour of financial profits. To get a
29 sense of the magnitude of the phenomenon, the article provides statistics: globally, gig
30 workers now account for up to 12% of the labour market.
31
32

33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42 Turning to the question as to who benefits from this trend, the article mentions that
43 first and foremost the gig economy offers benefits for organizations relating to reduced
44 labour costs, but individuals can also take advantage due to work flexibility, and autonomy.
45 But there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of gig work and the
46 work and life experiences of individuals who participate in it, i.e., the gig workers
47 themselves. Citing relevant bibliography, the author claims that a key feature of the gig
48 economy is algorithmic management (or control), which is the process of monitoring
49 employee performance through the use of algorithmic technology. Algorithms are used to
50 replace traditional forms of management in organizations (i.e., HR managers and line
51 supervisors) while allowing gig platforms to retain some control over how work is carried
52 out on their platforms. Algorithms automate typical management duties such as work
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 assignment, performance evaluation, recruitment, and selection. Algorithms rely on the
4 ratings gig workers receive from customers based on preset criteria and goals set by the gig
5 platform without workers' input. And, as the author mentions, these ratings are used to
6 assess gig workers' alignment with the display rules and enable gig platforms to set their
7 minimum standards on service quality.
8
9

10
11
12 The main objective of the article is to integrate emotional labour (EL) literature with
13 research on the gig economy to discuss EL performance within the gig economy. However,
14 the piece goes further to advance the literature through a focus on workforce diversity
15 within the gig economy by applying a racial and gender perspective to understanding the
16 differences in the gig work experience. The author suggests that race and gender
17 boundaries are retained within the gig economy through mechanisms such as unfair
18 customer ratings and reviews, as well as ill-developed (and biased) algorithms that obstruct
19 poorly rated workers' access to clients. Alongside this, the article investigates the
20 moderating effect of economic dependence on gig work income. It suggests that among
21 racial minorities and female gig workers, the need to engage in EL to manage reputation is
22 higher when gig work income is considered to be the primary source of income. Hence, the
23 article's contribution is the offering of insights into how financial reliance may influence EL
24 performance, especially for diverse individuals.
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

36 The article claims that the awareness of such experiences can yield actionable
37 suggestions for both organizations and gig workers. It concludes that the examination of the
38 interplay between minority status, gig work dependence, and emotional labour enhances
39 our understanding of the challenges faced by gig workers. As the gig economy continues to
40 evolve, there is a need for future research, offering practical implications for improving the
41 well-being of gig workers and fostering a more equitable and satisfying work environment.
42
43
44
45
46

47 The third article, titled 'What's in it for me? - Uncovering the individual benefits of
48 inclusive behaviour in the Norwegian workplace', authored by Ola Jensen Larsen, Laura
49 Traavik and Mari Svendsen, investigates how the practice of work inclusion towards
50 vulnerable groups can positively affect individual leaders and co-workers. By using a
51 multiple case design - data is gathered through semi-structured interviews in three private
52 Norwegian organizations - it examines intrapersonal factors such as motivation and
53 commitment. The piece builds on a rapidly grown research on EDI in organizations and pays
54 particular attention to inclusion, multiple socio-demographic groups, intersectionality, and
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 specific cultural and institutional contexts. As the author reminds us, EDI generally involves
4 how societies and workplaces address equality and inequality for different socio-
5 demographic groups. Inclusion (i.e., the provision of real opportunities for equal access), as
6 it is stated in the article, is often linked with systematic state policies that aim to boost the
7 engagement and participation of people in the workforce who have stopped or reduced the
8 amount they work because of illness or disabilities.
9

10
11
12
13
14 The authors claim that these policies have motivated organizations to participate
15 voluntarily by using arguments based on principles of social welfare and corporate social
16 responsibility (CSR) rather than on the business case approach to diversity. There is an
17 acknowledgment, though, that countries vary substantially regarding how EDI is understood
18 and practiced. Inclusion initiatives in Norway – the focus of this article - can be incentivized
19 and facilitated through state-sponsored programs that target groups that are more likely to
20 be excluded from the Norwegian labor market and include people with non-Western
21 cultural backgrounds, physical disabilities, sensory impairments, or a history of mental
22 illness. Primary research, such as interviews, combined with secondary data drawn from
23 internal documents regarding the work inclusion policies, sustainability reports, and news
24 articles reveal that work inclusion activities can positively affect leaders' and co-workers'
25 commitment and intrinsic motivation.
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

36 Using two dimensions from the DIM Model – commitment and motivation – to explore
37 how leaders and co-workers in three Norwegian firms relate to inclusive practices, the
38 article's main contributions are first, that inclusion is a process, not an end. It is an ongoing
39 process that enables organizations derive benefits for those practicing inclusive behavior.
40 Specifically, benefits include positive feelings when things are 'resolved', while a decrease in
41 general motivation prevails when things are at a standstill or seem unsolvable. Viewed this
42 way, inclusion can result in a clear starting point and a definite end, where there is a specific
43 solution to a specific challenge. Second, the piece finds that structure matters. By adopting
44 the structure for work inclusion, the staff apparently show a higher degree of commitment
45 and motivation. The above insights are beneficial regarding both the understanding of what
46 positives individuals can obtain and how they best can obtain them.
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56

57 The fourth article, titled 'How supervisors and coworkers enable workplace practices
58 to foster success for employees with mental health and/or addiction challenges', authored by
59
60

1
2
3 Kelley Packalen, Kaitlyn Sobchuk, Kelly Qin-Wang, Jenelle Cheetham, Jaclyn Hildebrand,
4 Agnieszka Fecica and Rosemary Lysaght aims to understand which employee-focused
5 workplace practices and priorities – more formally known as human resource (HR) practices
6 and priorities – employees with mental health and/or addiction challenges (MHAC) valued
7 and how they perceived the day-to-day implementation of those practices and priorities in
8 the workplace integration social enterprises (WISEs) that employed them. The work
9 acknowledges that when individuals with mental health and/or addiction challenges (MHAC)
10 work they frequently face significant barriers and also that negative attitudes and beliefs
11 towards workers with MHAC can translate into discrimination and unsupportive interactions.
12 This may result in hesitancy to disclose their MHAC to an employer due to a variety of factors
13 including the anticipated stigma of requesting accommodations and how likely they think
14 their employer would be to provide those accommodations. The authors note that from an
15 employer perspective, fostering an inclusive environment and administering workplace
16 accommodations for workers with MHAC can be challenging. In spite of legislative and public
17 pressure to create diverse and equitable workplaces, lengthy lists of possible HR strategies
18 and practices, and studies that demonstrate the benefits of accommodation, stigma and lack
19 of knowledge present real barriers for several employers.
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 By employing semi-structured interviews with twenty-two WISE workers who self-
36 identified as having serious MHAC the authors attempted to identify ways that employees did
37 or did not feel supported in their WISEs. The participants identified three HR practices and
38 two HR priorities as important to establishing an inclusive workplace that accommodated
39 their MHAC. The extent to which individual participants felt included and accommodated,
40 however, was shaped by interactions with their supervisors and coworkers. As the authors
41 claim, the findings provide lessons for both the WISE sector and conventional workplaces
42 concerning HR practices and priorities that can aid in the inclusion and retention of workers
43 with MHAC, whether they are formally managed through HR departments in larger
44 organizations or less formally through owners and managers in organizations that do not have
45 a formal HR department. By evaluating the salience of WISEs' employee-focused workplace
46 practices and priorities through the lens of employees for whom they are meant to
47 accommodate and include, the originality of this study articulates the critical role that
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 interactions with coworkers and supervisors have in whether HR practices and priorities have
4 the intended effect on worker experience.
5
6

7
8 The research findings support prior research that organizational support expressed
9 through leadership in the workplace can impact greatly on employee mental health and
10 wellbeing, worker productivity and engagement with organizational goals. Specifically, this
11 study identified how the workplace experience varied between workers, with different
12 individuals identifying interactions with coworkers and supervisors as beneficial or harmful to
13 aiding their evolution as capable and confident workers who felt included in their
14 organizations. Although each interaction was unique, the work identified a common theme
15 that was the important of the supervisors' work history. Notably, several participants
16 highlighted how having a supervisor who previously worked with individuals with MHAC
17 positively impacted their experience; similarly, the lack of prior experience was suggested as
18 an explanation for some negative supervisor interactions. Thus, the results support earlier
19 research that found that the longer supervisors had worked with a supported employment
20 program, the more fully they provided workplace accommodations. The study results also
21 suggest that both within WISEs and conventional employers there is a need for supervisor
22 training for those who do not have prior experience working with employees with MHAC.
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35
36 The take-away from this study is that successful work reintegration for individuals with
37 MHAC requires explicit attention to worker accommodations. Which HR practices and
38 priorities are most salient in this regard is not well understood, and rarely has policy been
39 informed through the voices of those who receive the support. However, the study
40 emphasizes the critical role that supervisors and coworkers play in determining whether
41 employees experience an organization's HR practices and priorities as intended. Importantly,
42 while the majority of the participants spoke highly of the WISEs in which they worked, some
43 participants experienced problems not because of the "rules" but because of the actions
44 and/or attitudes of specific individuals. Therefore, organizations with high turnover and/or
45 mandates to increase inclusion may benefit from offering training modules to supervisors and
46 coworkers, firstly to improve knowledge and understanding of the types of challenges that
47 employees with MHAC may experience and, secondly, to highlight how the use of social
48 supports can help supervisors and coworkers effectively enact the principles of inclusion to
49 which their organizations aspire.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 The fifth article, titled 'Decoding the networking strategies of Asian and black workers in the London
4 insurance market', authored by Mani Pillai, employs an individual-level analysis and focuses on
5 knowledge workers drawn from Asian and Black ethnic groups in the London Insurance Market.
6
7

8
9 These two demographic groups were chosen because they represent a substantial
10 proportion of the minority ethnic population in England and Wales. Given that the trading
11 activities of the London Insurance Market are underpinned by interdependent relations
12 among its participants, reinforced by personal connections and sustained rapport, it
13 provides an appropriate context for examining the networking strategies adopted by Asian
14 and Black workers to accelerate their careers. The study poses two research questions: a.
15 what motivates Asian and Black knowledge workers to adopt specific strategies to establish
16 and leverage their workplace networks within the London Insurance Market? B. which
17 factors steer the success or failure of these network strategies? This study is grounded in a
18 relational view of network strategies, utilizing Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and
19 habitus.
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

29
30 Drawing data from the Office for National Statistics, the study notes that the England and Wales 2021
31 Census recorded that 9.3% and 4% of the overall population were Asian and Black ethnic groups
32 respectively, representing approximately 72% of the minority ethnic population in England and Wales.
33 The study cites literature demonstrating that this demographic composition has an impact on
34 knowledge industries, which use existing information or generate new information to solve problems.
35 In 2021, knowledge industries employed a quarter of the UK's total population but 33% of the Asian
36 population and 25% of the Black population participated in them. The study acknowledges that the
37 reasons for this pattern are unclear, but a strong educational background is typically necessary for
38 careers in knowledge industries. This, according to the study, aligns with research indicating that
39 minority ethnic families in the UK prioritize formal education and professional credentials for high-
40 status careers.
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

51
52 Nevertheless, there is a discrepancy between the representation of Asian and Black groups in the
53 broader knowledge workforce and senior leadership roles, showing that firms are not fully leveraging
54 the talents and perspectives of these rapidly rising demographic groups. Whilst several factors may
55 contribute to the disparity between minority ethnic workers in the workforce and their ascension to
56 leadership roles, one salient explanation is the lack of access to workplace networks that impedes
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 career advancement for knowledge workers from minority ethnic backgrounds in the UK. The author
4 mentions that extant research has emphasized that a high attainment of education and skills alone is
5 not sufficient for career advancement without substantial support derived from network connections.
6
7 And adds that career advancement is frequently gauged through promotions and earnings
8
9 trajectories.
10
11
12
13
14

15 Although the literature recognizes that workplace networks are critical for everyone's
16 career, it has not fully investigated the networking behaviours that knowledge workers from
17 minority ethnic backgrounds adopt to build, sustain and harness their network relationships.
18 This gap, according to the author, is particularly evident when considering research from the
19 USA which indicates that the networking strategies used by individuals from majority ethnic
20 groups to gain access to elite corporate positions may not be as effective when employed by
21 individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds. The London Insurance Market has placed
22 strong emphasis on cultivating a diverse workforce as a strategic priority. Understanding the
23 experiences of such workers from the London Insurance Market is crucial from a diversity
24 and inclusion angle, but has also potential implications for the careers of these workers and
25 their contributions in the domain. If minority ethnic workers perceive the London Insurance
26 Market as a sector with limited opportunities for growth and advancement, it can result in its
27 organisations failing to attract and retain valuable talent from these demographics.
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

40 While prior literature has examined networking behaviours across various contexts, this
41 study's contribution lies in its contextualized analysis of the distinct field of the London
42 Insurance Market. The pervasiveness of nepotism unveiled by the study calls for urgent
43 attention from employers to address systemic biases, particularly in the recruitment process
44 for front-office roles. Eradicating nepotism requires collective and coordinated efforts
45 across the industry to develop and promote merit-based hiring practices across all
46 organizational functions. This is necessary to reduce the impact of personal connections
47 which currently determine who has access to the field. Monitoring mechanisms also need to
48 be implemented to ensure a sustained commitment to combating nepotism.
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56

57 The sixth and final article, titled 'Learning to dance the interview dance: The job interview as
58 an obstacle to employment for autistic university graduates' and authored by Brian Garrod
59
60

1
2
3 and Marcus Hansen, analyses how the traditional job interview might form an obstacle to
4 autistic people obtaining employment. The study focuses on the United Kingdom and in
5 particular on the UK's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which in 2023 drew
6 attention to the size of the employment gap for autistic people. As the DWP acknowledges,
7 autistic people have one of the lowest employment rates of any group, with fewer than 3 in
8 10 in work. According to 2021 data drawn from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), this
9 compares with around 5 in 10 disabled people in employment and nearly 8 in 10 of non-
10 disabled people.
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18

19 According to the authors, the existence of this employment gap (which is not unique to the
20 UK) is concerning for three main reasons. First, autistic people who find themselves
21 unemployed or underemployed are likely to suffer a lower standard of living, quality of life
22 and mental health. Second, by not employing autistic people, the economy is failing to
23 effectively utilise a potentially valuable resource, for the skills and knowledge of autistic
24 people are going to waste. Third, failing to employ potentially employable people needlessly
25 increases the burden on government for welfare support. The case for hiring and retaining
26 more autistic employees would seem especially compelling given the current economic
27 situation. The UK has experienced significant workforce challenges in recent times, and these
28 have affected the ability of many sectors to recover from the effects of the Covid-19
29 pandemic.
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39

40 Whereas the authors cite literature demonstrating that several studies exist on people's lived
41 experiences of autism in the workplace, they nevertheless note that research is more limited
42 when it comes to understanding the reasons why the autism employment gap persists.
43 Autistic people tend to have skills and knowledge that are scarce in the workforce and could
44 be harnessed by organisations were they only to employ. This is particularly true in relation
45 to highly skilled autistic people with post-secondary education. As the authors argue, there
46 may exist an 'autism advantage' that autistic people may have in the workplace. This suggests
47 that autistic people often possess traits associated with their conditions that help them to do
48 a job more effectively than most neurotypical people. The authors go even further to argue
49 that increasing neurodiversity in the workforce may bring a range of significant organisational
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 benefits that would not otherwise be captured, including improved productivity, greater staff
4 retention, reduced absenteeism and enhanced organisational reputation.
5
6
7

8 The aim of the research in hand is to examine the role of the interview in perpetuating the
9 autism employment gap. The interview is, of course, only one possible barrier to autistic
10 people gaining employment, and this study identifies the reasons why autistic people may be
11 less represented in the workforce. However, the interview is arguably a significant barrier for
12 many autistic people. This is because it is usually the final stage they encounter before they
13 secure the job. The interview is particularly important for autistic graduates, who are likely to
14 be applying for jobs where the candidate selection process culminates in a formal interview
15 of some kind. The study examines how the traditional interview may be a barrier to
16 employment by exploring the perspectives of autistic university students and their wellbeing
17 support professionals. By doing so, it offers a range of strategies that could make the
18 traditional job interview more effective in allowing employers to identify and hire autistic
19 employees.
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30

31 In methodological terms, the study employs a triangulated, qualitative approach, comprising
32 (i) five focus groups with a total of 23 students at a UK university who identify as autistic,
33 and (ii) semi-structured interviews with five of their professional support practitioners.
34 Thematic analysis is also applied to identify causes, effects and possible solutions of the use
35 of traditional recruitment interviews. In terms of findings, the analysis identifies three main
36 strategies, and two sub-strategies, for refining the traditional job interview with the aim of
37 assisting more autistic people to find suitable work: abandoning the traditional interview,
38 adapting it (divided into adjusting and augmenting sub-strategies), and accepting it as
39 necessary.
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48

49 The study puts forward three original conclusions: first, that while the traditional interview
50 tends to be biased against autistic people, it is not in itself a particularly acute method for
51 selecting job candidates; second, that the application of universal design to adapting the
52 interview process would be beneficial not only to neurodivergent people, but also to
53 neurotypicals and employers; and third, that the fear of disclosure represents a major
54 obstacle to autistic people trusting in schemes intended to assist them.
55
56
57
58
59
60

Discussion and moving forward

These six pieces from different parts of the globe contribute to the ongoing scholarly examinations of disability and other EDI issues such as workplace inclusivity, race and gender equality, value ethnicity and age differences, etc. The articles I have chosen represent critical disability, gender and race scholarship and the authors of the manuscripts present positions that document the events, social contexts and current effects of policies and practices of systemic disability positions against able people. I hope this special issue encourages research on multiple forms of disability and reshapes ways of representing disabled persons. I wish it encourages a sense of sharing from other people and makes more transparent the socio-cultural differences and similarities to disability experiences. We continue to draw on deeper exploration and critical engagement of disability. How can we institutionalize disability within our systems so as to address the socio-cultural and economic barriers which create added burdens on disabled people?

How can we continue to explore disability and forms of disability in different contexts and through different methodologies and means? What kind of policy and ground-up levers can help forge a more inclusive and cohesive society? I realize that there are many questions but few concrete answers to the ongoing concern surrounding the theme of disability. This special issue is a modest effort to address an empirical gap in the literature regarding disability. While much progress was achieved in the last two decades in fostering disability inclusion, the barriers to inclusion are still visible. I call on others to continue within this journey and to centre disability within their writings.

References

United Nations (2018) Disability and Development Report, at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/07/disability-report-chapter2.pdf>.

1
2
3
4
5
6 UK Parliament motion (16 May 2024)m at [https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/challenges-](https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/challenges-faced-by-people-with-disabilities/)
7 [faced-by-people-with-disabilities/](https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/challenges-faced-by-people-with-disabilities/).
8
9

10
11
12
13 WHO (World Health Organisation) (2022) 'Global report on health equity for persons with
14 disabilities', 2 December 2022. At <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>
15 (accessed 26/10/2024).
16
17

18
19 World Bank (2023) Report on 'Disability Inclusion',
20 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>.
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal

Guest Editorial: The disability inclusion challenge

Guest-Editor: Petros Iosifidis

Associate Dean EDI
Professor in Media Policy
Department of Sociology and Criminology
City St George's, University of London
Northampton Square
London EC1V 0HB

T: +44 (0)20 7040 8538

M: +44 (0)7946 246148

E-mail: P.iosifidis@city.ac.uk

www.city.ac.uk

<https://www.city.ac.uk/about/people/academics/petros-iosifidis>

The idea for this special issue of *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* was born out of various conversations between the journal editors and the guest-editor who hosted the 16th Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) International Conference at City St George's, University of London, 10-11 July 2023. The conference theme was '(dis)ability'. It drew particular attention to this concept because an estimated 1.3 billion people – or 1 in 6 people worldwide - experience significant disability (WHO, 2022). The WHO report showed that while some progress has been made in recent years, the world is still far from realizing that people with disabilities have the right to the highest attainable standard of health as those without disabilities. Persons with disabilities continue to die earlier, have poorer health, and experience more limitations in everyday functioning than others. These poor health outcomes are due to unfair conditions faced by persons with disabilities in all facets of life, including in the health system itself. In a nutshell, the WHO report provided a gloomy picture by claiming that people with disabilities still face barriers including stigma, discrimination, exclusion from education and employment, among others.

These findings are backed up by other studies. A 2023 World Bank report stated that barriers to full social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities include inaccessible physical environments and transportation, the unavailability of assistive devices and technologies, non-adapted means of communication, gaps in service delivery, and discriminatory prejudice and stigma in society (see <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>). A UN 2018 report (United Nations, Disability and Development Report, 2018 at

1
2
3 [https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/07/disability-report-chapter2.pdf)
4 [content/uploads/sites/15/2019/07/disability-report-chapter2.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/07/disability-report-chapter2.pdf)), reflecting on overall
5 progress towards the sustainable development goals from the perspective of persons with
6 disabilities like poverty, hunger and nutrition, found that the gap between persons with and
7 without disabilities is not closing. Recent research at a national level (see UK Parliament
8 motion, 16 May 2024 at [https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/challenges-faced-by-people-with-](https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/challenges-faced-by-people-with-disabilities/)
9 [disabilities/](https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/challenges-faced-by-people-with-disabilities/)) confirms the challenges faced by people with disabilities, such as inaccessible
10 online services, infrastructure that can be physically inaccessible, and attitudinal barriers.
11
12

13
14
15
16
17
18
19 On a more personal level, I have experienced physical and mental challenges faced by myself
20 and colleagues in my institution. As a disabled media sociologist myself, I started conducting
21 research that revolves around EDI issues in relation to the information society, namely,
22 participatory policies and access to information in the internet era with the intended impact to
23 influence government policies. Apart from my professional role, I have a deep personal
24 commitment to tackling EDI issues and this has motivated me to take on the roles of Associate
25 Dean EDI in my School and Co-Chair for City St George's Disability Network. City St George's has
26 changed radically in the course of time I have been here and many improvements have been
27 made, but certainly many more things should be done in the workplace to accommodate the
28 needs of disabled staff and students. The conference that I organised intended to raise
29 awareness of such issues.
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

39 The objectives of the conference were to:

- 40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
- Determine if disability today is considered as part of being human and whether it is integral to the human experience.
 - Promote the assembly, exchange and dissemination of good practice for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.
 - Assess the treatment and the opportunities for active inclusion and full participation of the disabled community in different parts of the world.
 - Check if people with disabilities can take advantage of new technologies and tools in the digital and information society, e.g., through the assistive technology service delivery.

1
2
3 The papers presented in the conference addressed a wide range of disability issues, including
4 disability and intimate partner violence, disability and gender, social construction of disability
5 identity, disability and the (post-) pandemic workplace, cultural variation in hiring people with
6 disabilities. However, the conference went well beyond the issue of disability to tackle wider
7 EDI issues, such as law and inclusion, neurodiversity and assistive technologies,
8 neurodivergent academics, women and work, mental health and the effect of the Covid-19
9 pandemic, experiences of sexual and gender identity minorities, diversity and emotional
10 labour in the gig economy, impact of workplace networks on minorities career advancement,
11 etc. Therefore, this special issue publishes a selection of papers that were presented in the
12 conference that make robust empirical, theoretical or methodological contributions to a wide
13 range of EDI matters, as well as experiences of policy makers and practitioners. It serves as a
14 strong request to governments, policymakers, scholars, civic society. It underscores the
15 necessity to acknowledge the nuanced understandings of the systemic nature of disability and
16 wider EDI issues and their impact on practices and policies.
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30

31 **Overview of the papers in this special issue**

32
33
34 This special issue aims to bring together scholars researching disability as well as a
35 wide range of related EDI issues. These scholars gave insightful presentations in the 16th EDI
36 International Conference at City St George's, University of London, in July 2023. In this special
37 issue, I hope to challenge the assertions that disability has been addressed satisfactorily,
38 highlight the diverse and intersecting realities faced by disabled people across geographical
39 and cultural boundaries, and explore the potential of what to do differently for creating a
40 more equitable, inclusive and just society. Above all, there is a belief that we must direct more
41 energy to changing the structural base of organisations, alongside raising the awareness of
42 the staff. This way can result in more inclusive behaviours and attitudes that will ultimately
43 become part of the organisational culture.
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52

53 The first article, titled 'Cultural Variation in Hiring People with Disabilities: A Theory
54 and Preliminary Test' and authored by Aminat Muibi, David Thomas, Anna Hsu, Bjørn Ekelund,
55 Mathea Wasvik and Cordula Barzantny, claims that Persons with disabilities (PWD) do not
56 have their equal rights recognized to the same extent as other groups. Although the UN
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified by 187 countries,
4 nevertheless PWD continue to experience barriers when attempting to gain and maintain
5 employment. The authors refer to several published studies that confirm that, even to this
6 day, PWD are universally underemployed as compared to the base employment rate. This
7 means that, despite the broad adoption of the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with
8 Disabilities, there is a wide range of the employment rates and significant variability in the
9 treatment of PWD around the world.
10
11
12
13
14
15

16
17 The article acknowledges that the vast majority of research with regard to PWD
18 involves a supply side approach that focusses on providing medical, psychological,
19 educational, and vocational services to PWD to improve their functioning, stamina, and jobs
20 skills. However, the authors cite works revealing that these models overlook factors related
21 to employer demand and the societal environment. There are several reasons impacting on
22 the treatment of PWD in organizations, including the socio-political context, the climate of
23 the organization, and managerial viewpoints toward PWD. The study in hand looked at the
24 extent to which the socio-cultural context influences hiring of PWD through its effect on the
25 disability inclusion climate of organizations. In keeping with institutional theory, it
26 investigated how people in specific national contexts are influenced by the cognitive (social
27 construction process), normative (mechanism of social obligation) and regulative (through
28 rules, laws and sanctions) aspects of institutions.
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

39 The authors suggested that societal culture affects the disability inclusion culture of
40 the organization through two processes. The first, referring to the regulatory aspect, is that
41 the societal context impacts on the social institutions through their objectives, the way and
42 manner they operate, and the logic for their policies. In particular, the exact implementation
43 of legislation regarding PWD across countries may have an effect on the individual's
44 legitimacy judgment (i.e., the evaluations that assess specific actions or decisions as
45 desirable or appropriate within a specific context. Borrowing from existing literature, the
46 authors claim that the disability inclusion environment of the organization is less the
47 product of conscious adherence to legislation than it is what is considered legitimate in
48 society. The second mechanism of cultural influence, relating to the normative approach,
49 suggests that the disability inclusion climate is a symptom or manifestation of culturally
50 based norms reflected in the values and attitudes of managers. The disability inclusion
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 climate may be the key driver of hiring PWD, however the authors acknowledge that both
4 supply side (e.g., the characteristics of PWD) and demand side factors (e.g., the societal and
5 organizational environments) would potentially moderate this relationship.
6
7

8
9 Building on existing literature, the article concluded that a key factor in the actual
10 treatment of PWD in organizations is the organizational culture. However, having focused
11 on the wider cultural and socio-economic environment as sources of country level variation
12 in the treatment of PWD, it suggested that future research could include both supply side
13 and other demand side characteristics in order to build a more comprehensive picture of
14 the influence of the socio-cultural context. As the authors mentioned in their study both the
15 age and gender of participants influenced some responses, so the age and gender of
16 decisions makers should be considered demand side moderators. Disability is a very broad
17 concept and much research reports variation of treatment of PWD based type of disability,
18 making it an important supply side moderator. Finally, the work claims that, from a practical
19 perspective, organizations can benefit from understanding the connection between the
20 societal context and the climate in their organization. For instance, at the societal level, it is
21 crucial to be conscious of the intermediate factors that influence the effect of legislation on
22 the organizational treatment of PWD and acknowledge that organizations can respond to
23 legislation in many ways.
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35

36 The second article, titled 'Diversity and Emotional Labor in the Gig Economy' and
37 authored by Ifeyimika Ajaiyeoba, deals with the current debates concerning the gig
38 economy or gig work, that is, work-tasks performed for money, but without a formal
39 employment arrangement. The author cites works that verify that the vast majority of such
40 tasks are carried out via internet applications referred to as gig companies or platforms
41 within the gig economy. And continue that despite most gig tasks are short-lived, lasting
42 mere minutes, the gig economy is currently booming. Of course, the gig economy has
43 broken apart and effectively eroded the robust links that exist in standard employment
44 settings between employers and employees. Such disintegration has led to a so-called 'thin'
45 or weak employment relationships. According to the author, this means the abandonment
46 of organizational responsibility towards employees in favour of financial profits. To get a
47 sense of the magnitude of the phenomenon, the article provides statistics: globally, gig
48 workers now account for up to 12% of the labour market.
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Turning to the question as to who benefits from this trend, the article mentions that first and foremost the gig economy offers benefits for organizations relating to reduced labour costs, but individuals can also take advantage due to work flexibility, and autonomy. But there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of gig work and the work and life experiences of individuals who participate in it, i.e., the gig workers themselves. Citing relevant bibliography, the author claims that a key feature of the gig economy is algorithmic management (or control), which is the process of monitoring employee performance through the use of algorithmic technology. Algorithms are used to replace traditional forms of management in organizations (i.e., HR managers and line supervisors) while allowing gig platforms to retain some control over how work is carried out on their platforms. Algorithms automate typical management duties such as work assignment, performance evaluation, recruitment, and selection. Algorithms rely on the ratings gig workers receive from customers based on preset criteria and goals set by the gig platform without workers' input. And, as the author mentions, these ratings are used to assess gig workers' alignment with the display rules and enable gig platforms to set their minimum standards on service quality.

The main objective of the article is to integrate emotional labour (EL) literature with research on the gig economy to discuss EL performance within the gig economy. However, the piece goes further to advance the literature through a focus on workforce diversity within the gig economy by applying a racial and gender perspective to understanding the differences in the gig work experience. The author suggests that race and gender boundaries are retained within the gig economy through mechanisms such as unfair customer ratings and reviews, as well as ill-developed (and biased) algorithms that obstruct poorly rated workers' access to clients. Alongside this, the article investigates the moderating effect of economic dependence on gig work income. It suggests that among racial minorities and female gig workers, the need to engage in EL to manage reputation is higher when gig work income is considered to be the primary source of income. Hence, the article's contribution is the offering of insights into how financial reliance may influence EL performance, especially for diverse individuals.

The article claims that the awareness of such experiences can yield actionable suggestions for both organizations and gig workers. It concludes that the examination of the interplay between minority status, gig work dependence, and emotional labour enhances

1
2
3 our understanding of the challenges faced by gig workers. As the gig economy continues to
4 evolve, there is a need for future research, offering practical implications for improving the
5 well-being of gig workers and fostering a more equitable and satisfying work environment.
6
7

8
9 The third article, titled 'What's in it for me? - Uncovering the individual benefits of
10 inclusive behaviour in the Norwegian workplace', authored by Ola Jensen Larsen, Laura
11 Traavik and Mari Svendsen, investigates how the practice of work inclusion towards
12 vulnerable groups can positively affect individual leaders and co-workers. By using a
13 multiple case design - data is gathered through semi-structured interviews in three private
14 Norwegian organizations - it examines intrapersonal factors such as motivation and
15 commitment. The piece builds on a rapidly grown research on EDI in organizations and pays
16 particular attention to inclusion, multiple socio-demographic groups, intersectionality, and
17 specific cultural and institutional contexts. As the author reminds us, EDI generally involves
18 how societies and workplaces address equality and inequality for different socio-
19 demographic groups. Inclusion (i.e., the provision of real opportunities for equal access), as
20 it is stated in the article, is often linked with systematic state policies that aim to boost the
21 engagement and participation of people in the workforce who have stopped or reduced the
22 amount they work because of illness or disabilities.
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33

34 The authors claim that these policies have motivated organizations to participate
35 voluntarily by using arguments based on principles of social welfare and corporate social
36 responsibility (CSR) rather than on the business case approach to diversity. There is an
37 acknowledgment, though, that countries vary substantially regarding how EDI is understood
38 and practiced. Inclusion initiatives in Norway – the focus of this article - can be incentivized
39 and facilitated through state-sponsored programs that target groups that are more likely to
40 be excluded from the Norwegian labor market and include people with non-Western
41 cultural backgrounds, physical disabilities, sensory impairments, or a history of mental
42 illness. Primary research, such as interviews, combined with secondary data drawn from
43 internal documents regarding the work inclusion policies, sustainability reports, and news
44 articles reveal that work inclusion activities can positively affect leaders' and co-workers'
45 commitment and intrinsic motivation.
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56 Using two dimensions from the DIM Model – commitment and motivation – to explore
57 how leaders and co-workers in three Norwegian firms relate to inclusive practices, the
58 article's main contributions are first, that inclusion is a process, not an end. It is an ongoing
59
60

1
2
3 process that enables organizations derive benefits for those practicing inclusive behavior.
4 Specifically, benefits include positive feelings when things are 'resolved', while a decrease in
5 general motivation prevails when things are at a standstill or seem unsolvable. Viewed this
6 way, inclusion can result in a clear starting point and a definite end, where there is a specific
7 solution to a specific challenge. Second, the piece finds that structure matters. By adopting
8 the structure for work inclusion, the staff apparently show a higher degree of commitment
9 and motivation. The above insights are beneficial regarding both the understanding of what
10 positives individuals can obtain and how they best can obtain them.
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18

19 The fourth article, titled 'How supervisors and coworkers enable workplace practices
20 to foster success for employees with mental health and/or addiction challenges', authored by
21 Kelley Packalen, Kaitlyn Sobchuk, Kelly Qin-Wang, Jenelle Cheetham, Jaclyn Hildebrand,
22 Agnieszka Fecica and Rosemary Lysaght aims to understand which employee-focused
23 workplace practices and priorities – more formally known as human resource (HR) practices
24 and priorities – employees with mental health and/or addiction challenges (MHAC) valued
25 and how they perceived the day-to-day implementation of those practices and priorities in
26 the workplace integration social enterprises (WISEs) that employed them. The work
27 acknowledges that when individuals with mental health and/or addiction challenges (MHAC)
28 work they frequently face significant barriers and also that negative attitudes and beliefs
29 towards workers with MHAC can translate into discrimination and unsupportive interactions.
30 This may result in hesitancy to disclose their MHAC to an employer due to a variety of factors
31 including the anticipated stigma of requesting accommodations and how likely they think
32 their employer would be to provide those accommodations. The authors note that from an
33 employer perspective, fostering an inclusive environment and administering workplace
34 accommodations for workers with MHAC can be challenging. In spite of legislative and public
35 pressure to create diverse and equitable workplaces, lengthy lists of possible HR strategies
36 and practices, and studies that demonstrate the benefits of accommodation, stigma and lack
37 of knowledge present real barriers for several employers.
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53

54 By employing semi-structured interviews with twenty-two WISE workers who self-
55 identified as having serious MHAC the authors attempted to identify ways that employees did
56 or did not feel supported in their WISEs. The participants identified three HR practices and
57 two HR priorities as important to establishing an inclusive workplace that accommodated
58
59
60

1
2
3 their MHAC. The extent to which individual participants felt included and accommodated,
4 however, was shaped by interactions with their supervisors and coworkers. As the authors
5 claim, the findings provide lessons for both the WISE sector and conventional workplaces
6 concerning HR practices and priorities that can aid in the inclusion and retention of workers
7 with MHAC, whether they are formally managed through HR departments in larger
8 organizations or less formally through owners and managers in organizations that do not have
9 a formal HR department. By evaluating the salience of WISEs' employee-focused workplace
10 practices and priorities through the lens of employees for whom they are meant to
11 accommodate and include, the originality of this study articulates the critical role that
12 interactions with coworkers and supervisors have in whether HR practices and priorities have
13 the intended effect on worker experience.

14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24 The research findings support prior research that organizational support expressed
25 through leadership in the workplace can impact greatly on employee mental health and
26 wellbeing, worker productivity and engagement with organizational goals. Specifically, this
27 study identified how the workplace experience varied between workers, with different
28 individuals identifying interactions with coworkers and supervisors as beneficial or harmful to
29 aiding their evolution as capable and confident workers who felt included in their
30 organizations. Although each interaction was unique, the work identified a common theme
31 that was the important of the supervisors' work history. Notably, several participants
32 highlighted how having a supervisor who previously worked with individuals with MHAC
33 positively impacted their experience; similarly, the lack of prior experience was suggested as
34 an explanation for some negative supervisor interactions. Thus, the results support earlier
35 research that found that the longer supervisors had worked with a supported employment
36 program, the more fully they provided workplace accommodations. The study results also
37 suggest that both within WISEs and conventional employers there is a need for supervisor
38 training for those who do not have prior experience working with employees with MHAC.

39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52 The take-away from this study is that successful work reintegration for individuals with
53 MHAC requires explicit attention to worker accommodations. Which HR practices and
54 priorities are most salient in this regard is not well understood, and rarely has policy been
55 informed through the voices of those who receive the support. However, the study
56 emphasizes the critical role that supervisors and coworkers play in determining whether
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 employees experience an organization's HR practices and priorities as intended. Importantly,
4 while the majority of the participants spoke highly of the WISEs in which they worked, some
5 participants experienced problems not because of the "rules" but because of the actions
6 and/or attitudes of specific individuals. Therefore, organizations with high turnover and/or
7 mandates to increase inclusion may benefit from offering training modules to supervisors and
8 coworkers, firstly to improve knowledge and understanding of the types of challenges that
9 employees with MHAC may experience and, secondly, to highlight how the use of social
10 supports can help supervisors and coworkers effectively enact the principles of inclusion to
11 which their organizations aspire.

12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21 The fifth article, titled 'Decoding the networking strategies of Asian and black workers in the London
22 insurance market', authored by Mani Pillai, employs an individual-level analysis and focuses on
23 knowledge workers drawn from Asian and Black ethnic groups in the London Insurance Market.

24
25
26 These two demographic groups were chosen because they represent a substantial
27 proportion of the minority ethnic population in England and Wales. Given that the trading
28 activities of the London Insurance Market are underpinned by interdependent relations
29 among its participants, reinforced by personal connections and sustained rapport, it
30 provides an appropriate context for examining the networking strategies adopted by Asian
31 and Black workers to accelerate their careers. The study poses two research questions: a.
32 what motivates Asian and Black knowledge workers to adopt specific strategies to establish
33 and leverage their workplace networks within the London Insurance Market? B. which
34 factors steer the success or failure of these network strategies? This study is grounded in a
35 relational view of network strategies, utilizing Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and
36 habitus.

37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47 Drawing data from the Office for National Statistics, the study notes that the England and Wales 2021
48 Census recorded that 9.3% and 4% of the overall population were Asian and Black ethnic groups
49 respectively, representing approximately 72% of the minority ethnic population in England and Wales.
50 The study cites literature demonstrating that this demographic composition has an impact on
51 knowledge industries, which use existing information or generate new information to solve problems.
52 In 2021, knowledge industries employed a quarter of the UK's total population but 33% of the Asian
53 population and 25% of the Black population participated in them. The study acknowledges that the
54 reasons for this pattern are unclear, but a strong educational background is typically necessary for
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 careers in knowledge industries. This, according to the study, aligns with research indicating that
4 minority ethnic families in the UK prioritize formal education and professional credentials for high-
5 status careers.
6
7
8
9

10 Nevertheless, there is a discrepancy between the representation of Asian and Black groups in the
11 broader knowledge workforce and senior leadership roles, showing that firms are not fully leveraging
12 the talents and perspectives of these rapidly rising demographic groups. Whilst several factors may
13 contribute to the disparity between minority ethnic workers in the workforce and their ascension to
14 leadership roles, one salient explanation is the lack of access to workplace networks that impedes
15 career advancement for knowledge workers from minority ethnic backgrounds in the UK. The author
16 mentions that extant research has emphasized that a high attainment of education and skills alone is
17 not sufficient for career advancement without substantial support derived from network connections.
18 And adds that career advancement is frequently gauged through promotions and earnings
19 trajectories.
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30

31 Although the literature recognizes that workplace networks are critical for everyone's
32 career, it has not fully investigated the networking behaviours that knowledge workers from
33 minority ethnic backgrounds adopt to build, sustain and harness their network relationships.
34 This gap, according to the author, is particularly evident when considering research from the
35 USA which indicates that the networking strategies used by individuals from majority ethnic
36 groups to gain access to elite corporate positions may not be as effective when employed by
37 individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds. The London Insurance Market has placed
38 strong emphasis on cultivating a diverse workforce as a strategic priority. Understanding the
39 experiences of such workers from the London Insurance Market is crucial from a diversity
40 and inclusion angle, but has also potential implications for the careers of these workers and
41 their contributions in the domain. If minority ethnic workers perceive the London Insurance
42 Market as a sector with limited opportunities for growth an advancement, it can result in its
43 organisations failing to attract and retain valuable talent from these demographics.
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56 While prior literature has examined networking behaviours across various contexts, this
57 study's contribution lies in its contextualized analysis of the distinct field of the London
58 Insurance Market. The pervasiveness of nepotism unveiled by the study calls for urgent
59
60

1
2
3 attention from employers to address systemic biases, particularly in the recruitment process
4 for front-office roles. Eradicating nepotism requires collective and coordinated efforts
5 across the industry to develop and promote merit-based hiring practices across all
6 organizational functions. This is necessary to reduce the impact of personal connections
7 which currently determine who has access to the field. Monitoring mechanisms also need to
8 be implemented to ensure a sustained commitment to combating nepotism.
9
10
11
12
13
14

15 The sixth and final article, titled 'Learning to dance the interview dance: The job interview as
16 an obstacle to employment for autistic university graduates' and authored by Brian Garrod
17 and Marcus Hansen, analyses how the traditional job interview might form an obstacle to
18 autistic people obtaining employment. The study focuses on the United Kingdom and in
19 particular on the UK's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which in 2023 drew
20 attention to the size of the employment gap for autistic people. As the DWP acknowledges,
21 autistic people have one of the lowest employment rates of any group, with fewer than 3 in
22 10 in work. According to 2021 data drawn from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), this
23 compares with around 5 in 10 disabled people in employment and nearly 8 in 10 of non-
24 disabled people.
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34

35 According to the authors, the existence of this employment gap (which is not unique to the
36 UK) is concerning for three main reasons. First, autistic people who find themselves
37 unemployed or underemployed are likely to suffer a lower standard of living, quality of life
38 and mental health. Second, by not employing autistic people, the economy is failing to
39 effectively utilise a potentially valuable resource, for the skills and knowledge of autistic
40 people are going to waste. Third, failing to employ potentially employable people needlessly
41 increases the burden on government for welfare support. The case for hiring and retaining
42 more autistic employees would seem especially compelling given the current economic
43 situation. The UK has experienced significant workforce challenges in recent times, and these
44 have affected the ability of many sectors to recover from the effects of the Covid-19
45 pandemic.
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55

56 Whereas the authors cite literature demonstrating that several studies exist on people's lived
57 experiences of autism in the workplace, they nevertheless note that research is more limited
58 when it comes to understanding the reasons why the autism employment gap persists.
59
60

1
2
3 Autistic people tend to have skills and knowledge that are scarce in the workforce and could
4 be harnessed by organisations were they only to employ. This is particularly true in relation
5 to highly skilled autistic people with post-secondary education. As the authors argue, there
6 may exist an 'autism advantage' that autistic people may have in the workplace. This suggests
7 that autistic people often possess traits associated with their conditions that help them to do
8 a job more effectively than most neurotypical people. The authors go even further to argue
9 that increasing neurodiversity in the workforce may bring a range of significant organisational
10 benefits that would not otherwise be captured, including improved productivity, greater staff
11 retention, reduced absenteeism and enhanced organisational reputation.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20

21 The aim of the research in hand is to examine the role of the interview in perpetuating the
22 autism employment gap. The interview is, of course, only one possible barrier to autistic
23 people gaining employment, and this study identifies the reasons why autistic people may be
24 less represented in the workforce. However, the interview is arguably a significant barrier for
25 many autistic people. This is because it is usually the final stage they encounter before they
26 secure the job. The interview is particularly important for autistic graduates, who are likely to
27 be applying for jobs where the candidate selection process culminates in a formal interview
28 of some kind. The study examines how the traditional interview may be a barrier to
29 employment by exploring the perspectives of autistic university students and their wellbeing
30 support professionals. By doing so, it offers a range of strategies that could make the
31 traditional job interview more effective in allowing employers to identify and hire autistic
32 employees.
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43

44 In methodological terms, the study employs a triangulated, qualitative approach, comprising
45 (i) five focus groups with a total of 23 students at a UK university who identify as autistic,
46 and (ii) semi-structured interviews with five of their professional support practitioners.
47 Thematic analysis is also applied to identify causes, effects and possible solutions of the use
48 of traditional recruitment interviews. In terms of findings, the analysis identifies three main
49 strategies, and two sub-strategies, for refining the traditional job interview with the aim of
50 assisting more autistic people to find suitable work: abandoning the traditional interview,
51 adapting it (divided in to adjusting and augmenting sub-strategies), and accepting it as
52 necessary.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 The study puts forward three original conclusions: first, that while the traditional interview
4 tends to be biased against autistic people, it is not in itself a particularly acute method for
5 selecting job candidates; second, that the application of universal design to adapting the
6 interview process would be beneficial not only to neurodivergent people, but also to
7 neurotypicals and employers; and third, that the fear of disclosure represents a major
8 obstacle to autistic people trusting in schemes intended to assist them.
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19

20 **Discussion and moving forward**

21
22
23 These six pieces from different parts of the globe contribute to the ongoing scholarly
24 examinations of disability and other EDI issues such as workplace inclusivity, race and gender
25 equality, value ethnicity and age differences, etc. The articles I have chosen represent critical
26 disability, gender and race scholarship and the authors of the manuscripts present positions
27 that document the events, social contexts and current effects of policies and practices of
28 systemic disability positions against able people. I hope this special issue encourages research
29 on multiple forms of disability and reshapes ways of representing disabled persons. I wish it
30 encourages a sense of sharing from other people and makes more transparent the socio-
31 cultural differences and similarities to disability experiences. We continue to draw on deeper
32 exploration and critical engagement of disability. How can we institutionalize disability within
33 our systems so as to address the socio-cultural and economic barriers which create added
34 burdens on disabled people?
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

45
46 How can we continue to explore disability and forms of disability in different contexts
47 and through different methodologies and means? What kind of policy and ground-up levers
48 can help forge a more inclusive and cohesive society? I realize that there are many questions
49 but few concrete answers to the ongoing concern surrounding the theme of disability. This
50 special issue is a modest effort to address an empirical gap in the literature regarding
51 disability. While much progress was achieved in the last two decades in fostering disability
52 inclusion, the barriers to inclusion are still visible. I call on others to continue within this
53 journey and to centre disability within their writings.
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

References

United Nations (2018) Disability and Development Report, at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2019/07/disability-report-chapter2.pdf>.

UK Parliament motion (16 May 2024)m at <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/challenges-faced-by-people-with-disabilities/>.

WHO (World Health Organisation) (2022) 'Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities', 2 December 2022. At <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600> (accessed 26/10/2024).

World Bank (2023) Report on 'Disability Inclusion', <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>.