

**CMI** Chartered  
Management  
Institute

**75**

YEAR

1947-2022

ANNIVERSARY

# THE WORKPLACE INCLUSIVITY ILLUSION

# The Workplace Inclusivity Illusion



Written by Liz Spratt and Madalina Radu

When is an inclusive workplace not actually inclusive? That's the question we've been asking ourselves at CMI based on the findings of our latest poll of 2,066 employees (non managers) in the UK.

Earlier this year, in March 2022, we polled employees to better understand Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in workplaces across the UK. We wanted to understand how inclusive employees found their own workplaces and what challenges they felt and experienced in being included (or not). Our focus on employees is particularly important - as senior leaders and managers may view the success of their EDI policies through a different lens to their staff.

Our latest research demonstrates that, despite on the surface, many organisations and staff are embracing EDI initiatives, there are systemic challenges around workplace inclusion in the UK, with specific challenges for minoritised groups who feel overlooked and face discrimination.

What is evident is that UK employers and managers must do more to ensure they are not simply creating cultures that pay lip service to EDI, but that they demonstrate their commitment to diversity and inclusion in order to harness all talent and see real organisational gains.

## THE UK APPEARS TO HAVE AN 'ALL-INCLUSIVE' WORKPLACE CULTURE

Positively, the majority of employees think their workplaces are inclusive: over 7 in 10 employees agreed that their organisation is inclusive for 13 out of 15 workplace inclusivity statements<sup>1</sup>. And 39% - that's nearly two fifths - agreed with all the statements. Most frequently employees agree that:

- "People of different backgrounds are valued and respected by my employer" (82% of employees)
- "Everyone can feel like they belong in this organisation regardless of background" (81% of employees)
- "My manager trusts all staff regardless of their background" (80% of employees)
- "My organisation values diverse opinions and ideas" (80% of employees)
- "My manager ensures that all members of my team feel like they belong regardless of background" (80% of employees)

The majority of employees (70%) also feel they understand what the focus on EDI in their own workplace aims to achieve to at least a moderate extent, and 70% would report harassment or discrimination even if it didn't impact their day to day work. Indeed only 8% of employees thought that their organisation had done too much to support EDI. This contrasts to the almost one third of male managers who thought EDI initiatives have gone far enough or too far in a recent CMI poll.<sup>2</sup>



## BUT MANY EMPLOYEES ARE BASED IN ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE FAILING TO RECOGNISE THEIR INCLUSION CHALLENGES

Digging deeper into our data we found that many employees remain based in organisations that are not inclusive. We mined our data to understand how being similar to their colleagues impacts employee views on workplace inclusion.

Using our workplace cohesion index,<sup>3</sup> we found that those sitting in the bottom quartile (scoring lowest in terms of people being like them/their local community), often perceived their workplace to be a lot less inclusive than those in the top three quartiles (where people around them were perceived to be more similar to them/ their local community).

The biggest differences were across three of our inclusivity statements which focussed on equity and trust - we have compared the top and bottom quartile of workplaces comprised of employees perceived to be most similar to one another, but this bottom quartile was different to all UK employees:

- I trust this organisation to treat all employees fairly (92% in the top quartile agreeing compared to 42% in the bottom quartile)
- Managers in my organisation treat all employees fairly (92% in the top quartile agreeing compared to 44% in the bottom quartile)
- Decisions about promotions are made fairly at this organisation (87% in the top quartile agreeing compared to 39% in the bottom quartile)

This still means that there are an estimated 5 million employees in UK organisations facing exclusion at work.

## DESPITE A DRIVE FOR EDI IN THE UK, NOT ALL WORKPLACE OPPORTUNITIES ARE EQUAL

Having the chance to progress and thrive at work is not a universal experience.

Although most employees (86%) think they have access to at least some workplace opportunities,<sup>4</sup> over half of employees (52%) - or an estimated 10.6 million people in the UK - feel they have been overlooked for opportunities in the workplace because of their identity over the course of their career.

And being overlooked remains significantly more likely to be the lived experience of individuals whose identity or background experiences discrimination. Nearly three quarters of employees (71%) from a Black background reported feeling overlooked for opportunities due to their identity; 66% from Asian backgrounds, and 65% of those who identified as LGBTQ+ also have the same experience.

Representation at senior levels is key to support workplace diversity, but the proportions from under-represented groups feeling overlooked in terms of progression is worrying. Those from Black backgrounds (53%) and those identifying as LGBTQ+ (48%) were more likely to feel that they were overlooked for promotion than UK employees as a whole (37%).

And many from under-represented groups feel they have missed out on getting new jobs due to their identity: those identifying as LGBTQ+, those from Black backgrounds, Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups and disabled individuals were all more likely to feel this than UK employees as a whole.

## DISCRIMINATION IS STILL PREVALENT, NEGATIVELY IMPACTING THOSE WHO ARE UNDER-REPRESENTED

Worryingly, being overlooked at work due to identity is not the sole cause for concern in UK workplaces. Our survey revealed that many employees have experienced discrimination over the course of their career. Over half (51%) of employees have either witnessed or experienced some form of discrimination at work<sup>5</sup> - where colleagues or themselves are negatively impacted due to their background.

Indeed over a third (34%) - or 6.9 million employees - say they themselves have been treated less favourably; received hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes/comments; or been harassed, or bullied in the workplace due to their identity.

Those from minoritised groups were more likely to say they had experienced discrimination themselves. This is particularly the case for:

- those identifying as LGBTQ+ (64%)
- those from Black backgrounds (63%)
- disabled individuals (55%)
- those from Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups (55%)
- those from Asian backgrounds (51%)

A non-discriminatory and inclusive workplace should be the norm in all organisations. But we can see from our research that for some under-represented groups this is not their experience:

- **Missing out on training opportunities** as a result of being your authentic self was reported by 35% of employees from Black backgrounds, 32% from Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, 30% of disabled employees and 29% of those from Asian backgrounds, compared to a typical UK employee (21%).
- **Harassment and bullying in the workplace** was more commonly experienced by those identifying as LGBTQ+ (38%), those from Black backgrounds (35%) and disabled employees (33%), compared to a typical UK employee (22%).
- **Experiencing hostile, derogatory or negative attitudes** was also more often experienced by those identifying as LGBTQ+ (36%), those from Black backgrounds (34%), disabled employees (34%) and those from Asian backgrounds (29%), than a typical UK employee (23%).

Indeed over 1 in 10 disabled people and those who identify as LGBTQ+ had personally resigned from a role because they felt they had been discriminated against.



## WORKPLACE CULTURES EXCLUDE TOO MANY IN GENERAL

How do employees deal with being overlooked, or worse being discriminated against? There seems to be only one way: changing yourself to get on in the workplace, rather than the workplace culture changing to include you.

Employees who told us they had been overlooked in the workplace were more likely to say they had made a change (63%), compared to those who had not been overlooked (24%). Those from some groups more likely to face disadvantage were more likely to say they had made changes to get on in the workplace: 7 in 10 of those identifying as LGBTQ+ and 66% of those from a Black background.

Only 20% of employees say they have faced direct pressure to change - but this equates to 4.8 million employees in the UK. Indeed 2.2 million employees, or just over 1 in 10, say they have been pressured by their managers and by their colleagues to make changes. Even without direct pressure to change, the key reason people told us they had changed was colleagues: 58% of employees say they made a change to be accepted, fit in with, or avoid criticism from, colleagues. Managers also play a role: 24% of employees said they made a change to be considered successful by their manager or be visible to their manager or senior managers.

But acting differently to break cultural stereotypes that others associate with your background can also drive some people to change who they are. 56% of those from Black backgrounds who had made a change say this was to break cultural stereotypes associated with their background. Similarly 40% of those identifying as LGBTQ+ and 36% from Asian backgrounds also cite this as a reason for making a change.



## SO WHAT'S NEXT FOR INCLUSIVITY AT WORK?

This research has revealed that there are still extensive and concerning levels of inequality and discrimination in the workplace in the UK. Despite many reporting that they felt their workplace was inclusive, this simply does not play out in the workplace when it comes to accessing workplace opportunities, such as new job roles, promotions, training opportunities, salary rises and bonuses.

Indeed, with an estimated 6.9 million individuals feeling discriminated against because of their background in the workplace, we still have a long way to go. Whilst a lack of inclusion is still prevalent, businesses will not realise the benefits of diversity, which have been shown to be considerable.<sup>6</sup> One thing is for certain: employers and managers across the UK must take action now if they are to harness these business benefits and play their part in boosting social value and economic opportunity across the UK.

## Methodology



CMI commissioned Critical Research to undertake a poll of UK employees (non managers and not self employed) between the 21st and 29th March 2022. 2,066 employees took part in the poll.

Data was weighted to be representative of UK employees by key demographics (Gender, Age, Disability, Diverse Ethnic Groups, region of work and Sexual Orientation), using the Labour Force Survey (LFS) dataset for January - March 2021. Sexual Orientation is not an accessible variable in the LFS and so the Annual Population Survey (APS) January - December 2019 was used for this to provide a robust sample and was provided by the ONS.

Data is grossed to reflect the working population in scope (those who are not managers and not self employed) - an estimated 20.3 million UK employees.



## WORKPLACE INCLUSION METRICS AND INDEX

We asked UK employees whether they agree with 15 statements around workplace inclusion. We used these 15 metrics to create a workplace inclusion index.

Respondents could agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Everyone has access to the same employment opportunities regardless of whether they are from different backgrounds
- Everyone has access to the same career development opportunities regardless of whether they are from different backgrounds
- Decisions about promotions are made fairly at this organisation
- People from different backgrounds are represented in management positions
- People from different backgrounds are represented in senior leadership positions
- My organisation values diverse opinions and ideas
- People of different backgrounds are valued and respected by my employer
- My organisation calls out inappropriate behaviour in the workplace
- I trust this organisation to treat all employees fairly
- Everyone can feel like they belong in this organisation regardless of background
- Managers in my organisation treat all employees with fairness
- Managers are inclusive of people regardless of their different backgrounds
- My manager values diverse opinions and ideas
- My manager trusts all staff regardless of their background
- My manager ensures that all members of my team feel like they belong regardless of background

We scored respondents based on the number of “agrees”, and created an index. This index was divided into quartiles to support our analysis.



## WORKPLACE COHESION INDEX

We used 4 metrics included in our polling to create a workplace cohesion index. Respondents could agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Colleagues in my workplace are from a similar background to me
- My direct team in my workplace are from a similar background to me
- Colleagues are from a similar background to other people in my local area
- My direct team in my workplace are from a similar background to other people in my local area

We scored respondents based on the number of “agrees”, and created an index. This index was divided into quartiles to support our analysis.



### References:

1. See the methodology section on page 6
2. CMI Managers Voice Poll of 1,149 respondents, conducted between 21st and 26th April 2022
3. See the methodology section on page 6
4. The workplace opportunities considered were: training opportunities, salary rises, promotions, stretch projects and representing the company at external events
5. We did not ask individuals directly if they had faced discrimination but provided a list of actions that could be discriminatory. This included due to their background being treated less favourably, receiving hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes or comments, being harassed or bullied in the workplace, missing out on promotions, missing out on other workplace development opportunities and resigning due to perceived workplace discrimination
6. For example see: [McKinsey](#) (2020), Diversity wins: How inclusion matters





## Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) works with business and education to inspire people to unleash their potential and become skilled, confident and successful managers and leaders. With a wealth of practical qualifications, events and networking opportunities on offer throughout the UK and across the globe, CMI helps people boost their career prospects and connects them with other ambitious professionals in any industry and sector. In fact, CMI has more than 130,000 people training to be better managers right now. Backed by a unique Royal Charter, CMI is the only organisation allowed to award Chartered Manager status – the ultimate management accolade, and Chartered Management Consultant status which sets and maintains the highest standards for the management consulting profession.

CMI's thought leadership, research and online resources provide practical insight on critical issues for 170,000 membership community and anyone looking to improve their skills, nurture high-performing teams and help pave the way for the next generation of managers and leaders.

For more information, please visit [www.managers.org.uk](http://www.managers.org.uk)  
Chartered Management Institute on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Twitter: @cmi\_managers



Facebook: [www.facebook.com/bettermanagers](http://www.facebook.com/bettermanagers)



LinkedIn: Chartered Management Institute



Instagram: @cmi\_managers



**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™**  
We invest in people Platinum



Certificate No FS28404

**Chartered Management Institute**  
77 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6SR  
Incorporated by Royal Charter  
Registered charity number 1091035  
Charity registered in Scotland number SCO38105

**#BetterManagers**

**CMI** Chartered  
Management  
Institute