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Guest Editorial: The disability inclusion challenge

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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.

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

The objectives of the conference were to:

- 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.

The papers presented in the conference addressed a wide range of disability issues, including disability and intimate partner violence, disability and gender, social construction of disability identity, disability and the (post-) pandemic workplace, cultural variation in hiring people with disabilities. However, the conference went well beyond the issue of disability to tackle wider EDI issues, such as law and inclusion, neurodiversity and assistive technologies, neurodivergent academics, women and work, mental health and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, experiences of sexual and gender identity minorities, diversity and emotional labour in the gig economy, impact of workplace networks on minorities career advancement, etc. Therefore, this special issue publishes a selection of papers that were presented in the

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conference that make robust empirical, theoretical or methodological contributions to a wide range of EDI matters, as well as experiences of policy makers and practitioners. It serves as a strong request to governments, policymakers, scholars, civic society. It underscores the necessity to acknowledge the nuanced understandings of the systemic nature of disability and wider EDI issues and their impact on practices and policies.

Overview of the papers in this special issue

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

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

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

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

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

Building on existing literature, the article concluded that a key factor in the actual treatment of PWD in organizations is the organizational culture. However, having focused on the wider cultural and socio-economic environment as sources of country level variation in the treatment of PWD, it suggested that future research could include both supply side and other demand side characteristics in order to build a more comprehensive picture of the influence of the socio-cultural context. As the authors mentioned in their study both the age and gender of participants influenced some responses, so the age and gender of

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

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

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

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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.
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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.
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28 The article claims that the awareness of such experiences can yield actionable
29 suggestions for both organizations and gig workers. It concludes that the examination of the
30 interplay between minority status, gig work dependence, and emotional labour enhances
31 our understanding of the challenges faced by gig workers. As the gig economy continues to
32 evolve, there is a need for future research, offering practical implications for improving the
33 well-being of gig workers and fostering a more equitable and satisfying work environment.
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37 The third article, titled 'What's in it for me? - Uncovering the individual benefits of
38 inclusive behaviour in the Norwegian workplace', authored by Ola Jensen Larsen, Laura
39 Traavik and Mari Svendsen, investigates how the practice of work inclusion towards
40 vulnerable groups can positively affect individual leaders and co-workers. By using a
41 multiple case design - data is gathered through semi-structured interviews in three private
42 Norwegian organizations - it examines intrapersonal factors such as motivation and
43 commitment. The piece builds on a rapidly grown research on EDI in organizations and pays
44 particular attention to inclusion, multiple socio-demographic groups, intersectionality, and
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specific cultural and institutional contexts. As the author reminds us, EDI generally involves how societies and workplaces address equality and inequality for different socio-demographic groups. Inclusion (i.e., the provision of real opportunities for equal access), as it is stated in the article, is often linked with systematic state policies that aim to boost the engagement and participation of people in the workforce who have stopped or reduced the amount they work because of illness or disabilities.

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

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

The fourth article, titled ‘How supervisors and coworkers enable workplace practices to foster success for employees with mental health and/or addiction challenges’, authored by

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

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

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interactions with coworkers and supervisors have in whether HR practices and priorities have the intended effect on worker experience.

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

The take-away from this study is that successful work reintegration for individuals with MHAC requires explicit attention to worker accommodations. Which HR practices and priorities are most salient in this regard is not well understood, and rarely has policy been informed through the voices of those who receive the support. However, the study emphasizes the critical role that supervisors and coworkers play in determining whether employees experience an organization’s HR practices and priorities as intended. Importantly, while the majority of the participants spoke highly of the WISEs in which they worked, some participants experienced problems not because of the “rules” but because of the actions and/or attitudes of specific individuals. Therefore, organizations with high turnover and/or mandates to increase inclusion may benefit from offering training modules to supervisors and coworkers, firstly to improve knowledge and understanding of the types of challenges that employees with MHAC may experience and, secondly, to highlight how the use of social supports can help supervisors and coworkers effectively enact the principles of inclusion to which their organizations aspire.

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

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

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

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

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career advancement for knowledge workers from minority ethnic backgrounds in the UK. The author mentions that extant research has emphasized that a high attainment of education and skills alone is not sufficient for career advancement without substantial support derived from network connections. And adds that career advancement is frequently gauged through promotions and earnings trajectories.

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

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

The sixth and final article, titled ‘Learning to dance the interview dance: The job interview as an obstacle to employment for autistic university graduates’ and authored by Brian Garrod

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

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

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

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benefits that would not otherwise be captured, including improved productivity, greater staff retention, reduced absenteeism and enhanced organisational reputation.

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

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

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

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.

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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal

Guest Editorial: The disability inclusion challenge

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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

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<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.

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

The objectives of the conference were to:

- 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.

The papers presented in the conference addressed a wide range of disability issues, including disability and intimate partner violence, disability and gender, social construction of disability identity, disability and the (post-) pandemic workplace, cultural variation in hiring people with disabilities. However, the conference went well beyond the issue of disability to tackle wider EDI issues, such as law and inclusion, neurodiversity and assistive technologies, neurodivergent academics, women and work, mental health and the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, experiences of sexual and gender identity minorities, diversity and emotional labour in the gig economy, impact of workplace networks on minorities career advancement, etc. Therefore, this special issue publishes a selection of papers that were presented in the conference that make robust empirical, theoretical or methodological contributions to a wide range of EDI matters, as well as experiences of policy makers and practitioners. It serves as a strong request to governments, policymakers, scholars, civic society. It underscores the necessity to acknowledge the nuanced understandings of the systemic nature of disability and wider EDI issues and their impact on practices and policies.

Overview of the papers in this special issue

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

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

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

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

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

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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.
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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.
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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.
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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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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.

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

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31 The take-away from this study is that successful work reintegration for individuals with
32 MHAC requires explicit attention to worker accommodations. Which HR practices and
33 priorities are most salient in this regard is not well understood, and rarely has policy been
34 informed through the voices of those who receive the support. However, the study
35 emphasizes the critical role that supervisors and coworkers play in determining whether

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

The fifth article, titled ‘Decoding the networking strategies of Asian and black workers in the London insurance market’, authored by Mani Pillai, employs an individual-level analysis and focuses on knowledge workers drawn from Asian and Black ethnic groups in the London Insurance Market. These two demographic groups were chosen because they represent a substantial proportion of the minority ethnic population in England and Wales. Given that the trading activities of the London Insurance Market are underpinned by interdependent relations among its participants, reinforced by personal connections and sustained rapport, it provides an appropriate context for examining the networking strategies adopted by Asian and Black workers to accelerate their careers. The study poses two research questions: a. what motivates Asian and Black knowledge workers to adopt specific strategies to establish and leverage their workplace networks within the London Insurance Market? B. which factors steer the success or failure of these network strategies? This study is grounded in a relational view of network strategies, utilizing Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and habitus.

Drawing data from the Office for National Statistics, the study notes that the England and Wales 2021 Census recorded that 9.3% and 4% of the overall population were Asian and Black ethnic groups respectively, representing approximately 72% of the minority ethnic population in England and Wales. The study cites literature demonstrating that this demographic composition has an impact on knowledge industries, which use existing information or generate new information to solve problems. In 2021, knowledge industries employed a quarter of the UK’s total population but 33% of the Asian population and 25% of the Black population participated in them. The study acknowledges that the reasons for this pattern are unclear, but a strong educational background is typically necessary for

careers in knowledge industries. This, according to the study, aligns with research indicating that minority ethnic families in the UK prioritize formal education and professional credentials for high-status careers.

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

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

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

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

The sixth and final article, titled ‘Learning to dance the interview dance: The job interview as an obstacle to employment for autistic university graduates’ and authored by Brian Garrod and Marcus Hansen, analyses how the traditional job interview might form an obstacle to autistic people obtaining employment. The study focuses on the United Kingdom and in particular on the UK’s Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which in 2023 drew attention to the size of the employment gap for autistic people. As the DWP acknowledges, autistic people have one of the lowest employment rates of any group, with fewer than 3 in 10 in work. According to 2021 data drawn from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), this compares with around 5 in 10 disabled people in employment and nearly 8 in 10 of non-disabled people.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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