



Inclusion – beyond processes and policies



Peter Cheese
CEO, CIPD

We should all know why inclusion and diversity is important for business outcomes as well as wider societal outcomes – how diversity drives creativity and innovation, diversity that reflects the communities we are part of and the customers we serve, and our ability to attract and retain all the skills and capabilities we need.

Inclusion is about giving opportunity and voice to all, of feeling in a safe culture and environment to be different but also united in common goals. And to be able to challenge and call out bias, unfairness, discrimination, or the inappropriateness of language or action. It has been described as not just of being invited to the party, but being asked to dance. Getting the best out of all our people, collaborating and working together; respecting and valuing difference.

Many organisations have put in place more processes and policies to encourage greater diversity and work towards inclusion. Such as recruitment policies for diverse candidate

shortlists, or supporting employee resource groups (ERGs) that bring together diverse or minority groups within an organisation.

But the reality is that real and lasting change has to come from behaviour and culture change. These are driven by many things, in particular our own experiences, backgrounds, assumptions, and biases – both as individuals, but also as organisations and institutions.

Racism and discrimination exist in so many forms and can exist between as well as within our different communities. It is not just the overt stereotyping or racist actions, but more persistently can come from micro-aggressions, thoughtlessness, the language we use, and how people are excluded or overlooked. These are the attributes of institutional racism which are too often misunderstood or brushed over.

These cultural and behavioural aspects therefore must begin with a deeper understanding of the issues of discrimination, and what racism really is. As we are being reminded, what one person

might see as 'banter', another can clearly see very differently. This understanding must begin with opening up to the lived experience of so many black people and people of colour, or those from disadvantaged backgrounds or other minority groups. For me, this has raised my own awareness of what can be described as white privilege or advantage – things I have not had to confront or even think about as I go about my daily work and social life.

We need therefore to look deeper, to commit to action and the interventions that really will make the sustainable difference. It is a lot more than processes and policies.

Let's understand and be honest about where we really are

As organisations we must be clearer on where we really are, and then be more transparent about it. We need better evidence. Yes, we need the data on our demographics, but also on progression, retention, and on pay differences. We should have benchmarks and targets that show seriousness of intent. As the CIPD we have been calling for ethnic pay gap reporting, which although not perfect and will have its challenges would send stronger signals about what we should all expect.

Raising awareness of lived experience

We need to engage all our people in raising awareness and understanding of lived experience, both externally but critically also the lived experience for people of colour and from other protected diversity characteristics inside our organisations. How do they experience work, opportunities for progression, how they are treated by colleagues, whether their voice is being heard. These may be tough conversations and we have to build the cultures of trust and support to allow those conversations. Not just in an annual engagement survey, but literally all the time.

Allyship and being anti-racist not just non-racist

We need to confront racism in our institutions and organisations much more honestly. That is something I have understood better over the last couple of years. It is not enough to say we are non-racist, we have to be actively anti-racist. We have to understand all the things that go in to a culture and experience that work against people of colour, then we have to stand up to those things. The notion of allyship is being talked about more and it is really important. White people and white leaders at all levels have to be part of this change. To call out racism in all its forms, and not stay silent or expect others to confront it.

The difference between equity and equality

For a long time most of us have lived by a view of fairness as providing a level playing field. That is equality – giving people the same resources or opportunities. The problem is, that the people coming on to the field are not all starting from the same place. Equity recognises that each person has different circumstances and allocates resources and opportunities needed to get to an equal outcome. That is quite a shift, but is critical in creating true inclusion, in helping progression for all to achieve diversity at all levels and throughout our organisations.

Training and supporting our managers

In this context we must do more to train and support managers at all levels to engage and be open to listening to all of their increasingly diverse teams. To understand their own experiences and behaviours, to understand how to get to equality through equity, and how this in turn will help them achieve positive business outcomes. And then to hold them to account for how they are supporting diversity and building the values and principles of inclusion.

The role of the people profession

The people profession, must be at the heart of the actions and changes that are needed. We must have the evidence and insights, and know what the levers are that we need to pull. We must consistently challenge leaders to lead by example and to understand these deeper issues of inclusion.

But we must also challenge ourselves within the profession to lead by example, to understand our own demographic profile and understand the lived experiences, the progression and opportunities for people from all backgrounds. We can then lead with credibility to change our organisations.

Within the NHS, the People Plan and the Future of HR and OD programme and report call out directly the action and intent to make sure the people profession is representative of the communities they serve and to lead by example in promoting and supporting inclusion and diversity. This work is guiding the direction for the whole people profession within the NHS and the banner of [#InclusiveHR](#) is helping to provide that rallying call.

There are strong networks across the NHS of black, Asian and ethnic minority leaders in the profession. The London NHS community of HR and OD leaders, the London HPMA and the Deputy Directors of HR networks are good examples and seeking to connect and champion inclusion, to lead by example, and to promote the [#InclusiveHR](#) principles. This is a great movement to change the demographic profile, cultural competence and reputation of our profession across what is the largest organisation in Europe, and it can be shared with other organisations and Inclusion and Diversity networks.

For the CIPD, this is also a central theme which we will continue to champion, helping to break down the barriers to entry and progression of our diverse communities. There are also professional capabilities we need to further develop, and within our CIPD Profession Map we have called out not only a golden thread of inclusion and diversity that must work through all areas of our people practices, but also where we really need deeper specialism in this field.

Together we can make change happen.

Peter Cheese
CEO, CIPD

Join the social movement

#InclusiveHR