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How can I... create the most inclusive Future Workplace?

Why is it important?
Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the offices of most organisations, including those of local government, were not designed to maximise the talent of the full diversity of their workforce. Inclusive workplaces are happier, more motivated and productive, and ultimately deliver better services for their citizens. This is especially true for a diverse and multicultural city like London, given that local authorities are large local employers. Now is the moment for councils to consciously imagine and create workplaces that enable a greater range of people to flourish. Partly this will involve building on developments from the shift to hybrid working, understanding what positive trends we want to keep, and which challenges we need to find solutions to. Beyond this, deeper reflection might be required to consider how organisations can truly bring out the best in their employees, both current and those who they may want to join in the future.

Who should we be more inclusive towards?
Organisations should strive to be inclusive of all of their staff as individuals, as well as towards minority groups that are underrepresented as a whole in their workforce. As one interviewee at a local authority said, "our workplaces have been designed for extroverts". Those who are loud and can play office politics thrive, which means that those who don't feel socially confident miss out on career opportunities and development. Research shows that minority groups like women or BAME people, as well as neurodiverse people, are less likely to speak up and socially engage in organisations (and lose out accordingly). Therefore, creating a culture of inclusion needs to start with a focus on including all individuals, of all personalities and backgrounds.

Build on Covid-19-induced transformations
The shift to remote and then hybrid working has had both positive and negative impacts on inclusivity in organisations. Organisations should be aware of these changes, and build on the good, and respond to the bad.

Examples of positive changes include:

- Individuals with lesser mobility not having to do difficult commutes into buildings not designed for them;
- Having fewer after-work social events - vital networking opportunities for jobs - but which can be off-putting to some, for example, parents with young children, those who don't drink, or those who socially don't feel comfortable.
- Enabling neurodiverse individuals to engage more easily in meetings - research has shown that some find it easier to engage with online formats.

Improving the power balance in meetings and enabling more introverted

personalities to participate more easily. In online meetings, it's harder for any one person to take all the air time, and the chat function allows people to share their ideas in writing.

Some of these might be permanent changes that organisations should try to embrace. One particular idea that seems sensible is for organisations to **offer particularly flexible work packages to neurodiverse people** to ensure that they have the best work life possible. By allowing people to spend more time in the environment that they are happiest and most productive, boroughs will get the most out of their staff and ensure they are enticing organisations to work in.

Unfortunately, as with many system shocks, inequalities have been exacerbated for many minority groups as a result of Covid-19, as one Mckinsey study revealed. For example, women were particularly worried about health and safety of on-site workplaces, as well as mental-health issues. Women also expressed increased concerns about household responsibilities as a result of remote working. LGBTQ+ identifying employees also disproportionately felt isolation during remote working. Given that mental health emerged as a significant issue in this study, LOTI recommends **investing in mental health resources and advertising them to specific target groups as a first step**, as part of a focus on building healthy workplaces, as per our other [pamphlet?] on creating healthy future workplaces.

Boroughs should also commit to **consciously running more inclusive virtual meetings**. Optimally, virtual meetings might empower those who might find it harder to contribute in in-person meetings. For example, those with hard-of-hearing can use automatic closed captions and read documents on their own screens at their own pace or ahead of meetings.

However, they might also reinforce existing problems with meetings, or even make them worse. For example, research shows that women talk less than men of equivalent position or knowledge during in-person meetings. Therefore, organisations should try to measure and understand how different groups of people do or do not enjoy virtual meetings. Interested boroughs who want to ensure that their virtual meetings are as inclusive as possible can already **consult LOTI's guide for running inclusive virtual meetings.**

Ensuring structural inclusivity

Beyond some of the challenges immediately raised by the move to remote and hybrid working, there are a number of challenges and opportunities that organisations could embrace to generate sustained positive changes in inclusivity.

Firstly, boroughs should ensure they are doing all they can on recruitment, which is a significant hurdle to creating diverse organisations. For example:

- LOTI encourages boroughs to **use ethical recruitment platforms** that are designed to reduce the impact of human biases, such as Applied, which LOTI uses and would endorse. AI and data-driven recruitment can

help, but isn't necessarily free of biases which might be hardwired into its design, so this alone isn't enough.

- To **generate a more diverse talent pool** applying for jobs, organisations should run their JDs through an online tool such as Gender Decoder, The Totaljobs Gender Bias Decoder, or Applied's Job Description Tool to help ensure you're using gender neutral language. They should also list their opportunities in places that share jobs for underrepresented groups - such as Adas List, Evenbreak, Proud Employers and UK Black Tech.
- Organisations should stress in job listings that they encourage diverse applicants to apply, and again, that in our new hybrid work models, there will be **the flexibility for neurodiverse staff** to find the best working solution for them.
- For more information on how to improve recruitment practices to support a more diverse workforce, read LOTI's Recruitment Guide.

Boroughs should also ensure that the people they want to include have a role in shaping the policy that shapes the organisation. Of course, having groups or networks for specific groups is useful - especially if senior leaders actively meet with and listen to them - but with almost infinite ways to identify oneself, there may be people not represented by such a group who an organisation should be listening to. The fundamental question is: how are diverse views informing decisions? There are a number of innovative ways that boroughs might want to try, which from our research include, but are not limited to:

- **'Reverse-mentoring'** - a process by which senior staff are 'mentored' by staff more junior than them. This has been implemented in the European Commission. This helps ensure that young people are listened to, but HR may want to heavily weight the diversity of mentors to ensure that senior leaders have one-to-one feedback with a particularly diverse group of people, and simultaneously promote good career opportunities for them. This webpage offers a useful introduction to the practice.
- **Undertake periodic user research** into different groups to understand how they 'use' the organisations they work in, and what changes might be necessary. As boroughs develop skills in user research and user-centred design for their services, these skills can equally be applied to their own internal processes with a focus on inclusion. This is what the GLA did during the pandemic to understand how different demographics within their organisation were faring, picking up far more granular information than an anonymous survey would.

Lastly, **digital and IT departments in boroughs should pay special consideration to diversity and inclusion** to ensure that the new digital futures of their organisation are positive. Those working in digital need little reminding that technologies can have both positive and negative unintended consequences on social equity. As such, this department in particular should have a strong relationship with HR on inclusion, and try to include as diverse stakeholders or users whenever possible when piloting or testing new digital offerings for their organisation.

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Recommendations

1. Offer particularly flexible work packages for neurodiverse people and those with physical disabilities;
2. Invest in health and wellbeing resources with a target on minority groups who may have particularly struggled with the pandemic;
3. Train staff to be aware of the measures needed to run more inclusive virtual meetings;
4. Use more inclusive recruitment practices;
5. Ensure that diverse stakeholders are included in decisions made about digital technologies for the organisation.

Useful Resources

LOTI (2021) *How to design inclusive online meetings, workshops and events,* accessed at https://loti.london/resources/inclusive-online-meetings/

World Economic Forum (2020) *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 4.0 A toolkit for leaders to accelerate social progress in the future of work,* accessed at https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_NES_DEI4.0_Toolkit_2020.pdf

Mindtools (2020) Reverse Mentoring, accessed at https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/reverse-mentoring.htm

Harver (2020) Five proven practices for more diverse recruitment, accessed at https://harver.com/blog/inclusive-recruitment/