

Five Trust Tests

How to know when its ok to ask your people to share personal information about their disability / long-term condition.

Building Disability Confidence from the Inside Out

Leadership Theme: Sharing Personal Information and Earning Trust

A first edition briefing by PurpleSpace





Building employer trust

Our members want to build a better, more inclusive world for employees with disability and by doing that they want to make it easier for people to bring their authentic selves to work.

As a result, we are seeing more organisations attempt to get better data about the number of employees with disabilities that they employ. We also see greater efforts to improve how an organisation asks if their people have a disability or long-term condition.

This is complex terrain and there is very little best practice guidance when it comes to building better data collection process's regarding this aspect of human identity and especially when there are different cultural, socio-political and legislative contexts. What is more, wherever you operate it is unlikely that you can simply rely on "asking better questions" in order to get a better understanding of the impact of disability on your workforce and / or customer base.

Last year we invited organisational psychologist, John Amaechi to join our CEO, Kate Nash in conversation with the PurpleSpace community to talk about the sharing personal information vs management-earning trust dynamic. As a result, we are building on his creative challenge to organisations to think deeply about how they earn trust and have created this short resource briefing to get us all thinking.

In a nutshell, we want our member employers to continue to foster trust and we want to support their colleagues understanding of what they need to do in order to earn it.

We offer '**Five Trust Tests**' for you to debate internally – these are the things that we recommend need to be seen to be happening if you are attempting to improve your organisation's monitoring and data collection process's.

We think these '**Five Trust Tests**' will help an organisation to:



1. Build the trust of their employees with disabilities as they decide whether to share personal information, or not.



2. Understand what must be seriously addressed before any big campaigns on new data collection, for whatever purpose, are conducted.



3. Support different decision-making colleagues, who may have little experience in the human dynamic of disability / long-term conditions, to understand the individual complexity of sharing this personal information about disability before introducing new data collection process's.

Being clear on purpose

In addition, we encourage you to think deeply about the purpose of data collection. Consider the different purposes of data collection below:



1. Is it to understand organisational progress over time, and you equate the willingness to share personal information as a proxy for measuring the extent to which the employer has become disability confident?



2. Is it to understand and measure disabled employee satisfaction with aspects of the company experience and compare with non-disabled counterparts?



3. Is it to monitor equal pay, career progression, fair redundancy policies and other equality indicators?

You may have other purposes. In other words, just knowing that you have persuaded 4% of your employees with disabilities to share personal information with you is far from being useful in and of itself. You must start with purpose. It will be easier, indeed essential to build trust if your people know WHY you want this information and can see, over time, that you used it wisely for the purposes for which it was intended.

At PurpleSpace we help our members build disability confidence from the inside out – that includes our global community of disability employee resource group (ERG) / Network leaders and their teams. And it includes the many thousands of allies and champions that make up our world. We know you are forever improving your leadership skills, forever learning, forever challenging yourselves and forever asking the question “how do we go further and faster?”

This resource is to help us to debate, learn and get better at building a better working world for employees with disability.

“Workplaces fundamentally misunderstand disclosure – they think it's a means by which individuals tell workplaces (in this case) something less-well-known about themselves. However, telling your workplace you have a disability is less about you and ALL about your perception of your workplace's worthiness to learn about you. Your judgement that it has earned the right to know you better.

Workplaces – and the leaders therein – must earn the trust of its colleagues and I think these Trust Tests can support that mission.”

John Amaechi OBE, Psychologist, APS Intelligence Ltd





When employees look for clues

Trust is a two-way street – and grows over time. And when someone shares personal information about their disability or long-term condition, they will most probably be looking for the clues that tell them their colleagues and their employer has earned the right to be trusted. Those clues are unlikely to be found in the communications briefing announcing a new data collection initiative. And they are unlikely to be found in your auto-mated HR systems. Nor are they likely to be found in your regular employee pulse surveys. The clues are found in other places.

Around the globe

Cultural and legal considerations in relation to data collection varies between countries. For example, in some countries it's mandatory and others it's unlawful. In some countries, it's lawful but culturally unacceptable. In short, it's complicated.

So, while there is no consistent approach, there are consistent themes that come from our conversations with thousands of employees with disability with regard to what makes it easier for them to notice the characteristics of 'trustworthy' organisations and thereby feel more able to bring their authentic selves to work and / or ask for the workplace adjustments / accommodations they require.

“ We believe inclusion requires us to change the rules, change the culture and change the lived experience for all our people. For global firms to do this effectively we need to develop plans that are targeted and tailored both to the individual needs of our people and to reflect the different societal attitudes and regulatory frameworks in the countries where we operate. We have one goal - but it will require many approaches to ensure all benefit.”



Matthew Layton, Managing Partner,
Clifford Chance LLP



Five Trust Tests

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1 Trust Test One – your organisation routinely learns directly from your own people through listening groups and / or a disability employee resource group / network. Your organisation may even be deliberately investing in the ERG and the capacity of ERG leaders; if they have status, influence and visibility within the organisation then you are likely to feel safer to share that you have a disability. In addition to the above, or as an alternative, you chose to ask specific anonymised questions during your employee engagement survey. Your own people help you to identify barriers which you then take steps to remove and then you tell your people, and your executive team, that you have done so.

“Employees will always look for clues that it is ok to bring their authentic selves to their workplace. That means you have to demonstrate your active interest in their welfare and career success. Organisations that choose to learn from their own people with disabilities, and mirror back their learning, are more likely to improve their performance when it comes to the recruitment, development and engagement of their employees.”

Stefan Tromel, Senior Disability Specialist, ILO

2 Trust Test Two – you have appointed senior leaders who are responsible for digital accessibility across the organisation, both in terms of employee and customer access. You are seen to be open to the many advantages that have come from working in a super-charged digital era during Covid-19 and want to keep the positive aspects as we work towards a new future.

“Creating a dedicated accessibility leadership role is the starting point not the end goal and every organisation has a job of work keeping on top of technology and ensuring it is inclusive. Nevertheless appointing a senior leader responsible for accessibility is a strong signal of intent that an organisation is prepared to walk the talk.”

Neil Milliken, Global Head of Inclusion-Group CSR, Atos

3 Trust Test Three – you have a well-thought-through, easy to use and visible workplace adjustment / accommodation service which enables employees to access adjustments / accommodations within a specific time frame via carefully structured service level agreements. In addition, your organisation may well have introduced Adjustment Passports to ensure employees have a record of the tools and flexibility that have been agreed.

<https://www.purplespace.org/home?myhub&selected=3363>

“Trust takes time to earn - yet is quickly destroyed. The employee needs to 'trust' that the employer knows how to expertly provide the right kit, chair, software ... they need to 'trust' that their personal information remains respected and confidential and most importantly, they need to 'trust' that their next brand-new CEO doesn't decide disabled colleagues are just not worth the bother. Trust takes time and care to earn and it starts with the Board.”

Susan Scott-Parker, Founder, Business Disability International and Strategic Advisor ILO Global Business Disability Network

4 Trust Test Four – you consistently use external levers to push for internal progress. For example, you may have joined the Valuable 500 movement and / or the ILO Global Business Disability Network and / or take part in the annual #PurpleLightUp movement (as a mark of respect to the annual UN International Day of Persons with Disability on the 3rd December each year). Your tone and style deliberately communicate, internally and externally, that your organisation celebrates the economic contribution employees with disabilities make to economies across the globe.

“Leaders must actively demonstrate their commitment to inclusion – a value that is not demonstrated is a secret. In a world where people with disabilities all too often face discrimination, why would they presume that you are different – you need to show it through your actions if you want to build a culture of confidence and inclusion.”

Tiernan Brady, Global Director of Inclusion, Clifford Chance LLP

5 Trust Test Five – you notice the personal inner confidence challenges employees with disability may sometimes have, especially those who may experience disability / long-term conditions for the first time during their working lives. You encourage story-telling campaigns that support the personal and professional advancement of employees with disability. Your organisation invests at least as much in the development of colleagues with a disability as they do in line manager confidence. Senior disabled executives share their stories in a way that supports others that come behind us to build confidence, resilience and the ability to trust.

“As a newly-disabled senior executive, I have found that the most powerful intervention I can make to support disabled colleagues, and our allies, is very simple. I tell my personal story of disability and how it has affected me, honestly, directly and unflinchingly. By exposing personal vulnerability, I am signalling to our employees that sharing personal information is not just OK, but a valuable contribution to a business culture that celebrates diversity and difference.”

Damian Riley, Managing Director & Client Partner, Education Sector, Capita

Finally, a word on language

Let us end with a few thoughts on language. The words 'declaration' and 'disclosure' are so old school. And yet they are often used thoughtlessly to describe the process of people sharing personal information about disability and long-term conditions. Our advice? Just don't use them. In fact, we would go one step further and suggest you operate a zero-tolerance policy.

Why?

Because their use betrays an outdated and unempathetic mindset. Suggesting disability is an experience that needs to be 'declared' or 'disclosed' conveys a deep-rooted belief that the experience will be naturally hidden as it brings shame, career and personal risk, stigma and discomfort. Often the ask, 'please disclose' signals a legal compliance culture. Thus, the company inadvertently communicates 'we want you to disclose because we will only provide the tools and flexibility you need if required to by law'. This might suggest someone must 'declare' in order to access that flexibility. In addition, and all too often, it signals you must not just 'disclose' – but prove your experience of disability / long-term conditions.

It can be really difficult to make sense of a life experience that you would, if pushed, say you would prefer not to have. Working in an organisation that suggests that having that experience is a secret or a big piece of news is not where you want your organisation to be.

The majority of people who acquire a disability do so through the course of their working lives – depending on where they are in this transition from 'not having a disability' to 'having a disability,' they may well choose not to adopt an identify that still lies in their future.

For some, they may never choose to embrace that aspect of their identity. Consider the colour-blind Chief Financial Officer. He / she / they may not 'disclose' they have a disability – until they can't read their board reports - and even then, they may never do so.

Encourage people to share their personal information when you are crystal clear how they and the company will benefit – and crystal clear that the organisation can be trusted with information.

Because trust is a two-way street.

“ Why would an organisation that wants to make it easier for its people to bring their authentic selves to work and ask for a workplace adjustment or accommodation (if indeed they need one) use words that suggest the opposite? Employers must choose words that convey that all human difference, including disability, is anticipated and positively celebrated if they want to create a step-change in their inclusive-culture strategy. ”

Brendan Roach, Director of Strategy & Networkology





PurpleSpace

PurpleSpace is a unique professional development and networking hub for disability employee resource [ERG] group / network leaders, champions and allies around the world.

Our 1300+ members across 160 employer brands reach over 500,000 employees with disability between them. Members join in order to increase the effectiveness of their disability ERGs / networks, develop their leadership skills and learn how to help their organisations to become disability confident from the inside out. We call it Networkology and it is having a powerful worldwide impact on driving the next phase of cultural change within many different types of organisations.

The introduction of rights-based legislation is what we call the first phase of change. In some parts of the world that is still on the move.

The second phase is the process where employers tap into the enabling products and services that help them to create better policy, practice and procedure. That phase continues.




Meanwhile, the third phase of change has begun. Where employees with disability build inner confidence, lean into their careers and create meaningful conversation about how to get ahead at work. High performing disability ERGs and networks are at the vanguard of this change. This is the new modern approach to sustaining culture change.

It's what we do.

Find the space to think Networkology. PurpleSpace



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