



LLOYDS
BANKING
GROUP



Doing Seniority Differently

A study of high fliers living with ill-health, injury or disability

Interim report: executive summary

September 2009

Learning from success

Most reports on our experiences as disabled people focus on the barriers and problems we face. But if we focus first on problems, we often forget what is possible – we become pessimists.

For me as a disabled member of the House of Lords I know it was my dreams that took me there, and the inspiration of others who had gone before me. That hope and optimism gave me the motivation to overcome the barriers in my path. If I had thought mainly about the barriers (and heaven knows there were many of them) I would have given up long ago.

This report breaks new ground by starting with disabled people's successes. It shows us what is possible. Roger Berry MP and I, who co-chair the All Party Parliamentary Disability Group, urged people to take part in the research because we need to understand factors in success for our work in Parliament.

At a time when the Speaker of the House of Commons is investigating how to enable more disabled people to enter Parliament, and when private and public organisations are aiming to diversify their boards, this report offers real learning on how to enable more disabled people to succeed.

I will be working closely with RADAR to ensure both that we understand and spread success – and that we tackle the major inequalities and poverty that so many disabled people face in the UK today.

Baroness Jane Campbell
Co-chair
All Party Parliamentary Disability Group



Flying high



We know remarkably little about the experiences of senior people living with ill-health, injury or disability. There is no huge pile of books and learned articles on the disability glass ceiling, the disability pay gap, the contribution of disabled leaders. Government targets focus on “the inclusion of disabled people in the workplace” – not our career progression or tackling the 11 per cent disability pay gap.

I think this is because of low expectations of disabled people. As someone who went to a special school I know about low expectations, about caring systems that sap ambition. But it is changing. As this report shows, some of us are stripping away low expectations - and flying high. And some organisations are getting very serious about spotting and developing all the talents – which makes them more competitive as well as benefiting talented disabled people.

At RADAR we are working strenuously to improve rights to independent living and routes out of poverty for everyone living with ill-health, injury or disability. Millions live in poverty, without the chance to reach their potential. We also run leadership programmes – because we believe that organisations and cultures will change when there is a critical mass of people with personal experience of disability in positions of influence. We support people who want to be local trustees, school governors, MPs and more.

And, thanks to the support of Lloyds Banking Group, who were centrally involved in establishing and helping shape this research, we are delighted to be launching a new Doing Seniority Differently network for people working in senior roles. Raising everyone’s expectations of what disabled people can do will help more and more people to ‘fly high’ – pursuing our dreams, whatever they may be.

Phil Friend
Chair
RADAR

Spotting talent

Lloyds Banking Group is delighted to have been involved with, and sponsored, this groundbreaking piece of research. We have a long track record of recruiting and supporting disabled colleagues. Increasingly, our approach has moved from simply accommodating disabled people, to focusing on their talents to help them develop for more senior roles in our company.



At the same time we have made a clear commitment to ensure we're able to recruit the very best disabled leaders, but all too often we hear that this talent simply doesn't exist externally. But we have never actually believed that! The findings of this research, therefore, will be of great interest to us as we begin to better understand what the external marketplace does actually look like, and in helping us make our leadership teams as diverse as possible.

Fiona Cannon
Equality and Diversity Director
Lloyds Banking Group

Acknowledgements



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- Mike Smith and Agnes Fletcher for their invaluable work on the project.
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- The various organisations that distributed and publicised the questionnaire on behalf of RADAR.
- The ongoing support of Lloyds Banking Group.

This report was written by Liz Sayce, Chief Executive of RADAR.

Executive summary

Very senior disabled people exist – as board level directors, departmental directors, non-executives and more. This first ever national survey of their experiences found a significant senior disabled talent pool: people living with ill-health, injury or disability who are ‘flying high’.

Many have significant impairments – from paraplegia and renal failure to bi-polar disorder – and over half of those we surveyed had had their impairment for over 20 years. The common belief that the only disabled people at the top are those who climbed the career ladder before becoming disabled is contradicted by this new evidence.

“I have suffered from MS for 19 years”.

Chief executive in the public sector

“I have bi-polar mood disorder.”

High flier in the finance and accountancy sector

Disabled high fliers tend to be male, middle-aged and to work in the private sector.

They are very clear about what helped them progress. The factors significantly associated with seniority were having a mentor committed to your career; and having senior staff support throughout your career. This suggests that spotting and developing talent and aspiration may be even more important for progression than simply accommodating impairment. Employers and skills agencies may need truly to “look beyond labels” – to spot, mentor and support talented disabled people.

The factors people said made a difference to their careers:

- **“None but my own obstinacy”**
- **“Coaching”**
- **“Leadership programmes and secondments to broaden experience”**
- **“Being good at managing my own mental health problems at work”**
- **“Sheer hard work and determination – and not taking no for an answer”**
- **“As the boss I could arrange my own adjustments”**
- **“Being in charge makes it easier to cover things up”**
- **“Networking with other people in the same situation and seeing other people at work who cope well and are assertive, in control and happy”**
- **“Disabled role models”**
- **“Litigation!”**

Despite the presence of high fliers, sharp inequalities persist. There are also important inequalities among disabled people – in relation to age, gender, ethnicity and impairment type.

And disabled people are at a massive disadvantage in terms of career progression. Although we found that career aspirations were equal between disabled and non-disabled people, there was a chasm between their actual experiences of seniority. Disabled people were a third as likely as non-disabled people to earn £80,000 or above; and less than half as likely to be a board level Director.

Experiences differ between people with different impairments. In particular, people with mental health conditions were significantly less likely than other disabled people to earn above £80,000, to be board level directors and to believe they would have the same career opportunities as other employees.

Many disabled people have the option to keep their impairment hidden – and many exercise that choice, some or all of the time. People with mental health conditions were particularly likely to choose to conceal their impairment, often because they feared the impact being open might have on their career prospects. This raises important questions about how organisational cultures can enable people to feel safe to be open if they wish.

Many people responding said they would welcome a network to meet other influential people living with ill-health, injury or disability, to pool experiences and support their own career progression. As a result RADAR, with the support of Lloyds Banking Group, has decided to launch a Doing Seniority Differently Network in early 2010.

Key findings

We received 1461 survey responses, 911 from people with ill-health, injury or disability (disabled people). The headline findings are as follows:

- There is a pool of senior, successful disabled people.
- 110 earned £80,000 or above. There were 102 board level executive directors, 80 other directors/heads of departments and 126 senior managers.
- Disabled and non-disabled people had equal career aspirations yet non-disabled people were over three times as likely as disabled people to earn £80,000 or above .
- Only 39 per cent of disabled people were confident that they would have equal career opportunities to non-disabled people.
- Over half of those earning £80,000 or above had had their impairment for over 20 years.
- Some had substantial impairments, from paraplegia and renal failure to bi-polar disorder.
- The high earners were typically male and middle-aged, and were more likely to work in the private than public or voluntary sector (mirroring the wider gender pay gap throughout the economy).

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- Disabled people across the income range were, however, more likely to work in the public and voluntary than the private sector.
 - Two types of support were significantly associated with career progression and high earnings for those earning £80,000 or above: having a mentor committed to your career; and having senior staff support throughout your career. No disability specific support or adjustments were positively associated with progression (although they may be necessary to working at all). This suggests employers may need truly to “look beyond labels” to support the careers of talented disabled people.
 - There are, despite this pool of talent, huge challenges.
 - Non-disabled people were over twice as likely to be board level executive directors and three times as likely to be other directors/heads of department. Disabled people were more likely to occupy non-leadership roles.
 - Disabled people were less likely to get mentoring and career-long senior support – the very supports that the ‘high fliers’ valued for career progression.
 - 62 per cent of disabled people had the option not to reveal their impairment, of which 75 per cent did hide it sometimes or always. Most commonly they were open to colleagues rather than those with power in the organisation.
 - People with mental health conditions were nearly four times more likely than other disabled people to be open to ‘no one’ about their impairment; and less than half as likely to be open to everyone. Other groups who disclosed “potentially hidden impairments” – people with long-term health conditions or learning difficulties – were more likely than other disabled people to be open to everyone. There were several reasons for keeping a condition private, one of which was fear or experience of discrimination.
 - In the private sector, disabled people were less likely to be open about their impairment.

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- Pay also varied by impairment group. People with mental health conditions were less likely to earn £80,000 or above than other disabled people; and less likely to be board level executive directors. They, and people with learning difficulties, were more likely to hold junior roles.
 - Different impairment groups also valued different generic and disability specific career support and development.
 - People with mental health conditions were less likely than other disabled people to believe they had had or would have the same career opportunities as other employees.
 - People with physical/mobility impairments were less likely to aspire to be promoted in the next two to three years.
 - Disabled people were less likely than non-disabled people to report working for an organisation committed to helping all people. This may suggest disabled people are less convinced that any such commitment will help them progress or that they believe there is a difference between what organisations say and what they do.
 - They were also less likely to report support from management colleagues or from family and friends.

The research

The full version of this research report is available on RADAR's website at www.radar.org.uk. It contains the full survey findings: success stories of the 'high fliers', the challenges we face, the experience of inequality and the diversity of experience, across sectors and different impairments. It also explains the methodology we used.

This interim report contains our initial survey results. RADAR is now undertaking qualitative interviews with senior individuals, employers and recruitment agencies, and analysing implications of all the findings. In late 2009 we will publish the final Doing Seniority Differently report, which will include the full data and clear recommendations, for employers, recruitment agencies, HR and Government.

We welcome comments and discussion on this interim report and suggestions for ways to improve career progression opportunities for people living with ill-health, injury or disability (please contact liz.sayce@radar.org.uk)

Conclusion

The spirit of the comments of participants in this research was one of activism. People were managing their work, their impairments, often their own adjustments and support:

“What worked? Being a disabled role model and activist.”

Some people are flying high, harnessing their talents and energies, sometimes hugely helped by mentors and senior staff and other support. Others are frustrated and feel their potential is stifled. Some live in anxiety that if their ‘secret’ is discovered their position at work will be jeopardised.

RADAR seeks to work with others for a world in which disabled people have the freedom to develop our talents and fly – freedom from fear, from prejudice and from low expectation. People will make different choices – for instance, some will choose self-employment partly in order to create their own flexible working. But our ambition is a just and equal society in which those choices are not constrained by lack of opportunity or encouragement to succeed across sectors.

We hope that increasing our understanding of those who have succeeded will add to the pool of disabled role models that gives everyone visions of the possible; and help open doors for new generations of disabled people to pass through.

We welcome comments on the report. Please contact liz.sayce@radar.org.uk.

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