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ultimate people networks

Secrets & Big News

The research findings

RESEARCH BROCHURE

From the Kate Nash Associates' learning and development series for disabled employees – designed especially for disability confident employers

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Secrets & Big News: The research findings

In February 2013 Kate Nash Associates invited 100 employers to take part in the Secrets & Big News research project. The employer participants were drawn from KNA's extensive reach across its client and contact base.

There was no direct cost to take part in the project, other than a time commitment to complete a broad questionnaire about challenges and current practice with regard to monitoring, and time to circulate a second survey to disabled employees.

55 employers took part and together they reached a total of 2,511 disabled employees who responded to the survey. The Advisory Board had set a target of 500 responses so the reach far exceeded expectation.

The initial findings of the survey were shared with employer partners during five focus groups in October 2013. 41 employers took part in the focus groups with members of the advisory board, to discuss the early findings and hear their reactions and ideas to incorporate in the book 'Secrets & Big News.'

Detailed responses from employers and employees have been kept in complete confidence.

EMPLOYEE SURVEY RESPONSES

We asked employer partners to circulate the employee survey as widely as they could and allowed them the freedom to do this in any way that suited them best. We shared with our employer partners our goal of reaching, as far as possible, 10 disabled people per organisation.

Some sent out a global message across the organisation, some to those employees who had requested or secured a workplace adjustment and some to those people who were involved in a disability network or business resource group. In total 2,511 took part with an average of 45 per organisation.

Responses were gathered online between 4 June and 31 August 2013. Of the 2,511 responses from disabled employees – 873 responses were from employees in the private sector, 1636 from the public sector (2 responses did not give their employer and therefore we are unable to classify).

Q2 – Have you ever shared information about your disability, illness, injury or accident with your employer?

	All	Private	Public
Yes	90%	86%	92%
No	10%	14%	8%

Base: All respondents (2,511)

Q3 – If YES, what was the main reason why you did so? Choose ONE only.

	All	Private	Public
I needed my employer to make an adjustment for me, or to take it into account in the way that I do my job	57%	55%	58%
I just wanted to share the information in case the subject came up in the future	16%	17%	15%
There is a formal process, so I just followed the process	12%	10%	12%
I did so anonymously via the staff survey	1%	1%	1%
Any other reason? (Please write it in the box below.)	14%	17%	12%

Base: All who have shared information with employer (2,288)

Q4 – If NO, why haven't you shared the information? Choose ONE only.

	All	Private	Public
I don't really need any adjustments made in the way that I do my job so I prefer not to notify my employer	22%	27%	20%
I don't see it is relevant to tell my employer – it is my business	15%	16%	11%
I am worried that if I tell my employer there may be repercussions either now, or in the future	60%	50%	68%
Any other reason? (Please write it in the box below.)	3%	7%	2%

Base: All who haven't shared information with employer (329)

Q5 – Over 11 million people with a health condition or impairment are protected from discrimination by the disability provisions of the UK's equality law. Yet only a quarter of those describe themselves as disabled. Why do you think that is the case? Choose ONE answer only.

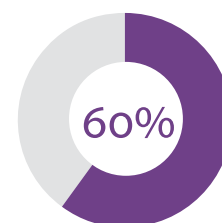
	All	Private	Public
It takes a long time to understand that what you are experiencing is the same as employment law definitions of disability	22%	21%	22%
Some people will always resist the label of 'disability' because it feels so negative	27%	26%	26%
It is a big personal step to associate yourself with the word disability	36%	36%	34%
Any other reason? (Please write it in the box below)	15%	15%	13%

Base: All respondents (2,511)

Q6 – When you have been asked by your employer whether you have had a disability has it been clear why your employer was asking for the information?

	All	Private	Public
Yes	58%	58%	58%
No	42%	42%	42%

Base: All who have shared information with employer & answered question (1,971)



are worried that if they share information about their disability, illness, injury or accident with their employer there may be repercussions

36%

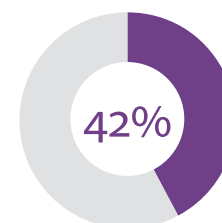
suggest it is a big personal step to associate yourself with the word



27%

say some people resist the label because

"it feels so negative"

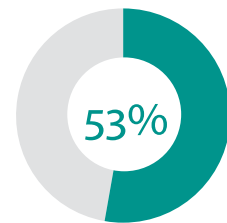


believe that it has not been clear why their employer was asking whether they have had a disability

Q7 – When you have been asked by your employer whether you have a disability have you understood how the information would be used by your employer?

	All	Private	Public
Yes	47%	45%	49%
No	53%	55%	51%

Base: All who have shared information with employer & answered question (2,009)



do not understand how information on their disability would be used by their employer

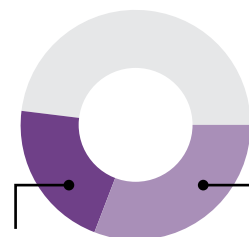
Q8 – Did you know the definition of disability in the UK Equality Act 2010 (previously the Disability Discrimination Act) when you shared your personal information about your disability, illness, injury or accident with your employer? (And if you work in another country did you know about the definition in that country?)

	All	Private	Public
Yes	52%	41%	59%
No	48%	59%	41%

Base: All who have shared information with employer & answered question (2,329)

52%

of all respondents knew the definition of disability in the Equality Act before sharing information



41%
Private sector employees

59%
Public sector employees

Q9 – Have you ever sought the advice of a disability charity or third party agency when deciding whether to tell your employer about whether you have a disability, illness, accident or injury?

	All	Private	Public
Yes	21%	16%	23%
No	79%	83%	77%

Base: All Respondents (2,511)



21%

have sought the advice of a disability charity or third party agency when deciding whether to tell their employer about whether they have a disability, illness, accident or injury

Q10 – If you have sought advice from others, was the information useful?

	All	Private	Public
Yes	79%	75%	80%
No	21%	25%	20%

Base: All those who have sought advice (936)

Open ended questions – not broken by sector

Q11 – What ONE piece of advice would you give to employers about what they can do to make it easier for people to share information about their disability, illness, injury or accident?

Respondents were extremely candid in offering advice to their employers about what they can do differently, and better, in order to make it easier for people to share personal information.

Following detailed analysis of the responses most suggestions focused on the following key themes:

1. Employers need to be clear about the purpose of monitoring and state how the information will be used
2. Employers need to make it clear that sharing personal information will not have a negative outcome on their career
3. Employers need to recognise that the participation in a monitoring exercise can be an emotional transaction for some
4. Employers could do more to help individuals with acquired disability/ health conditions to talk to others who have experienced disability and to access support and training to build resilience and confidence
5. Employers must focus on sharing positive messages about disabled talent, offer an easy, accessible workplace adjustment process and signpost to an expert to talk to.

Q12 – What ONE piece of advice would you give to employers about what they can do to make it easier for people to share information about their disability in order to get the adjustments they may need?

Respondents were extremely candid in offering advice to their employers about what they can do differently, and better, in order to make it easier for people to share personal information, in order to get the adjustments they may need.

Following detailed analysis of the responses most suggestions focused on the following key themes:

1. Employers must focus on the culture of the organisation, rather than the number of disabled employees they have
2. Employers should positively promote the availability of adjustments
3. Employers should provide a point of contact other than line manager to discuss and secure adjustments and address lack of confidence
4. Employers must offer training and signposting for line managers.

Q13 – What ONE piece of advice would you give to employers about what they can do to make it easier for people to be themselves at work?

Respondents were extremely candid in offering advice to their employers about what they can do differently, and better, in order to make it easier for people to be themselves at work.

Following detailed analysis of the responses most suggestions focused on the following key themes:

1. Employers must identify the imaginative leaders who will support a culture which focuses on the need to 'normalise difference' and fosters a respectful and inclusive culture

2. Employers must notice and offer interventions to help individuals become confident in periods of transition and when learning how to manage impairment
3. Employers should encourage the establishment of an easy-to-use adjustment process and make it widely available
4. Employers should be specific and positive about its disabled talent, to demonstrate true understanding of the experiences disabled employees
5. Employers should stimulate opportunities for employees to discuss and debate career progression and personal excellence more than the adjustment process

Q14 – What ONE piece of advice would you give to employers about the things they can do to make it easy for people to understand the connection between the definition of disability in employment law and the experiences they have with disability, illness, injury or accident?

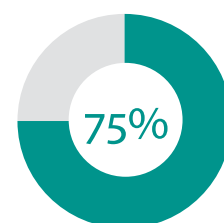
Respondents were extremely candid in offering advice to their employers about what they can do differently, and better, in order to make it easy for people to understand the connection between the definition of disability in employment law and the experiences they have with disability.

Following detailed analysis of the responses most suggestions focused on the following key themes:

1. Employers should make available an in-house expert or confidential channel of information
2. Employers should illustrate what ‘disability/ill-health’ might mean and convey the message that it is “people like us”
3. Employers must offer easily accessible information about the workplace adjustment process and not focus on the words ‘reasonable’ – focus on the word ‘adjustment’
4. Employers should help individuals have the ‘awkward’ conversations about disability.

Q15 – How far would you agree with the following statement?: When deciding to tell anyone about my disability, illness, injury or accident I take into account my view of how others may react to me either now, or in the future.

	All	Private	Public
Strongly agree	42%	41%	42%
Agree	33%	33%	32%
Neither Agree or Disagree	12%	11%	13%
Disagree	8%	8%	8%
Strongly Disagree	6%	6%	5%
Agree (total)	75%	74%	74%
Disagree (total)	13%	13%	13%



agree or strongly agree with the statement
 “When deciding to tell anyone about my disability, illness, injury or accident I take into account my view of how others may react to me either now, or in the future.”

Q16 – If you are happy for us to contact you to help us further,
please provide contact details

1,493 provided details – 59% across all sectors & total

Q17 – If you would like a copy of the summary, please provide
contact details

1,319 provided details – 53% of total (52% of private sector, 54% of
public sector)

EMPLOYER SURVEY RESPONSES

We asked our 55 employer partners about their existing practices about how and when they ask their employees whether they have a disability or not whether they formally monitor, and what their challenges are in this area.

Q1 – Why did the employers wanted to get involved in the project?

- “The data we have recorded about the prevalence of disability in the workplace is far lower than reputable national statistics. We don’t know why or what we are doing wrong. Is it the way we ask the question in formal monitoring exercises? Or is it because of our trade or sector that we are not attracting disabled candidates or not retaining them when they acquire a disability?”
- “We want to see what the current marketplace trends are for this area of work. To hear what other employers are doing. No-one has tackled this issue and so we all struggle”
- “We want ideas about how we can improve our processes and are keen to hear what others are doing in this area – should we start with monitoring or just get on with plans”
- “This is a topic we have discussed a lot and have never come to the ‘right’ answer!”
- “If I don’t deliver the types of numbers that you would expect in a workplace, around 10% then how on earth can I persuade the organisation to spend time and money on improving processes to create an inclusive environment?”

Q2 – The key driver in monitoring

Employer participants all expressed an ongoing desire to better understand the issues that disabled employees face at work as part of building an inclusive workplace.

Outside of wanting parity in monitoring other protected characteristics, many employers focused on the workplace adjustment process as a key driver in wanting better data.

Some employers suggested that it is hard to justify improvement exercises to the adjustment process without accurate data about the number of disabled people employed by the organisation.

Others wanted to create parity with the other protected characteristics, in monitoring data about pay, progression, reward, promotion, training and were exploring how to incorporate disability into existing data capture exercises.

Q3 – Do you formally monitor the number of disabled employees that you have?

73% answered yes. Among the employers surveyed, knowledge about the number of disabled employees as a proportion of the total workforce is mixed. The type of data collected also varies.

Q4 – How many disabled employees do you employ?

34% said they did not know how many disabled employees they employed. Some said the discrepancy between anonymous and non-anonymous surveys was so significant it meant that the data was unreliable and meaningless. Many employers cited how hard it was to collect information, particularly from those employees who may have acquired an impairment while at work.

It has proven difficult to determine the percentage of employers who had data +/- 3% of national averages of disabled people in work. Our estimate is that less than 8% of employers have data that is +/- 3% national known averages.

Q5 – Do you monitor new entrants?

83% monitor the number of new disabled entrants. This data is captured after job offer and onboarding though as part of a general induction and familiarisation programme with new recruits in order to offer any adjustments that may be needed.

Q6 – Do you monitor the number of adjustments provided?

42% of the 55 employers monitor the number of adjustments provided.

Q7 – Do you monitor data about speed and quality of adjustments made?

18% of the 55 monitor data about the speed and quality of adjustments made.

Q8 – Do you ever use the language of 'disclosure' or 'declaration'?

76% of the 55 employers use the language of 'declaration' and 'disclosure'.

Q9 – Do you use the definition of disability used within the Equality Act?

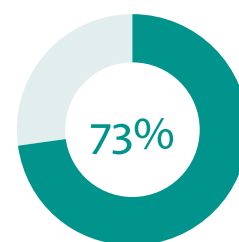
96% surveyed use the definition used within the Equality Act.

Q10 – Do you supplement the definition of disability when you monitor?

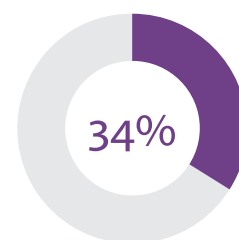
Employers struggle to decide how to phrase the definition of disability when monitoring. 31% supplement the definition of disability with examples of people who might be covered by the definition and used examples of people with different impairments.

Q11 – Do you have a centralised workplace adjustment process?

Of those surveyed 63% said they had a centralised workplace adjustment process. However the majority then described a number of adjustment 'owners'.



of the 55 employers surveyed formally monitor the number of disabled employees they employ



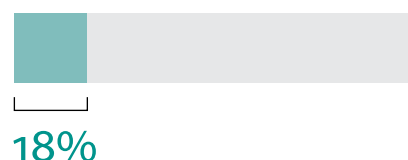
of the 55 employers surveyed did not know how many disabled employees they employed



While nearly all employer participants engaged with the key questions and topics of debate that the report pose,

76%

of the 55 employers use the language of 'declaration' and 'disclosure'



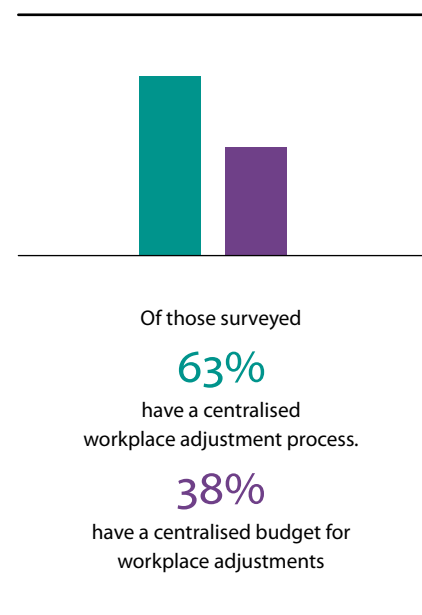
Only 18% monitor data about the speed and quality of adjustments made

Q12 – Do you have a centralised budget for workplace adjustments?

Of those surveyed 38% have a centralised budget for workplace adjustments. Of those, 20% went on to describe other localised budgets.

Key challenges

- Employers acknowledge that while a monitoring exercise might be seen as transactional for the employer, it is often personal and emotional for the employee. Employers acknowledge that this is the case in both formal monitoring exercises and at other times when colleagues share information about their disability. This is a key challenge for employers.
- The employers surveyed expressed their need to improve their data capture but want to do this by better reflecting that they understand this key dynamic. Many feel constrained by structural and procedural systems that do not allow for imaginative and 'human' communication methods. One or two employers expressed disappointment in their legal teams; having to balance a strategic imperative to communicate that the business wants to do well by its people with the risk of non-compliance in delivering workplace adjustments.



The purpose of data capture

- The employers surveyed recognised that language can often get in the way of building an accurate picture about their workforce. The vast majority are keen to find new approaches to make it easier for people to share information about their disability and to respond in appropriate ways.
- Employers suggested that there are two key reasons why they want better data. Firstly, to create better plans in order to reduce barriers for groups of people at a business (macro) level. Secondly, to create better processes to make specific adjustments at the individual (micro) level.
- Employers recognise the need to be clearer about specifying the limits to which they will use/pass on information that is given in monitoring processes and to specify why they asking for information and in what context. Most of the employers also suggested that they need to get better at signposting individuals to information about what adjustments they can get, and how to do so. 75% of the employers expressed concern about whether their processes (to data capture) were 'joined up' or consistent.

Employer intent

Employers expressed again and again their wish to convey the message that disability and ill-health are normal life events and that they want to start with the principle that they are likely to be able to make an adjustment (which both parties will want to be reasonable – or which 'feels fair'). Employer participants often expressed that, when they do ask for information, they do not want to convey the impression that the employer believes 'having a disability makes you fragile' or that 'all disabled people need adjustments'.

- "We should be much more vocal and visible on our own company websites about the support we give to our disabled staff – the existence of networks – so from day one they are not embarrassed to enquire

about or request adjustments and support – this should be part of our mainstream message not an add-on in one-off campaigns”

- “If you can’t educate all the line managers then go for the education of people with a disability so they can help their line manager with what to do”
- “Celebrate senior disabled people’s successes within the organisation and regularly include articles on this in corporate newsletters”
- “Make it explicit that requesting an adjustment will not have a detrimental effect on the career of disabled employees”
- “Let employees self-refer so they have control over the decision to share information or not”
- “Make sure that company stories, town-halls, newsletters have lots of stories of successful disabled employees. And doubly make sure the stories don’t just focus on the adjustments that has been made, that’s just good housekeeping – focus on how brilliant they are and what they do for the business”

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to Charlotte Turner, Bean Research for her expert advice and analysis during the research phase of Secrets & Big News.

Charlotte set up Bean Research in 2012, specialising in research, evaluation and advice on responsible business, sustainability and public policy issues. Charlotte has worked in research and communication on behalf of the private, public and charity sectors for twenty years. Most of that time, she was Research & Information Director at Business in the Community and a Director at Ipsos MORI. Charlotte Turner is a regular speaker and presenter of issue-based research, an Associate of Market Research Society, a Fellow of RSA and a mother of two lovely children! She also works with Cranfield School of Management as an Associate of the Doughty Centre, supporting students and advising partnered businesses on responsible business issues.

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Secrets & Big News

The research findings form the basis of the Secrets & Big News project and the 15 Big Ideas offered for employers and employees in the book of the same name produced in 2014.

Written by Kate Nash OBE it unpacks the challenges that sit behind the subject of monitoring disability in the workplace and invites a fresh conversation between employers and employees.

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