

# Leadership imbalance: Black and Asian leaders missing in action

## A think piece

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The reality across children's services in England and Wales is that despite an increasing Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) population both using and working in children's services and the public sector as a whole, it is still possible to count on one hand the number of directors of children's services who are Black. As researchers into one local authority observed:

*"Nearly every organisation has a problem with diversity. The reality is that most are not as diverse as they would like to be, and those in positions of power are even less diverse than in the rest of the organisation."*<sup>1</sup>

Across local authority management structures there is a pyramid which essentially means that whilst a larger number of Black<sup>2</sup> professionals work within these organisations, they are not gaining promotion into more senior managerial and leadership roles in proportion to their representation within the sector.

In March 2013, the Office for National Statistics released its fourth quarter Employment Statistics<sup>3</sup>, which showed that there were 5.7 million people working in the public sector across the UK; 2.6 million of those people were

employed in either education or public administration. Of course, these figures represent a much larger group of public sector workers but it is important to recognise the significant numbers of employees across all populations that make up the pool from which leaders and future leaders in children's services, adult social services and local government are drawn.

Every three years, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is required to report to Parliament on the progress that society is making in relation to equality, human rights and good relations. Its first Triennial Review entitled 'How Fair is Britain? Equality, Human Rights and Good Relations' was published in 2010.

The findings supported what many in the sector knew simply by looking at the visible under-representation of the BAME population among directors of children's services and, indeed, other chief officers. Despite increasing numbers of staff from BAME groups in the workforce they often do not progress to senior leadership positions. Although the EHRC report highlighted that some of the barriers for women in reaching managerial and professional positions had come down, it noted that *"Black, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and Other Asian groups generally have significantly worse outcomes in terms of employment and earnings, compared to White British people"*<sup>4</sup>. It asserts that *"...the British labour*

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1 P.90, The Disproportionate Impact of Employment Procedures on Black Employees in Nottingham City Council, The Institute for Employment Studies, Nii Djan Tackey, Penny Tamkin, Hülya Hooker, 2002.

2 Black is used a definition within BALI for anyone who experiences direct or indirect discrimination based on the colour of their skin.

3 ONS Q4 2012 Public Sector Employment released 20 March 2013

4 P.418, EHRC Op Cit.

*market continues to be characterised by a high level of occupational segregation*<sup>5</sup> and that segregation affects Black people in numerous ways.

The EHRC looked at two main types of employment segregation<sup>6</sup>: 'Vertical' segregation and 'Horizontal' segregation. Vertical segregation examines the proportion of people in different levels of seniority and types of occupation. Horizontal segregation examines the proportions of the workforce who are drawn from a particular group in different sectors (for example, the numbers of men and women who work in engineering). Although the EHRC notes that the occupational categories are not as comprehensive as they could be. It reports evidence that *"Women and people from some ethnic minority groups are less likely than White men to reach higher level jobs"*<sup>7</sup> and that some ethnic minority groups are less likely to be in higher skilled, professional occupations than others. Gender and ethnicity differences together are also seen as doubling the effects of disadvantage, *"In terms of discrimination in progression, research suggests that Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women face particular discriminatory barriers in the workplace."*<sup>8</sup>

## Barriers faced by Black leaders

There are many barriers facing Black leaders; the first is securing a position within an organisation and then getting on within the organisation, achieving promotion and securing a senior leadership position. Black leaders trying to secure chief officer or very senior leadership positions face barriers when trying to join mainly white organisations or organisations where the very top tier of chief/senior officers are mainly white. For many senior leadership positions elected Members are part of the recruitment process and this also adds to the obstacles faced, particularly where those Members do not reflect the populations they serve in terms of their own ethnicity or/and where they have had no specific equalities training in recruitment and selection.

The Policy Studies Institute (PSI)<sup>9</sup> in its evidence to the EHRC uses the phrase 'process discrimination' to examine the barriers faced by candidates in recruitment, retention and promotion and the implications of these barriers on pay, employment and occupational segregation.

For those applying for senior leadership positions in local authorities, there are often additional layers in the process; one of these is candidate search and long listing which is often conducted by specialist recruitment agencies. Long listing, is a common practice designed to

whittle down a field of suitable applicants to consider for shortlisting. Many of these consultants operate on a key contacts list; they will either know people in authorities and ring them to ask if they know of anyone suitable for the position they are trying to fill or they may have a small network of professionals with whom they 'keep in touch' for their next career move. This reliance on an informal network is potentially the first barrier to such networks faced by Black professionals. If they are not part of an 'in' crowd it is unlikely that their names will become known and be proactively approached in this way. By their very number, senior Black managers may not have the same opportunity to be part of networks or they may be wary of networks as their structure may conform to culturally biased norms and, consequently, the manager may decide that they do not feel comfortable being part of them.

In a 2009 report, the Government Equalities Office<sup>10</sup> pointed to evidence that under-represented groups not only had limited 'social capital' (relationships between people and the mutual obligations and support that these relationships create), but that they were often excluded from these informal networks.

Once an application for a post is made there is further scope for process discrimination. The PSI highlighted a field experiment, testing recruitment procedures. *"[It] involved the submission of matched job applications from white and ethnic minority applicants. Candidates were matched except with respect to their ethnic background and names were randomly assigned to convey that ethnic background. The test sought to estimate the extent of racial discrimination in different areas of the British labour market. Net discrimination in favour of white names over equivalent applications from ethnic minority candidates was 29% (Wood et al, 2009). The level of discrimination was found to be high across all ethnic minority groups."*<sup>11</sup>

For some candidates then, it may be that they don't even make the long-list for consideration. If they do, a further obstacle can be the 'technical assessor' that sits alongside the recruitment consultant to assess the professional skills and knowledge of the potential candidate. Once again, the informal network comes into play in selecting these technical assessors. Furthermore, for some of these assessors it may well have been some time since they were in direct practice and they may not have had any recent equality recruitment training themselves. Although the figures are not available simply because of the low numbers of Black senior leaders in the sector, it is unlikely that they will be represented as one of the technical assessors on long-listing recruitment and selection processes.

5 P.X EHRC First Triennial Report 'How Fair Is Britain' 2010

6 P.382, EHRC Op Cit.

7 P.421, EHRC Op Cit.

8 P.448, EHRC Op Cit

9 Developing The Employment Evidence Base, Policy Studies Institute, D. Smeaton, M. Hudson, D. Radu, K. Vowden, 2010.

10 Increasing Diversity on Private and Public Sector Boards, Ruth Doldor, Professor Susan Vinnicombe, Cranfield School of Management, 2009.

11 P.85 PSI Developing The Employment Evidence Base, Op Cit.

There is a useful, albeit private sector, example of how specific actions by organisations can positively impact on the Black talent pool and increase chances of being retained and promoted. *"Sanglin-Grant and colleagues (2002) examined survey data in the FTSE-100 companies and found that for 'the handful' of companies actively working on race equality issues, an increased minority of ethnic representation at more junior levels was enlarging the pool of candidates for promotion to senior grades."*<sup>12</sup> It is worth considering that in economic terms, some of the local authorities in England and Wales are the equivalent of a FTSE-100 company so, theoretically, the same approach may reap rewards in the public sector.

Getting promoted is another area where process discrimination is often experienced by individual Black leaders. The PSI sets out the work undertaken by Roberts et al, 2008<sup>13</sup> using discourse analysis of promotion interviews they found *"persistent but tangible barriers to ethnic minority groups progressing into management positions."* This, asserts the PSI, does lend weight to concerns that individuals from BAME communities have to be better than their competitors in order to get a job (Parekh, 2000).<sup>14</sup>

Another layer in the process for senior leadership interviews are tests, assessment centres and 'trial by buffet' or mixer type events for shortlisted candidates to meet partners or elected Members. There are well known cultural biases in psychometric testing (Rust & Golombok 1999) and new tests of applied leadership bring in different challenges for Black candidates. The informal layers of organisations and their own culture 'how we do things around here' may well be founded on white norms, without valuing other aspects or skills that different backgrounds can bring. Traits can be negatively reframed from their positive origin; for example, assertiveness reframed as aggression, enthusiasm reframed as pushy etc. A further hazard for some Black candidates can be the 'trial by buffet' situation for chief officer appointments, where candidates are on show and expected to 'perform' for those on the appointment panel and, usually, a range of politicians. Unless these are well set up and backed by appropriate training there can be extremely inappropriate 'informal' questioning based on racially biased views; for example, the politician who asked what a candidate thought of residential care given that most Asian people 'look after their own'. Answering such a loaded question whilst maintaining any hope of getting through a competitive recruitment process is a treacherous business.

So, if the candidate makes it through to the final interview process, they have already navigated numerous barriers. The final interview at a chief officer level is usually a Member led process. The PSI in its evidence to the EHRC put the challenges succinctly, clarifying the important

12 P.86, PSI Op Cit.

13 P.92, PSI Op Cit.

14 P.92. PSI Op Cit.

issue relating to the training of those on interview panels:

*"Discourse analysis of barriers to progression emphasizes the subjective nature of the interview process. A related study (Roberts et al, 2008) sought to understand the discourse processes in promotion interviews in ethnically and linguistically diverse areas and identify some of the wider organizational cultures and practices which may act as a barrier to promotion."*

Some of these relate to specific practices such as processes of socialisation with managers that would help them *"talk like a manager"*, related to informal practices and ethnically-based affiliations.

Moreover, formal procedures for selection interviewing and training in diversity and interviewing skills *"do not engage with the detailed processes of the job interview or scrutinize them for the potential they have for indirect discrimination."* These studies lend weight to concerns that direct forms of discrimination are becoming increasingly less prevalent, whilst indirect, subtler forms of discrimination, are becoming more prevalent. (Ogbonna and Harris, 2006: 400).<sup>15</sup>

Under the Equality Act 2010 and (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011<sup>16</sup>, there is a specific requirement on local authorities to publish information relating to the protected characteristics of employees and, more broadly, on how they are meeting their equality duty within their organisation. They must demonstrate compliance under the Act by, for example, analysing the profile of staff at different grades, levels and rates of pay, the profile of staff leavers, occupational segregation and recruitment and retention. Information from authority to authority differs and few include the information about proportionality for BAME both within the workforce and at more senior leadership levels in their organisations.

Recently, Brighton and Hove City Council commissioned a piece of work to further explore issues of race equality in the local authority following concerns from their Black and Minority Ethnic Workers Forum (BMEWF)<sup>17</sup>. In this report Elaine Bowes and Davina Boakye conclude that within the local authority, they found a 'funnel' or attrition rate which was higher for Black and minority ethnic candidates from shortlist to appointment than for other applicants. They assert that the picture was clear in that *"the 'funnel' is widest for white British/Irish people, and tightest for BME people"*<sup>18</sup>. The authors also note a significant fall from 7.8% in 2010/11 to 2.9% 2011/12, in the proportions of BME people offered posts by the local authority; a fall not in proportion to a corresponding drop in overall applications for employment.

15 P.92 PSI Op Cit.

16 Equality Act 2010: Specific Duties to Support Equality Duty Quick Start Guide for Public Sector Organisations, Government Equalities Office, 2011.

17 Race Equality in Employment Brighton & Hove City Council, Elaine Bowes and Davina Boakye, Global HPO, 2013.

18 P.20 Global HPO, Op Cit.

## Additional expectations of Black leaders

Once appointed, there are a unique set of additional expectations placed onto the shoulders of Black leaders; whether they want them or not they will be there. This is particularly magnified as they are likely to be the only Black leader at chief officer level or one of only a few for positions below chief officer. Forewarned is forearmed, and being prepared for these expectations assists newly appointed senior Black leaders in handling them, alongside the set of expectations that every leader has placed on them when they are appointed. Black leaders often find themselves being used by the organisation as their equalities 'expert'. Black staff in an organisation can vest all their hopes for better treatment on the new Black appointment and expect them to right perceived wrongs that have a long history, almost overnight. Members of the Black community can also have additional expectations that, since the new appointee understands their community, they will act on issues that the organisation may not have acted on before.

All new appointments to senior leadership positions bear the weight of expectations upon them as they start in an organisation. Black leaders have those expectations as well, but, in addition, they are saddled with a whole set of additional expectations, whether they want them or not. The first list of the two illustrations below shows the expectations on all newly appointed leaders and the second list shows the unique additional set of expectations placed on newly appointed Black senior leaders:

A Black leader faces the perceptions of the white staff, partners and politicians; these may vary from a firmly held view that 'they only got the job because they were Black', to views from politicians which are informed by their own particular political or personal views on the place of Black leaders in the workplace in general, or in society. Of course, many will be excited to see the first Black leader within their organisation and genuinely welcome the leader into the organisation or partnerships. The sheer variety of views could be overwhelming to any new leader when preparing for the different opinions that might exist. It is helpful to work out strategies for recognising and tackling situations or comments when they arise, and to reflect on the possible unspoken issues for staff, partners and politicians.

Sometimes, existing Black staff within the organisation can place immense pressure on new and potentially first time senior Black leaders. They will naturally look to the new leader to 'right the past wrongs' of any discrimination they may have experienced in the organisation. They will vest a hope in the new appointment that, finally, the organisation will change its behaviours, particularly where they are perceived by Black staff to be institutionally

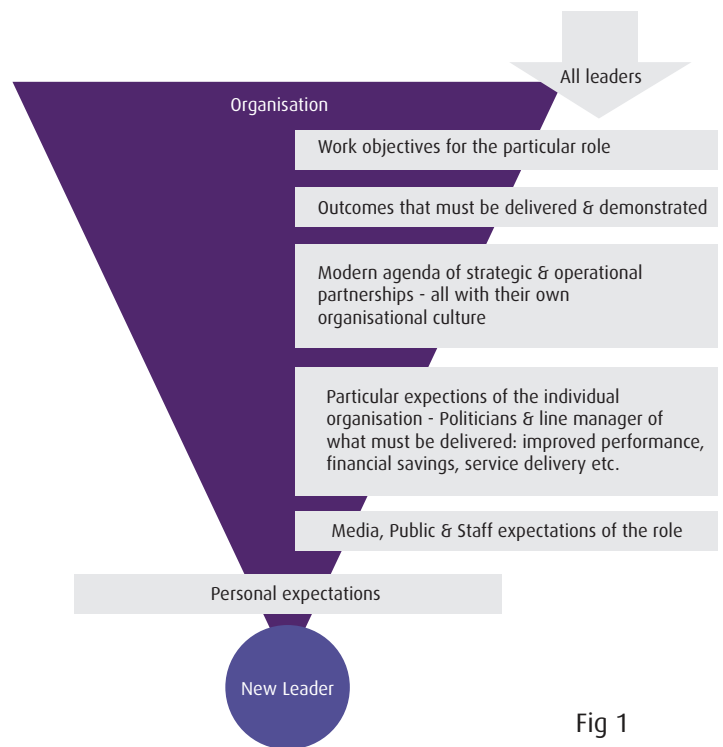


Fig 1

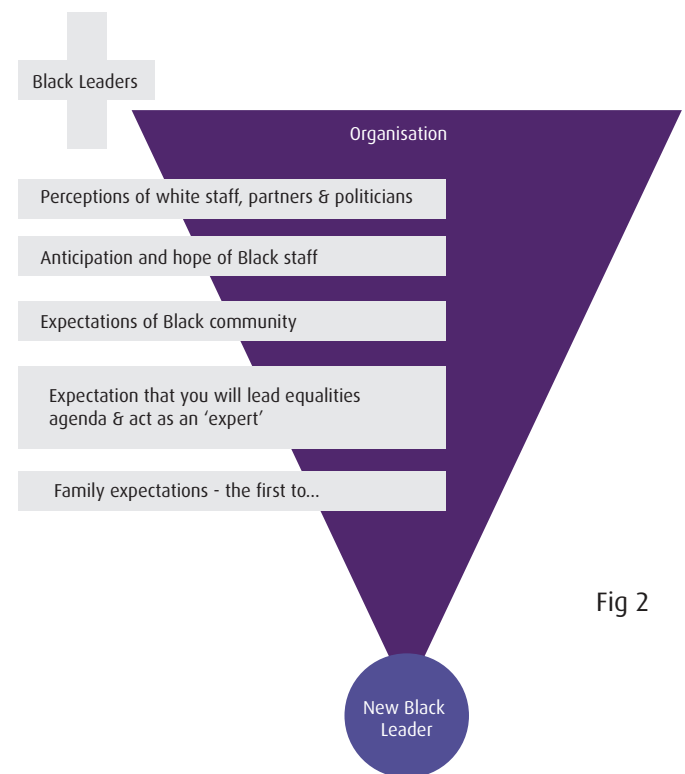


Fig 2

racist or discriminatory. If they have waited for years staff will often expect these wrongs to be righted as soon as the person arrives. They may lobby quickly for change and this can place a newly arrived Black chief officer or senior leader in a difficult position before they have even fully established themselves as a new leader in the organisation. It is important to be prepared for the kinds of conversations that will ensue and think about how to respond in a way that does not disenfranchise those Black staff, but also doesn't require premature responses to issues that the leader is yet to become familiar with.

Another set of powerful expectations can come from those in the third sector and in Black communities themselves. Similar to the expectations and hopes of Black staff, they will have a clear idea that the appointment of a Black leader could be the change they have wanted to see from the organisation and again they vest their hopes and aspirations for long held difficulties to somehow be successfully overcome as soon as the Black leader is in place. With the three groups, staff, third sector and community it is important to realise that there are real personal stories behind each person who makes up the group; their own experiences of racism, direct or indirect can be extremely powerful and they vest their emotional energy in having high hopes for the Black leader. Unfortunately, this places an almost impossible expectation upon the newly appointed Black leader and it is a very real problem that Black leaders need to think about i.e. how they avoid transference of all the historic individual issues, whilst seeking to make changes that would support people in the future.

This very much leads to part of the next set of expectations on Black leaders. They will often be the first Black leader at the senior leadership table and when talk turns to equalities and diversity, all eyes turn to the Black leader in the room. Many Black leaders do not want to be seen as the only leader who 'does equalities', but on the other hand, helping to lead an equalities and diversity agenda could support them in getting institutional change within the organisation, which would support, staff and communities alike. It is important for Black leaders to have a strategy in place when that assumption is made and the moment occurs for them to respond, and it will occur for them in their leadership roles. They may choose to have a conversation in advance of any

meetings with the Head of Human Resources or their line manager to explore the different expectations that they will face including potentially being seen as the lead on 'equalities'. They may agree a strategy and propose a compromise like sharing the rotating chair of any groups set up around equalities and diversity with their fellow senior leaders, rather than taking sole ownership of the issues/group.

The lack of Black senior leaders in the public sector and particularly in the field of children's and adult services means that it is statistically unlikely that Black candidates will have anyone else in their family who has successfully achieved the kind of role they will have achieved. Furthermore, it may be the first time that anyone in their family has achieved such a senior position. For Black families experiencing an educational system that disadvantages many of them, who experience direct and indirect discrimination on a regular basis in their daily lives, there can be a burden placed on their children that they should succeed where potentially their parents were unable to. It is salutary to note that issues such as outlawing discrimination in housing were not addressed in legislation until as recently as 1976. The emotional burden of expectation by parents adds another layer of complexity to the expectations on Black leaders.

Of course, the expectations and burdens outlined above and exemplified in fig 3 below are in addition to those placed upon the shoulders of all leaders who are newly appointed to senior positions. Many organisations fail to consider the additional challenges that Black leaders face.

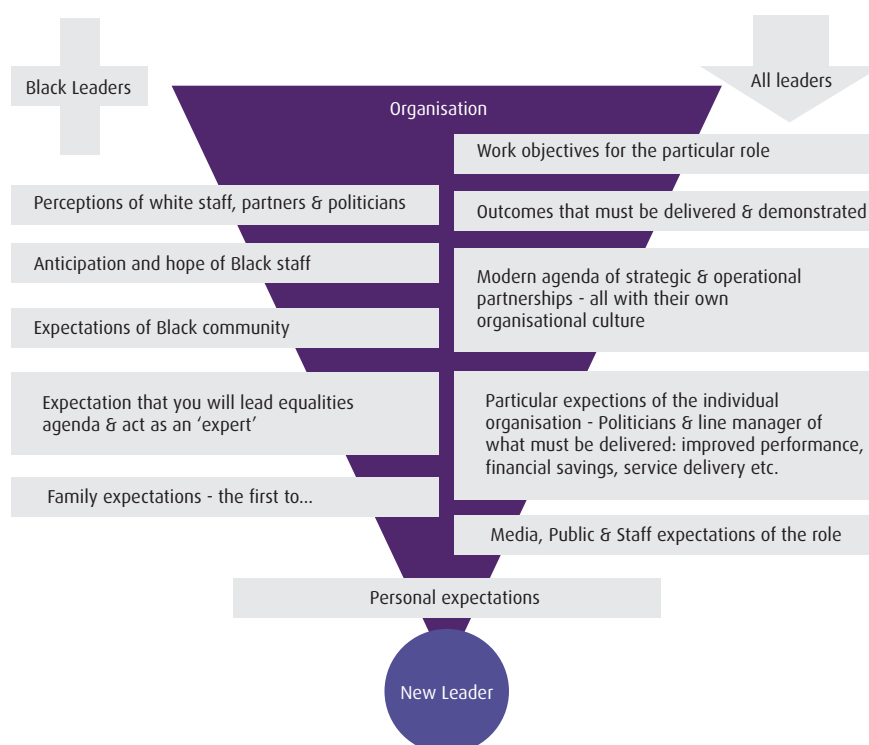


Fig 3

## Over-representation in disciplinary & employment processes

Having navigated the barriers and obstacles to successfully secure a senior leadership position, surviving there holds a whole new set of potential pitfalls. From the sparse information that is published, it would appear that Black staff can routinely be over-represented in disciplinary process within organisations.

Few local authorities appear to be publishing comprehensive staffing information showing full compliance to the Equality Act 2010 for those who are defined as having 'protected characteristics' by the Act, these should include staff from BAME backgrounds. Therefore, it can be difficult to gain an absolute picture of the representation issues relating to Black staff and Black leaders.

Some authorities have taken a more comprehensive approach and recognised their own human resource issues and commissioned reports to consider why Black staff are disproportionately represented in disciplinary processes. Nottingham City Council commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) to undertake some research, mainly qualitative, to examine the apparent disproportionate impact of employment procedures on Black employees<sup>19</sup>. Another local authority<sup>20</sup> explored race equality in employment by also commissioning an external organisation following concerns raised by Black staff working within their authority. The authorities concerned should be commended for recognising and commissioning research on this particularly sensitive issue.

The Nottingham City study examined three pertinent areas: the organisational culture; the experiences of Black and minority ethnic employees and the management of performance. It also considered the impact of unitary status relating to the authority.

Interviewing key personnel, the researchers found:

*"...near unanimous consensus among the interviewees that [the authority] compared very favourably with other employers with regard to its policies on equality in general and race (ethnic minorities)."*<sup>21</sup> Although the authority was committed to diversity they acknowledged some wide variations on practices in different departments.

They also found a considerable difference of opinion on how Black staff thought the policies were applied. Crucially they found:

19 The Disproportionate Impact of Employment Procedures on Black Employees in Nottingham City Council, The Institute for Employment Studies, Nii Djan Tackey, Penny Tamkin, Hülya Hooker, 2002.

20 Race Equality in Employment Brighton & Hove City Council, Elaine Bowes and Davina Boakye, Global HPO, 2013.

21 P.xiv Op. Cit IES

*"...black and minority ethnic staff interviewed believed there was a mismatch between written policy and their experiences in their working lives in the Council; in recruitment and selection, in promotion and career progression, and in their relationships with their managers. Black managers, in particular, attributed some of the underlying causes of the high incidence of disciplinary cases against minority ethnic employees to this imbalance in the application of equality policies."*<sup>22</sup>

The researchers examined this complex issue by holding extensive interviews with staff and seeking to find any specific issues that might go some way to explaining some of the apparent differences in the over representation of Black employees in the disciplinary and redeployment processes. Difficult situations such as these and, also, managing poor performance, were explored.

Most of their findings were consistent with those that any authority might expect to find regarding the capability and confidence of managers to assess performance and the variability and subjective nature of performance review to address poor performance. There was, however, a more complex and sensitive layer of issues and findings relating to Black staff. The report found evidence of a disparity in the assessment of performance of Black and minority ethnic staff compared to their white counterparts. For example, evidence that some *"white managers quite often [felt] unable to communicate with their black staff"*<sup>23</sup>, which would create difficulties in the management of conflict and demonstrates lack of awareness and experience of managing particular groups of staff.

The research explored the behavioural descriptors associated with job competencies. They found that by asking individual staff to rate employees, the white employees tended to rate a greater number of white colleagues in the category of good, placing more ethnic minority individuals in the poor performer category. They considered the difference especially striking, as ethnic minorities make up around a fifth of the whole sample of individuals. They explored further the differences in managerial views of performance. They found 'distinct differences' when they analysed their data. It also showed that white managers placed more white staff within the top three categories compared to their placement of ethnic minorities. As a consequence, this translated into 90% of those described as good performers being white compared to just 10% of ethnic minorities.

The reasons for this are complex and extremely sensitive. However, the concepts we have explored on the Virtual Staff College's Black and Asian Leadership Initiative of reframing attributes from positive to negative, e.g. enthusiasm being interpreted as aggression, focus seen as scheming, is likely to be responsible for some

22 P.xiv Op.Cit IES

23 P25 Op. Cit IES

of these results. Indeed the researchers noted that white individuals *“were more likely to significantly use more negative attributes to describe minority ethnic individuals”*<sup>24</sup> and *“used significantly more positive attributions to describe white rep individuals.”*<sup>25</sup>

Unsurprisingly then, when the researchers went on to examine in detail the disciplinary action and redeployment, there were distinct perceptions by Black staff that they had been treated unfairly and some of the unfairness was due to racial prejudice. Some considered that white staff who had acted in the same way as they had were not taken through disciplinary procedures as they had been. The researchers noted that the Black and Asian respondents were ‘convinced’ they had been treated unfairly on the grounds of racial discrimination. Indeed the researchers commented that:

*“there was some justification for the respondents’ despondency that the disciplinary action was not deserved. Most of them had the charges against them dismissed after a formal hearing.”* Unfortunately by then, as they describe, the disciplinary action had had a significantly adverse impact upon them.

Similar findings were made within Brighton and Hove City Council by Elaine Bowes and Davina Boakye<sup>26</sup> who observed that (although small in number), BME staff were nearly twice as likely to be disciplined as their white colleagues. The major difference in reasons for disciplinary processes between BME and white colleagues was startling. By far the majority of reasons for disciplining white staff was sickness absence whereas, for BME staff, capability was the major ground for a disciplinary process. In fact they found the proportion of BME staff disciplined for capability issues had also risen in the last two years from 14% to 29% with the latest figures (2011/12) showing no white staff were taken through a disciplinary on the grounds of capability. Not only were BME staff more likely to be subject to disciplinary procedures within the local authority, they were more likely to be dismissed from employment than their white colleagues. Bowes and Boakye found that in one of the years they were studying (2010/11), the overall rate of exit as a result of dismissal from employment was 7.5% but the dismissal rate of BME staff leavers totalled 21%. Although they note that in the most recent year exits as a result of dismissals had increased across the board, they still noted a higher figure for BME staff compared to their colleagues. The issue of over-representation of BME staff in disciplinary procedures was noted when the authority undertook previous exploration of these issues in 2009. However, as highlighted in the most recent report, no action had been undertaken to specifically address this concern.

24 P.51 Op. Cit IES.

25 P.55 Op. Cit IES.

26 Race Equality in Employment Brighton & Hove City Council, Elaine Bowes and Davina Boakye, Global HPO, 2013.

Bowes and Boakye also found issues in relation to the numbers of BME staff compared to white staff using the local authority formal grievance procedures. Although, again, the overall numbers were small, the researchers were able to conclude that *“BME staff are more likely to raise a grievance at BHCC, and far more likely to complain of bullying and harassment.”*<sup>27</sup>

The Nottingham City Council research examined redeployment and, although some shortcomings of how processes had been conducted were felt by the majority of staff interviewed, the issues that were handled in a less than transparent and variable manner appeared to affect all staff rather than particular groups. However, it is interesting to note that the Black staff interviewed perceived the process to be unfair to them.

Whilst the researchers did not come to that conclusion it is easy to see how staff already affected by potential reframing and performance assessment might view all such processes through a similar lens. The lack of appropriate role models within any organisation can also skew the perceptions (rightly or wrongly) of Black staff that they are neither good enough for, nor welcome to aspire to, senior leadership positions. In the Nottingham City Council report researchers highlighted that:

*“The lack of representation of ethnic minorities in the senior management team of the Council is considered the most serious of the shortcomings of the Council.”*<sup>28</sup>

Similar conclusions were reached by the research in Brighton and Hove City Council:

*“The data analysis shows an under-representation of BME people at the most senior levels in the council and an overrepresentation of them at the most junior levels.”*<sup>29</sup>

How many other councils, if they examined their own information would also be in that position?

Researchers have also used the models of Alderfer and Dansereau<sup>30</sup> to consider how organisations can assign individuals to groups which hold certain traits or characteristics which can be used to make or break a reputation. They explored the concepts of ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’ with organisations identifying and assigning (albeit informally) individuals to these groups, one formed around identity; women, ethnicity, ‘race’, age, gender; the other formed on task, function and hierarchy. The sets of behaviours between groups and resulting judgements have the potential to not just negatively affect all members of the perceived ‘out-group’ but,

27 P.29. Op. Cit Global HPO

28 P.74 Op. Cit IES.

29 P.73 Op.Cit Global HPO

30 P.85 Op.Cit IES

moreover, individuals within that group; this could lead to a multiple layered field of disadvantage for aspiring Black leaders. This very much points to the lack of social capital, networks and opportunities which we explored previously considering recruitment issues that Black leaders may experience in their career paths. In their individual study the IES researchers concluded that:

*“...cognitive processing philosophy and group membership theory provide the intellectual explanatory framework for some of the observed differences in the assessment of performance between white and minority ethnic employees.”<sup>31</sup>*

In their report they set out a number of actions and steps that could support the Council in its improvement journey, both at a general level in human resource procedures and training but also to specifically address the inequalities found as part of their research.

Having a disproportionate number of Black staff within disciplinary procedures is not, however, isolated to local authorities. In 2012, Manchester University<sup>32</sup> was commissioned to research disproportionality of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) police officers involved in professional standards issues. The researchers examined data from Greater Manchester Police, West Midlands Police and the British Transport Police. They found that in West Midlands Police *“statistically significant over-representation of BME officers was identified in internally raised misconduct investigations. Disproportionality was more pronounced for Asian officers who were 2.08 times more likely to be subjected to investigation than white officers.”<sup>33</sup>* The report found even higher rates of disproportionality in the British Transport Police, with BME officers 2.41 times more likely than white officers identified in internally raised misconduct investigations.

In 2012, following a Freedom of Information Request, the Royal College of Midwives reported, that, across their eighteen trusts, there were a disproportionate number of Black midwives subjected to disciplinary hearings and that the consequent outcomes were also disproportionate. They found that 60% of midwives subject to disciplinary processes were Black and, over the time period examined ten midwives were dismissed, all of whom were Black.

These examples are given in the context of the partnership work being undertaken by local authorities, with health and the police. The data from those organisations on disproportionate representation of Black staff in disciplinary processes should also point us to the potential difficulties in the culture of other organisations with whom Black leaders are expected to work in partnership,

let alone the potential issues in their own employing organisations.

## Conclusions

The review of the barriers and obstacles faced by potential and serving Black Leaders set out in this paper should be valuable reading for organisations, chief executives, other senior leaders and elected Members.

As these barriers and obstacles affect Black staff and leaders they fall firmly into the definition of Institutional Racism<sup>34</sup>, defined in the late 1990s by Sir William Macpherson as:

*“The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping.”*

Process discrimination starts at the very point an organisation seeks to recruit to a vacant leadership position and the types of issues we have explored further compound the potential for discrimination at all levels.

For Black aspiring leaders and Black leaders already in mainly white organisations, reading this paper may make them feel as if the odds are stacked against them and, in reality, they may well be. However, going in forewarned about the many obstacles, barriers and behaviours that can affect their progression into senior leadership is the best way to be prepared for the challenges that they will face. The Black and Asian Leadership Initiative offered by the Virtual Staff College is now on its third cohort. It offers aspiring Black leaders an opportunity to consider the unique challenges that they face in progressing in their careers and their unique leadership perspective that they can bring to organisations adding additional value as a consequence. It supports them in a safe environment to critically examine their own experiences, views and perceptions and supports them to build their unique leadership skills, preparing them for the challenges ahead with strategies on how to address them and increase their confidence in preparation for their next career move. Ultimately, as individuals, they need to make a choice about what they would like to do in their careers, make a plan and remain committed to it. The rewards are potentially great for Black leaders bringing something unique to an organisation, making a contribution at many levels that other colleagues may not be able to and, most of all, giving a sense of achievement to individual Black leaders who are making a difference to their community, their staff, their partners and their organisation.

31 P.85 Op.Cit. IES

32 Disproportionality In Police Professional Standards, Graham Smith, Harry Hagger Johnston & Chris Roberts, Manchester University July 2012.

33 P.4 Op. Cit Manchester University

34 “The Inquiry Into The Matters Arising From The Death of Stephen Lawrence”, Sir William Macpherson 1999.



Organisations need to review themselves against the barriers, obstacles and hurdles we have set out and critically evaluate how they measure up to these. If we asked a group of Chief Executives and Directors whether they thought their organisation was institutionally racist, we would surmise that not many would answer in the affirmative. However, once organisations have reflected on their own understanding of the issues, breaking down the obstacles and barriers piece by piece and reflecting on how many bear relevance for them, perhaps the answer would be slightly different.

As Leroy Eldridge Cleaver said in 1968: *"You're either part of the solution or part of the problem."*



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