Business Disability Forum

The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023

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Summary report

June 2023

Contents

Introduction

The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey was first developed by Business Disability Forum in 2018 and published in 2019.

We did this because we could see that the experience of workplace adjustments was fundamental to how included or excluded employees felt at work, yet the volume of questions about the process from employers and reports of poor support from employees we receive continues today.

We intended to repeat the survey two years later to track the improvements and changes that had occurred since our first survey. However, in 2021 we were still amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and we therefore decided to wait, primarily because many workforces were yet to establish their 'new' adjustments processes and working arrangements.

We issued the survey that informs this report's findings in November 2022. We left the survey open until March 2023 and during that time we engaged with many organisations, both within and outside of our membership, as well as disabled employees, and employee disability networks to get their feedback, talk about workplace adjustments, and encourage them to share their experiences in the survey themselves. We were thrilled with the response both in terms of number of survey responses we received, including the sheer amount of lengthy 'free text' responses and the feedback from people during the promotion of the project. We received a total of 1,480 responses from employees with a disability or condition, and 396 responses from managers.

The last survey in 2018/2019 concentrated on the workplace adjustments process only. This was the right thing to do at the time, and it gave us a good baseline for the basics of what should be considered within each iteration of a survey that assesses the experience of workplace adjustments.

However, since that survey and in its findings, we started to see that the workplace adjustments process itself was only one part of what contributed to removing barriers in the workplace for disabled employees. The figure from the 2018/2019 survey that workplace adjustments only removed all barriers at work for 19 per cent of disabled employees stayed with us, and we looked into it more (the same figure this time was 18 per cent). We worked with our members, disabled employees, and leaders of employee disability networks to come up with additional related topics we wanted to introduce into the 2022 survey that we felt had a significant impact on disabled people's everyday lives at work and which the experience of workplace adjustments influenced.

This is the summary version of the full 2023 report.

About the survey and methodology

The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023 project ran from October 2022 until June 2023. We designed a survey which repeated key questions with the same wording from the 2018/2019 survey to provide a direct comparison of views between 2019 and 2023.

In the 2018/2019 survey, we saw the beginnings of how disabled employees were not viewing workplace adjustments in isolation of their wider experience of their workplace. Therefore, for the 2022/2023 survey, we added the following topics:

- The barriers that remain in the workplace after adjustments have been made.

- Disabled employees' experiences of occupational health.

- The intersections and other person 'characteristics' that impact disabled employees' experience of inclusion or getting adjustments at work.

- What causes disabled employees work-related stress.

- Disabled employees' overall health and wellbeing and how their disability and working life interact and impact one another.

We received 1,480 responses from employees who have a disability or condition and who are in work, and we received 396 responses from managers.

Key statistics

- **78 per cent** of disabled employees told us they, rather than their employer, had to initiate the process of getting adjustments.

- **58 per cent** of employees said getting the adjustments they needed was due to how assertive and confident they are to ask for that support.

- **56 per cent** of disabled employees said there are still disability-related barriers in the workplace after adjustments have been made.

- **Only 37 per cent** of disabled employees feel their employer is genuine about removing all disability-related barriers and making the workplace inclusive for disabled employees.

- **Only 18 per cent** of disabled employees said their adjustments have removed all barriers in the workplace.

- **10 per cent** of disabled employees said it was easy to get the adjustments they needed.

- The speed of getting adjustments has **improved by 4 per cent** since 2019. But **1 in 8** disabled employees are waiting over a year to get the adjustments they need.

The speed of getting workplace adjustments has improved by four per cent since 2019.
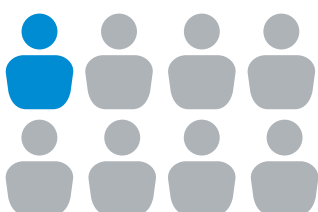
But 1 in 8

disabled people are waiting over a year to get the adjustments they need.

% of respondents

Source: The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023

Disabled people are having to 'push' for the workplace adjustments they need.

78% Told us they had to initiate the process.

% of respondents

Source: The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023

10% Said it was easy.

Common themes

The common themes that emerge throughout each chapter and section of the survey findings are as follows:

- **Disabled employees' experience of feeling included and having adjustments at work is complex** and often filled with mixed emotions, whereas for their managers and wider support teams, adjustments is seen as a 'process to be fulfilled'. There was often a feeling from employees that the emotions that come with having disability and adjustments-related conversations were intensely personal; and that the experience of their disability or condition in work and outside of work have an impact on one another. This was not always recognised by employers and their processes, although there was evidence that managers see the barriers for disabled employees in their workplaces and want to remove them.

  The most difficult conversations and tensions in employee and manager relationships often came when adjustments needed to change or when a 'first choice' of adjustments could not be fulfilled. From the employee's perspective they were being let down and, from the manager's perspective, they were fulfilling workplace decision-making processes. This is the distance between employees and managers that needs the greatest attention.

- **Managers' confidence in making adjustments has improved — but workplace health and adjustments-related support services are often disorganised and not streamlined** within organisations. This leads to employees not getting the adjustments they need. In the 2018/2019 survey, managers not being confident in the adjustments process or how to fulfil requests for disabled employees' support was the main reason for many delays and employees not getting adjustments.

  However, this time round, we found the knowledge, skills, and understanding of managers had improved; it was now about complicated and multiple ways 'in' to a workplace adjustments process that was confusing for managers and that needed a lot of managers' time and energy to figure out. Multiple contracts and different types of support appeared to be accessed through and across different departments in organisations and it was rarely brought together behind one internal centralised service where managers could contact one person as their way into all of the support they could offer to their employees. The result was stressed managers who were trying to do the right thing for their team members and upset employees who just wanted to do their job but didn't have what they needed in terms of adjustments to do it.

- As per the last survey, **a significant number of barriers remain in the workplace after workplace adjustments have been provided for individuals.** The reasons employees gave for this was that adjustments were generally made for their specific situation, their specific job, and to their immediate direct working location and set up. Workplace adjustments, however, did not address the barriers elsewhere in the organisation that disabled employees continue to experience. Examples of these given by disabled employees were bullying and harassment, regular hostile comments and microaggressions from colleagues and senior leaders, inaccessible shared spaces (such as eating areas, social areas, and walkways), transport to work, inaccessible development opportunities, potentially unfair promotion and internal recruitment processes, and getting around the whole workplace site.

  Managers were generally equipped to make adjustments to a job so that they could support an individual's performance and hence direct job outputs, but they often did not have the scope of authority to make adjustments to the culture and wider physical and non-physical working environments and social relationships which existed at all levels of the organisation. This means that it continues to be the case that workplace adjustments address barriers in someone's immediate job, working location and team, but wider cultural barriers related to bullying and harassment, general workplace culture, and social interactions and behaviours, still need wider addressing.

" **The adjustments help more than not having them, but they don't remove all of the barriers because the conditions are still there and still affected the working day. For example, they can't help when I have a bad day and am in so much pain."**

- **Disabled employees felt pressures and experienced poor mental wellbeing at work as all employees can do, but amplified** due to the experience of not getting the support they needed and by the very nature of living with a disability or condition all day, every day. Stressors included: workload, unclear communication and decisions, senior leaders leaving non-inclusive behaviours unchallenged, and anxieties unaddressed by lack of transparency and supportive communications during times of change. On top of these pressures that everyone experienced was the additional 'layer' of having a disability or condition and 'fighting' for adjustments or waiting for them for a long time.

  The nature and experience of work-related stress was therefore multi-layered for many disabled employees. For those who could not do their job to the quality that they are skilled to do because they do not have adjustments, it often had the effect of making them feel 'vulnerable' in a workplace where support was not equal and not equitable for disabled employees.

- Better understanding is still needed of the whole-life living experience of having a disability or condition. Even the most inclusive and accessible of teams and workplaces could not remove the wider impact of a disability or a condition itself; for example, no amount of adjustments or inclusive culture-shifting could take away side effects of medication, discomfort that comes from physical conditions or where chronic fatigue or chronic pain persist daily whether at work or at home.

  A greater understanding is needed that disabled employees do not just experience their disability during working hours: it is there all the time, and that means they experience the emotional, physical and/or mental toll of managing disabilities and conditions both in work and outside of work. So, a lack of adjustments in the workplace does not just affect the employee in working hours but impacts on their whole day, their whole body and 'whole life' experience. Employees necessarily need to view workplace adjustments through this wider lens as a crucial piece in the 'whole life' experience.

Having a disability, being disabled, and types of adjustments

- **56 per cent** of disabled employees said there are still disability related barriers in the workplace after adjustments have been made.

- **49 per cent** said adjustments help them stay in their job.

- **48 per cent** said adjustments help them to be more productive.

- **Only 45 per cent** of employees currently have all the adjustments they need.

- **Only 43 per cent** of employees with disabilities or conditions would describe themselves as 'disabled'.

- **27 per cent** said describing themselves as disabled depends on the situation.

As we so often say at Business Disability Forum, people may not identify with the term "disabled" but still need adjustments. The majority of respondents to our survey would not describe themselves as "disabled" at least part if not all of the time, despite having disabilities or conditions.

The most common types of adjustments are working flexibly or with adjusted hours (47 per cent), having time off to attend appointment to help manage a disability or conditions (42 per cent), and ergonomic or adapted equipment for an immediate working station and computer set up.

Adjustments are an important part of disability workplace inclusion but barriers still remain for disabled people.

48% Said adjustments help them to be more productive.

49% Said adjustments help them stay in their job.

56% Told us that workplace barriers still remain even with adjustments.

% of respondents

Source: The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023

There was, however, some evidence of going through a formal adjustments process to get adjustments that should have been easy to agree or that are part of how some organisations work with all employees anyway. Examples included: working from home for an extra day per week, coming in an hour later and leaving an hour later, or arranging the types of tasks employees do according to their energy levels throughout the day. In an increasing number of organisations, these are not 'adjustments requests'; they are standard ways of enabling a flexible working culture where employees have autonomy to manage their day and their outputs in a way that suits them so long as the target or the deadline is met. It is for this reason that many managers and disabled employees said **adjustments are less needed in organisations where flexibility is designed into the culture**.

In employees' words:

> **It's the freedom to ask to work the way that makes me most productive given my neurotype [which helps most]."**

> **I don't have formal adjustments, but my job inherently allows me to work flexibly."**

Managers' experiences of supporting employees and providing adjustments

- **81 per cent** of managers said it is a lot easier to make adjustments when an employee tells them they have a disability or condition.

- **73 per cent** of managers said it is a lot easier to make adjustments when the employee knows what adjustments they need.

- **64 per cent** of managers are very confident to have a conversation with an employee who tells them they have a disability or a condition.

Managers recalled and valued situations where employees offered information about a disability or condition, particularly when they knew what adjustments and support would help, and this indicates a growth in trust, which is positive. Of course, this is much easier for employees who have had their disability or condition for a while and who are confident to have conversations with managers.

However, with NHS waiting times increasing, more employees than ever are in the situation of struggling and needing adjustments before they even get an appointment to be seen by a specialist. This means many employees experience barriers and difficulties at work because of a potential onset of a condition, but they do not yet know why. This in turn means that workplace processes which rely on managers making adjustments when they know someone has a disability are becoming outdated; a focus on the barriers that someone is experiencing and how they can be removed is ever more crucial.

In workforces where adjustments procedures did not acknowledge this, employees told us they were funding their own diagnosis privately just to get the proof to show their employer so that adjustments would be made for them. This means an often-hefty fee that the employee picks up to get the proof their employer's procedures require, and it often takes a lot of time and energy to arrange and go through this as well.

Not "one and done": the reality of disability passports and workplace adjustments plans

- **22 per cent** of employees have never had their adjustments reviewed.

- **17 per cent** of disabled employees have their adjustments reviewed less than once per year.

- **Only 11 per cent** of disabled employees who have a passport in place said they speak to their manager 'a lot more' or 'a bit more' about their disability or adjustments since having it in place.

A disability passport or a workplace adjustments plan is a live record of an employee's adjustments.

It structures the conversation about disability and adjustments between an employee and their manager. The document is usually 'owned' by the employee, but the manager necessarily has a copy so that they can ensure they are putting the agreed support in place. Passports have grown in popularity recently, but getting adjustments was not always a better experience in organisations who operated a passport process. We therefore asked both managers and disabled employees about their experiences of having the passport.

Some employees said they "love" their passports, but key to this and the experience of having a passport was having a good manager who was understanding of disabilities and conditions and who knew how to use and complete the passport with them. There was evidence that some employers are sending the passport document to employees and asking them to fill it in themselves. This is poor practice and not how the passport was intended to be used.

The two key findings in this section were as follows:

- The passport itself did not improve the experience of getting adjustments, nor speed up the process of getting adjustments. A significant percentage of employees said that the passport agrees the adjustments, but it does not go as far as recording what adjustments have actually been implemented. In addition, many employees with a passport said they had never had their adjustments reviewed.

- Although employees and managers said the passport is about structuring a conversation, they also said it caused an additional part to the process (and therefore waiting times) to get adjustments in place, and it was 'yet another form to complete'. For many, this reinforced the experience we often hear from disabled employees that whenever an employee tells an employer they have a disability, the general response is having a form to fill in. Managers and employees felt the passport affirmed this in organisations.

In addition, managers and employees said in organisations where there is a fit for purpose adjustments process and experience, where there is a good relationship between the employees and managers, and where there is good communication, the passport is not needed. This was interesting, since many employers had implemented a passport to improve and adjustments process, rather than reviewing the process and fixing the parts of it that are broken and making the process more efficient.

Occupational health

- **Only 22 per cent** of employees said occupational health helped them understand or manage the impact of their disability or condition at work.

- **Only 25 per cent** of managers agreed a lot that occupational health helped them understand how to manage and support their employees.

We heard of significant issues with the use and quality of occupational health provision that employers were using to support disabled employees and their managers. Employees and managers said the process and format of occupational health was often inaccessible; examples included asking employees with hearing conditions or who are deaf to have a telephone appointment, or not providing someone's occupational health report in a format that was accessible to them.

In addition, the one-size-fits-all assessments meant some physically disabled employees were being asked to do physical assessments that they could not do. In some cases, employees said they had been asked to do tasks and exercises as part of the assessment that made them unwell for weeks after the appointment.

Both employees and managers pointed to poor quality of the written reports. Some said the report had got details of their job or condition wrong and some felt they received inappropriate comments and judgments about their disability or condition during their assessment.

Managers and employees offered two recurring themes:

- An occupational health referral was rarely necessary and was only done because the employer's policy told the manager they had to do it. Employees were frustrated but they had to wait for an appointment and go through the assessment just to get adjustments they already knew they needed.

- There was frustration that the occupational health assessment report appeared to detail purely what the employee had said. From the managers' perspective, this felt like occupational health was therefore biased towards the employee and, from the employee's perspective, this made them feel as though the manager and employer did not trust them and did not trust what they had told their manager about their disability or what would help.

For these reasons, occupational health, although there to help both manager and employee was, in most cases, actually causing more frustration, tension, and distrust between the employee and the employer.

It must be noted that although these were small in number, we did hear of positive experiences of occupational health. These detailed a good use of occupational health where the provider offered a high-quality service, were fit for purpose in terms of what the employer needed from that service, where the provider also included the manager in the assessment process, and where the employee and the manager had a good communicative relationship together.

Working life during the pandemic

- **72 per cent** of disabled employees said it was easier to manage their disability or condition when working at home.

- **52 per cent** said the pandemic was the first time they could work in a way that best suited them.

- **49 per cent** of disabled employees needed additional or different adjustments during the pandemic but only 18 per cent said their employer provided everything they needed.

- **28 per cent** have felt pressurised to return to the workplace but do not want to.

- **14 per cent** of disabled employees are still shielding, isolating or restricting contact with others.

Employees generally reported needing to work differently during the pandemic and needing different adjustments. However, many said that it took a very long time for their employer to respond to this, and some they didn't get the adjustments they needed at all.

More positively, employees used terms such as the pandemic "revolutionised" work for them or that work during the pandemic was "FANTASTIC". The reasons generally given was that, although some reported working longer days when working from home, they felt they could do this because they had more energy that was not being taken away by long stressful commutes or navigating the poor accessibility of their wider working environment. Many employees also reported a better work-life balance and improved energy during this time.

The impact working from home had on improving disabled employees' working and home lives was evident and, for this reason, disabled employees who had not yet returned to the office had a huge amount of anxiety because they felt requests to return to the office are imminent. Not only were they anxious about needing to return to the office, many also feared how they would be asked to return to the office – for example, the tone of those communications, if adjustments would be discussed at that time, and if the employer would generally be understanding that this was a huge life change when they had been working from home for years.
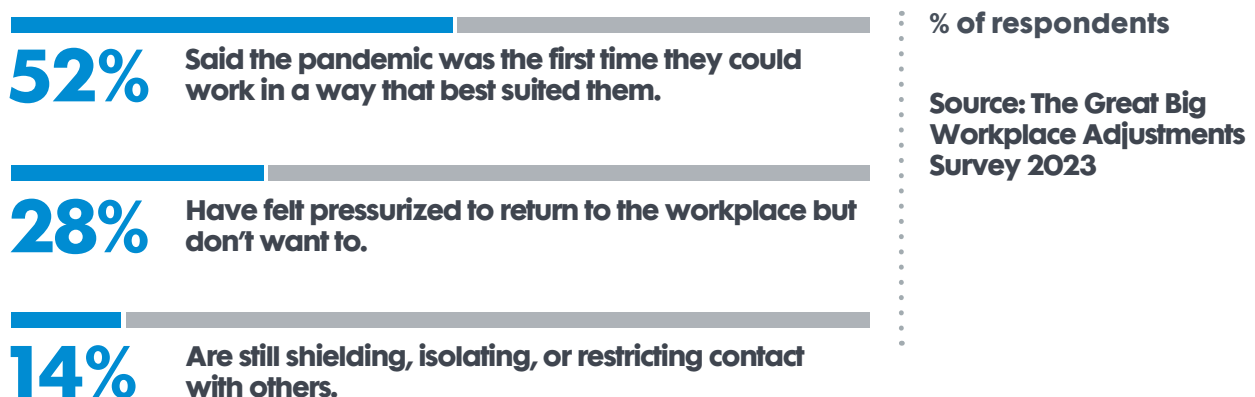
The pandemic was not good for everyone, though. Not all disabled employees enjoy working from home and some missed the office environment. Some even said the adjustment their employer made was opening the office for them to continue working from there during the pandemic. Some wished more colleagues would come back to the office.

Communication was also very difficult for many during the pandemic. The expectation to be on many more meetings that were online during the day contributed to a different type of tiredness and fatigue for people with some specific conditions. For others, colleagues and workforces being slow to learn the accessibility features of these online platforms meant that many with, for example, vision and hearing related conditions waited literally months before they could take part in meetings and online social situations with colleagues again.

The toll the pandemic took on managers must be recognised. Managers said they had to change how they looked out for their teams; they were no longer in the office with them and could not tell when someone might not be 'OK', so they had to make additional efforts to make individual calls more often with each team member. Managers felt their employer asked too much without giving them the skills to deliver; for example, some managers felt they were expected to be counsellors to employees as well as line managers with no additional training or briefing about what the boundaries of this were.

In many workforces, managers did not receive instructions about moving adjustments from the workplace to people's homes, different arrangements for making or requesting those adjustments, or any shift in what was now 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable' because of the move to home working. Crucially, other managers reported how their employer had given little recognition to employees who could not work from home and who had to keep working in frontline roles throughout the pandemic. Managers recognised these teams and individuals were experiencing a very different type of stress and burnout which was little recognised, particularly by senior leaders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a long-term impact on adjustments (Disabled people working with adjustments):

52% Said the pandemic was the first time they could work in a way that best suited them.

28% Have felt pressurized to return to the workplace but don't want to.

14% Are still shielding, isolating, or restricting contact with others.

% of respondents

Source: The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023

Bullying and harassment

- **40 per cent** have felt patronised or 'put down' by other people at work because of their disability or condition.

- **38 per cent** of disabled employees said they had been bullied or harassed in their workplace specifically because of their disability or condition.

Sadly, it was common for disabled employees to experience bullying and harassment. It was also clear that employees felt that difficulty in getting adjustments was a form of bullying and harassment by the manager and employer, because it was a dismissal of what they needed. Many employees had raised grievances purely to get the adjustments they needed; in this way, the grievance procedure had become the process that employees used to get the adjustments they need. The hefty price that employees paid for this though was the reputation that they are "trouble" and "a pain".

In addition, continued stigma and stereotyping about specific disabilities and conditions or disability related situations was evident, and employees are experiencing these small 'drips' of harassment very regularly and over a long period of time. It caused some employees to say that, as an isolated incident, these occasions do not feel big enough to report, but when they look back to how long it has been happening, all these little comments and incidences amount to a generally hostile and uncomfortable working environment for them. Examples of this included autistic employees being told that they come across as "rude" or "blunt", or that people showing specific personality traits were referred to as "spectrumy". A common experience was disabled employees being told that they are only in the workplace because they "ticked the disability box" during their interview.

Disabled employees experience poor behaviours at work because of their disability or long term condition:

40% Have felt patronised or 'put down' by other people at work.

38% Have been bullied, harassed or discriminated against at work.

% of respondents

Source: The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023

Stress and mental wellbeing

- **Only 5 per cent** of disabled employees said their mental well-being is generally very good in an average week.

- **20 per cent** of employees said they feel their mental well-being is generally neither good nor bad.

Having a disability or condition in itself can demand a lot of time to manage, and the symptoms and experience of a disability or condition may pose difficulties and discomforts every day. Many employees who had recently received a diagnosis of a disability or progressive condition said wellbeing takes on a different meaning that they are still navigating.

Other disabled employees, however, pointed to what helps keep their wellbeing generally good. There were some recurrent themes and responses which include the following:

- Connecting with friends and positive people outside of work

- Having breaks – by steering the week in terms of a work free weekend, but also during the day where they can talk to a friend or colleague or do something to calm them or relieve stress.

- Having somewhere quiet to go, in the workplace to "sit quietly" at work in the physical workplace.

- Experiencing nature or outside the work and home environment - some said having time just to go out into the garden.

- Having realistic goals to achieve both at work and outside of work.

- Getting good feedback from managers and leaders and feeling valued by managers and colleagues at work.

The accessibility and inclusion of employers' health and wellbeing initiatives

- **44 per cent** of disabled employees felt their employee assistance programme was accessible and inclusive to them.

- **15 per cent** of disabled employees said their employer had promoted health and well-being initiatives that were inaccessible to them because of their disability or condition.

Many employees reported similar health initiatives that their employers had encouraged everyone in their organisations to do but which were very inaccessible to them. These included:

- Signs on lifts telling employees to use the stairs instead of the lift.

- Team activities and health advice which encouraged people to walk more.

- Encouraging teams to compete against each other to beat exercise targets.

- Diet-related advice about which foods should and should not be eaten and in what portions and when, which were particularly difficult for people with bowel and digestive related conditions and people with eating disorders, for example.

- Mental health and mindfulness initiatives – most of which was sent to every employee in the organisation with no consideration, but such interventions can be triggering or crisis inducing for people with specific mental health diagnoses or experiences.

- Inaccessible employee assistance programme services – many which rely on inaccessible apps, inaccessible advice and digital content, or are overly reliant on "phoning this number" which immediately excludes people with speech- and hearing-related conditions.

Employees felt there was no intended discrimination or exclusion meant in the above situations, but they did however give the impression of inconsideration or misunderstanding of a range of disabilities and conditions. As a result, it created the general feeling of disabled employees feeling "left out" at work.

What disabled employees want in their current job and future career

- **62 per cent** would like to be promoted to a more senior role with higher pay in their current organisation within the next two years.

- **45 per cent** would like a more senior role with higher pay in a different organisation.

- **55 per cent** would like to or would consider decreasing their hours in their current job to help them get a good life work-life balance while managing their disability or condition.

- **28 per cent** want to leave their current employer because they don't feel they have been treated well.

- **Only 18 per cent** of disabled employees are currently very satisfied with their current work situation.

This section showed that a lot of employees are ambitious and still want more for their career, but they feel "stuck". For many employees, it had taken them so long to get their adjustments in place that they did not want to change anything about their working situation because it may put their adjustments at risk, and they feared going through the process of renegotiating those adjustments again. Others looked at senior leaders and how they operate in their roles and felt they would not be able to manage their condition while fulfilling what looked like a lot of long hours, difficult demands, and a lot of pressure.

Some employees were looking to leave their organisation because of how they have been treated by colleagues and managers or because, despite repeatedly asking over a long period of time, they still do not have adjustments to do their job well. Other employees felt they were underutilised; they had the skills, experience and capacity to do more but their manager and, sometimes, senior managers were deciding not to use them in this way. It led some employees to say they were "bored".

For others though, they wanted to do less and reduce their hours. Others still wanted to be promoted and wanted senior roles, but they did not want to always do full-time hours in these roles; they instead wanted to work part time to achieve a good work-life balance while managing their disability or condition, or to pursue interests in their own time as well.

What is clear is that one size does not fit all; managers need to have the confidence to have individual, person-centred progression conversations that acknowledge the breadth of "ambition" and to enable people to "develop" in the way that works for them. Similarly, we need to look at what we mean by "progression" and consider more diverse routes to move on in a career.

We asked disabled employees about job satisfaction and their plans for the next two years.

62% **Want to be promoted to a more senior and higher paid role in their current organisation.**

45% **Want the same in a different organisation.**

28% **Want to leave their current employer because they don't feel they have been treated well.**

18% **Are very satisfied with their current work situation.**

% of respondents

Source: The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023

Overall conclusion

Disabled employees continue to struggle at work due to both individual barriers in their job and wider barriers in their workplace environment and working culture.

Conversations about having a disability between employees and managers and with the wider team, and the difficulty in getting adjustments, remain huge barriers. In addition, both employees and managers said that senior leaders were not always calling out poor behaviours, microaggressions, and insensitive comments even when they witnessed these behaviours themselves.

These factors led to an impact in overall work-related stress and a detrimental effect on the level of employees' mental wellbeing that they said they experience each day.

However, work-related situations and getting adjustments can only go so far when the experience of employees' disabilities or conditions are difficult every day, inside and outside of work. It is for this reason that **a better understanding of managers and wider workplaces about the whole experience of having a disability and being disabled is needed, and it is also why an improved and more mature approach to removing disability-related barriers for disabled employees at work is needed.**

Ultimately, disabled employees do not see their experience of workplace adjustments in isolation but in the context of how they are treated by others in the organisation, the existing barriers that remain after adjustments are made, and the general culture of disability inclusion in their workplace. While managers and leaders often see workplace adjustments as 'one' process in an employee's experience, for the disabled employee, having adjustments and removing barriers underpins and exists within every single experience of the workplace. Disabled employees experience workplace adjustments as a whole work experience, not just as an isolated process.

Business Disability Forum will continue to use The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey to speak to employers about how to improve the experiences of disabled employees in workplaces today. We will repeat this survey and measure what is improving and what is not and, as a result where resources and attention must be focused.

We would love to hear your feedback on this survey and its findings, and how work on this topic progresses in your organisations. To contact us about anything in this survey, please e-mail the policy and research team at policy@businessdisabilityforum.org.uk, and we will be happy to advise you or to point you in the direction of what would help.

Lastly, we would like to thank everyone who has supported this project, and particularly to those who gave their time and their trust to us by completing the survey and telling us their experiences that were a mixture of intensely difficult or confusing, and at other times liberating and fulfilling.

For many, The Great Big Workplace Adjustments Survey 2023 was the first time they had shared with anyone that they have a disability or a new diagnosis or have been bullied at work, or it was the first time they had written their experience 'in words' in a way that helped them make sense of it. To those people, and to everyone who completed this survey to make this project possible: thank you.

Recommendations for employers

- **Identify any 'simple' or standard ways of working in your organisation which can be signed off without having to go through a formal adjustments procedure or occupational or workplace health assessments.** Examples include access to noise- cancelling headphones or earphones, suitable car parking, having quiet areas to sit if working in the office or onsite, and allowing employees to plan their working day according to when they best perform different types of tasks (such as responding to non-urgent communications in the afternoon and writing in the mornings, for example).

- **Establish what 'clear communication' means across the whole of the organisation.** It should not be an adjustment for an employee to know what their job is, have clear explanations, or have decisions communicated clearly. Employees should not have to request adjustments to get important decisions and instructions in writing. Important, business-critical decisions should be communicated in a number of ways, and then managers can organise any specific different versions of materials that are needed in addition to this.

- **Employers should build better understanding between employees and managers of their different perspectives during the process of making adjustments and refer to workplace and occupational health services only as needed.** How employees feel is not always 'visible' to managers unless these specific conversations about the transparency of processes and about personal feelings and emotions happen. In addition, employees are not always aware of the limitations and processes managers must use when making decisions about adjustment and resourcing them. More understanding about what it can be like for employees to share personal information and discuss adjustments at the very time they need supporting can help managers. Equally, employees understanding how managers make decisions about adjustments-related situations can help employees understand the reasons for decisions.

- **Managers need support and recognition.** They are generally skilled and experienced at doing their jobs, often with increasingly limited resources, yet with increased targets and demands from senior leaders, while receiving a lot of information from different areas of the organisation and different types of instructions and advice about how to support disabled employees. The pandemic was hard for many managers, and many 'figured out' for themselves how to support their teams during that time without senior direction, and with little support and recognition from senior teams.

- **Have one 'single entry' point into employer-provided health, adjustments and wellbeing support.** Many of the issues managers reported are created by multiple points of support and inside and outside of the organisation. One 'single entry point' into all of the employer-provided health, adjustments and wellbeing support there is available for managers to get support for staff (and themselves) at work for any situation will make decisions and finding support quicker and easier for managers which will then be felt by staff. This may include bringing together much of what many employers already provide into one internal service, but it needs employers to undertake a review of what is not currently working and provided and then ensure it sits within this single service offer. Within this single offer must come a single, overall workplace health and adjustment budget available to the whole organisation.

- **Don't over complicate things.** Processes are about people; the actions and thus behaviours that are set out in policies and procedures convert into an experience for employees. If a service or process (such as workplace adjustments) is not working, identify why it is not working and fix it. Do not 'add on' additional forms and processes – such as passports and more referrals – to processes to solve a problem. This often overcomplicates processes for managers, and it feels too 'clunky' (and lengthy) for employees. Passports and external referrals are much less needed if an employer has invested in, and continuously reviewed, fit-for-purpose workplace health support and adjustments procedures, and good team and colleague relationships where everyone – employees, colleagues, and managers – can talk to each other, trust each other, and find solutions constructively and supportively together.

About Business Disability Forum

Business Disability Forum is the leading business membership organisation in disability inclusion. We are trusted partners, working with business, Government and disabled people to improve the life experiences of disabled employees and consumers, by removing barriers to inclusion.

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