



"Tapping The Hidden Talent Pool"

In this latest instalment of "Our Stories" our Founding Director Oliver Fenghour talks with Jonathan Kewley Co-Head of the Clifford Chance Technology Group about how organisations can support those with hidden disabilities in the workplace.

OF Why is it important for organizations to have a clear Diversity & Inclusion Strategy?

JK: I think personally there are a few reasons. It sets the tone for the organisation that Diversity is at the core of what a business is doing. This isn't just about having people of different race or different types of ability or disability but it's about people who can think differently and look at the world in a different way and there is so much research now which shows if you have a more diverse, inclusive team you will not only have a happier team but from a business perspective you will have a more productive team because you have diversity of thought and ideas and you can see the bigger picture. We need Diversity and Inclusion to develop as an organisation and those businesses who don't clearly communicate this or don't put it into practise will have real challenges in this space because the world is moving very quickly and people's expectations and clients expectations are moving very quickly and in effect this is the right thing to do to ensure our organisations are inclusive.

OF What must organisations do to identify autistic talent and support them effectively in industries such as the legal profession?

JK: I take the view that this can't be a label so you can't say we support all forms of disability and difference and just leave it at that. I know from discussions that we have both had about the importance of having a more effective application and interview process that is clearly designed to deal with the needs of people who have Autism. Some of those needs are specific and require education and training for those people who are involved in the recruitment process. So, you will attract Autistic talent if those people with Autism are confident that they will be treated fairly by the organisations that they are approaching. As, we know people with neuro-diversity and Autism have so much to offer organisations not just in the legal industry but in every single business and profession. Yet, you are not going to attract that talent if you make the process of recruitment in particular one which is not designed for their needs. So, this requires a more sympathetic and also a much more thoughtful way of recruiting and it needs new models for reaching out to those people with huge talent who may not feel comfortable or inspired to apply for roles, particularly if the recruitment process isn't properly designed. I work in the technology space and I am so inspired by

companies like Microsoft and Salesforce who want a neuro-diverse workforce and from my perspective that inspiration needs to move out of just tech and actually into other industries. Clearly, law is one of them and so there is a lot of inspiration and positive messaging coming out of tech and it now needs to diffuse into other industries. Law is a very good example of that.

OF In your opinion how can the legal profession be more inclusive and open to those with hidden disabilities such as Asperger's Syndrome?

JK: I think that its about understanding those people with hidden disabilities and often we have the perception that it is something that you can see. I think with neuro-diversity that it's often not the case and particularly the legal profession can be quite closed and unemotional and sometimes actually we need to break outside of that and be more emotionally intelligent and start to talk about the challenges that those people with hidden disabilities have and how they would like them to be fixed. I think a consultation on this is vital and we can't come up with the solutions we must be informed and educated through people such as yourself and for me listening has to be vital in understanding those challenges and hearing and reflecting and then based on that knowledge that has been built, create a strategy that is appropriate. It has to be carefully thought through, inclusive and most importantly consultative process and its shouldn't be a one size fits all approach either. You talk about Asperger's Syndrome here but there are many types of hidden disability that need to be thought about. Clearly Autism is one that is widespread and is something we need to focus on and I don't think the legal industry in particular is focused on it enough.

OF How do you see organizations in the future finding effective solutions to root out negative forms of bias within their businesses'?

JK: I think that's an interesting point you raise. I guess its comes down to how you measure bias and it is challenging because it happens everyday and it's not recorded and it's not written down. It can be a case of people speak about it incidentally or hear stories but actually how do you start to measure that and then sulphur it. I know we have spoken recently about the importance of surveys and actually getting a sense of the way people think and saying that I don't have all the solutions for this but hopefully you will develop them. So, in the future there will be forms of technology and forms of consultation which are relatively light-touch but will make people think and reflect on some of their actions. I mean clearly looking at how you are recruiting and the diversity in the recruitment process is really important but actually a lot of negative bias and unconscious bias can happen day to day which is not part of the recruitment process and is just part of the office environment. There needs to be much more engagement with the workforce around that and I would hope that can engagement can be put into practise not just through the traditional ways of speaking to teams and training them through that way. Hopefully some form of technology training and mentoring. The mentoring aspect particularly is imperative and the other part of this process is of course to ensure that where people feel that they are subject to this form of bias. That they talk about it and don't hide it and I think a lot of that conscious bias piece is quite hidden. So, as an organisation we are very keen that people tell us when they feel that something hasn't gone right and that we are open and share our feelings and thoughts in this area. So, there is an obligation on us to ensure that were working closely with our colleagues and friends and providing them with the tools they need for training. That we consult them and train them regularly but there is also a need for the workforce more generally to be much more open and to share if they have a bad or negative experience.

OF Why is it important that organizations have a good culture and ethos and in your view what does a good organizational culture look like?

JK: For me personally you are working with corporate organisations which have a degree of hierarchy in them as all organisations do. The most important sign of a good culture within an organisation is an openness to accept and embrace new ways of thinking, new types of people and to acknowledge that you are part of a fast-moving world outside. So, to develop and grow you can't necessarily just recruit the people you have always recruited. I personally believe that this requires open conversations and it requires you to shine a mirror on yourself in relation to the recruitment process and in your ongoing mentoring of colleagues. To ask whether the right methods have always been employed. So, it's about being honest and it's about being open and speaking to people outside of our organisations. We can all work within an echo chamber and it's important to hear experiences from people such as yourself who come from a different environment with different perspectives and it's that diversity of thought which in my view is absolutely critical for any organisation. It isn't just about disability or neuro-diversity it's that diversity of thinking and if you can get that within your culture then you have a very strong platform for not only a great business but also for great business growth.