



DECONSTRUCTING UNSAFE SPACES

How to create a truly
inclusive workplace culture
for racialised staff...

Executive summary & full report by Race Alliance Wales

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RACE ALLIANCE WALES

Race Alliance Wales is a relatively new initiative, established in December 2018, which aims to provide a self-directed space where racialised¹ organisations and individuals can come together to discuss experiences as ethnic minorities in Wales, share information, and develop new ideas and solutions to the growing challenge of racism in Wales.

Through collaborative work, the group seeks to contribute to a more equal, globally responsible Wales with cohesive communities to make Wales a welcoming place of safety where rights are enjoyed and racialised people can thrive. The group also aims to act as a supportive space for racialised individuals who may face a range of personal and professional challenges. The group commits to always act in the best interest of racialised people and communities in Wales, to ensure that our resources are used to best effect, and to speak with a coherent and strong voice on policies and practices affecting minority ethnic people in Wales.

Race Alliance Wales is an independent member-led network, with a current registered member and supporter base of **69 organisations** and **143 individuals**. Project Staff are currently funded by Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. Operationally hosted by Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team Wales (EYST Wales)

For more information please visit:
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¹ We recognise that as the discourse on racism develops so does the terminology used, understood, and accepted by racialised people in Wales and beyond (Da Costa et al, 2021). We use the term racialised, paying homage to the understanding that many people are actively racialised by Welsh and British society not only because of their race/skin colour and other elements of their appearance, but also because of their religion, nationality/national origin, and migration status. Various other terminologies were considered, including People of Colour, however we felt this term not only ignores people who may not identify as a person of colour due to being White/ White-passing in their skin tone, even if they are not White British, but also perpetuates the idea that whiteness is the default and white people therefore have no particular race; race therefore being a special identity marker that is only assigned to people who are not white; who are the other. We do not support the term minorities, which produces a feeling of inferiority, being marginal, outvoted, the losing side, the less than and the immature, as we recognise that we are the global majority, and again, are being actively minoritized by Welsh society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was conducted by Race Alliance Wales (RAW). We would like to extend a huge and heartfelt thank you to all that contributed to this research, providing stories and insights that were invaluable sources of knowledge. We are humbled by your willingness to share personal experiences and suggested solutions to reach our vision of race equality in Wales: a Wales we want to see.

We recognise this research is owned by all of those who contributed, including the participants who dedicated time to being interviewees and survey respondents. As well as wider contributions and support from professionals across Wales with expertise in the field of employment, and the consistent steering of the RAW Steering Group Members across 2021. To you, we are grateful for providing context and scope for the research that was conducted, ensuring we built on previous research and recommendations, strengthening our voices by uniting and developing on what has come before. A full list of contributors can be found in APPENDIX 1.

Thank you to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust who fund the development work, including this research paper, of Race Alliance Wales. Without this funding RAW would be unable to carry out research in a truly non-extractive and independent fashion, enabling those in racialised communities to conduct research with and for those facing similar lived experiences. We would also like to thank Ethnic Youth and Minorities Support Team for hosting staff members Leila Usmani, Jami Abramson, and Assia Kayoueche, without whom the

infrastructure, operational and managerial support would not have existed.

It is important to note the context in which this research was conducted within. Each one of us navigated through 2021 in our own way and we truly appreciate the willingness to collaborate, connect and share during such uncertain times. We will honour these contributions throughout our continued work and hope to see action and change reflected in future policy work regarding representation in Wales. Key authors would like to extend thanks to the family and friends who, in our personal lives and while working from home, and have listened to us talk about this topic endlessly. A special thank you to Sol, Jess, Rolo, and Maryjane for all the support, and Lenaine for the undying understanding.

Finally, this paper is dedicated to all the people before us, around us, and ahead of us, who have not given up, continued to pursue professional careers and stand up against racism, at the risk and expense of their own reputations. With a special remembrance to those who have died at the hands of it. This is about real people, real lives. To our ancestors, and to our future generations, this is for you.

If you have any queries in relation to this report, please contact Leila Usmani at Race Alliance Wales (RAW) info@racealliance.wales

Literature review was completed in Spring 2021.

Active research took place across Summer 2021.

This research paper was completed in April 2022 and first published in November 2022.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

"Contemporary workplace racism is rooted in forms of racial thinking that once underpinned imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and scientific racism."

(Ashe et al, 2019, pg 9)

When it comes to **rates of employment**, racialised people are disproportionately underemployed, with racialised unemployment being 70% higher than White unemployment for the last 20 years (White, 2021). When comparing entry into employment, racialised people in Wales are also **less likely to be aware of career support programmes** and are regularly referenced into low-paying/ low-skilled occupations such as cleaning with insecure and precarious working conditions. (Weigand & Cifuentes, 2018a, Ogbonna, 2019; Hatch, S et al, 2021; Byrne et al, 2020). And we see that only 6% of senior leadership or higher positions in the public sector in Britain are held by racialised people. (Institute of Government and Public Policy, 2022) The math doesn't add up. Unless you throw racism into the equation.

Much research has been undertaken on the experience of racialised people trying to enter employment/obtain certain jobs in certain fields of work. (Broughton et al, 2016; Brown, 2021; Di Stasio et al, 2020) One of our member organisations noted that for many professional fields in Wales, professional networks were also insular. It was really about who you know not what you know to be able to obtain a job.

Organisational Culture

"Racism remains an integral feature of workplace culture and everyday working life"

(Ashe et al, 2019, pg 10)

However, a persistent issue that must not be forgotten is the experience that racialised staff face when they enter professionalised employment. And this experience is evidenced as, unsurprisingly, racist. This backdrop does not allow people to feel positive about working in the space.

Over the span of 3 years' worth of engagement with racialised people across Wales, it was found that "60% of [racialised people in Wales] think that ethnic minorities are treated unfairly in the workplace [and] perceived employment as the least fair area of society." (Weigand & Cifuentes; 2018, pg. 23)

It has also been evidenced that up to 70% of racialised people have experienced some form of racial discrimination at the hands of their employer (Ashe et al, 2019). Much of the evidence around racism in employment looks at unveiling the proliferation of **one-on-one** racism, felt by racialised individuals, perpetuated by White colleagues directly at them, with the most common form being racist remarks, including verbal abuse, racist jokes, and ignorant/insensitive questioning. (Ashe et al, 2019). These findings from the Racism Ruins Lives report are shocking and disgusting to see only 3 years ago. However, these stats don't encompass the racism that is **covert in nature**, as people noting changing in attitude due to religious dress, or even being told off for using their own language in the workplace. These experiences lay way for racialised staff members to **feel isolated and othered** in organisations, something not experienced by White contemporaries. (Weigand & Cifuentes, 2018a, Pennant & Hannagan-Lewis, 2021)

"[The] archetypal leader is a White, heterosexual male, commonly with a transactional and task-oriented leadership style... leadership search in many organisations is likely to favour those that share a common heritage... By adopting a policy of internal promotion, managers increase their opportunity to homogenise organisational culture by restricting promotion to those that demonstrate competence in the espoused cultural values...making promotion decisions in ways that may privilege particular groups and work against others."

(Ogbonna, 2019, pgs. 315, 318)

Gaps in literature

With all this understanding of the prevalence and fall out of racism in employment in Wales, what there is less of is an exploration of the **manifestations of organisational culture, and intraorganizational dynamics** and how these, in more specific ways, impact racialised staff, leading them to either feeling isolated and othered, having to codeswitch to fit in and progress, and with an underlying sense of fear of repercussion on their professional career and reputation. (Ogbonna 2019)

Defining organisational culture

One of the most common models used to explain culture is that of the iceberg. This demonstrates that the tip of the iceberg, above the surface, is the part of culture we can see most obviously. Under the water are the less visible elements of cultural manifestations, such as religious/world views, attitudes towards different people, hierarchies, concepts of success and status, problem solving, time and work ethics. What underpins and drives these elements of culture is understood generally as shared values and assumptions. These underpinning values are fostered and maintained across generations through strong societal influences, including family, religion, education, and the media.

"Your organisation will have a culture, regardless of whether or not you've ever tried to create one, but it might not be the culture that you want."

(Millar, 2021)

Organisational culture and culture change management has become central to a lot of organisations HR functions, in attempts to align staff towards the vision and mission of an organisation and provide a framework to work towards. (Ogbonna, 2019) Value defining exercises have become more common in many workplaces, especially White collar/ office-based organisations. And recruitment drives regularly include values/ culture fit as a marker for suitability to an organisation.

However, what is rarely explored and defined and recognised, are the **unobservable and observable elements of culture in organisations**, which are borne from the underlying values and assumptions. Although an organisation published their organisational values, this does not mean that they are truly the underlying values that are held by the staffing body, and therefore do not always drive the **cultural manifestations** of an organisation, especially those unobservable such as work ethic, communication methods, perceptions of hierarchy, office etiquette. This makes it easy to end up replicating dominant cultures representative of capitalist, neoliberal values, that reproduce systems of oppression in organisations. (Millar, 2021)

“Organizational culture is powerful precisely because it is so pervasive, impacting every part of our work; at the same time, it is very difficult to name or identify.”

(Okun, 2021, pg. 7)

As Ogbonna explains, in organisations, “these **values and assumptions are typically derived from the wider society** where ethnic minority groups are already disadvantaged through prejudice and discrimination.” (Ogbonna, 2019).

And as Okun explains, “Characteristics of organisational culture are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group... many organizations that claim to be multicultural in fact require new participants to **adapt or conform to already existing cultural norms**.” (Okun, 2021)

This inevitably disadvantages, both professionally and interpersonally, racialised people who have not been socialised in the same way, and who face discrimination regardless.

“The implementation culture organisations provide for the organisational context to generate disadvantages, especially where managers seek to harness culture for competitive purposes. Even where espoused, organisational values are presented as neutral, the ways in which they are understood and interpreted in everyday behaviours, are commonly influenced by societally derived beliefs and assumptions.”

(Ogbonna 2019)

Organisational culture can therefore be conceptualised – that there are rules of behaviour that are expected as the norm to be the way in which staff members act and interact. This piece aims to explore are the interwoven elements of org culture that are seen as the norm in Wales, the elements of an organisation that dictate behaviours, ways of working and managing relationships, both professional and personal, across an institution, and how these empirically impact racialised people in professional organisations.

Gaps in impact on racialised people

With the context above, research being undertaken on organisational culture, and its direct felt impact on racialised people within the workplace is emerging. Some themes are clear but have few robust evidence bases. It is these gaps we hope to fill.

The rapid review of evidence undertaken by the Welsh Centre for Public Policy (WCPP), ahead of the initial draft of the Welsh Government's Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, highlighted regarding recruitment, tackling workplace discrimination, and developing anti-racist policy, that the **psychological safety**² of racialised members of staff needed to be a priority in actions going forward within employment. This is one of the areas that merits much further exploration therefore – a handful of reports talk to the need for psychological safety, and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) report *Racism Ruins Lives* (Ashe et al, 2019) expands on lived experiences that clarify that racialised people do not feel safe in this sense in the workplace. However, we need to understand further the felt detail of what happens when people do not feel psychologically safe.

One of the fallouts of this lack of safety and sense of belonging, which goes underreported in real terms, is the fact that it leads to racialised people leaving employment. Although recorded in a few reports (Route2, 2020; Morris, 2022; Ashe et al, 2019), the weight and depth of this is not explored. We need to understand why racialised people leave employment, what factors create an experience that means that they feel this is their only option.

In addition, one of the large gaps in research is highlighted by the heavy emphasis we see on policy change and revisiting values of an organisation to bring about change. But this emphasis leaves a gap in understanding what the policy is trying to elicit in practice. White Supremacy³ culture dictates a worship of the written word (Okun, 2021), and with this obliterates the fact that writing is borne out of reality – to write something and try to manifest it is much harder than to manifest something and to then write about it. Again therefore, we hope to plug this gap by focussing on the changes that can be made outside of formal policy, that will impact real behaviour and therefore culture change – which then, to not be lost, forgotten, to allow space for people to reference, can be written into policy and values for understanding.

“Cultural change was a precursor to applying an anti-oppressive or anti-racist lens to our policies... Policy is a powerful tool, when used in conjunction with efforts at cultural change.”

(Okun, 2019, pg. 7)

Policy and Legislation Framework

Since the public sector is the largest employer in Wales (not considering charities and private bodies that receive public money), the Welsh Government has a lot of power regarding defining how racialised people experience work and the labour market. There is a wealth of policy opportunities already in play that can be strengthened going forward to ensure that recommendations to date as well as those brought to light with our findings are incorporated.

² An environment feels psychologically safe when all team members: “share the belief that within the team they will not be exposed to interpersonal or social threats to their self or identity, their status or standing and to their career or employment, when engaging in learning behaviours such as asking for help, seeking feedback, admitting errors or lack of knowledge, trying something new or voicing work-related dissenting views.” (Millar et al, 2021)

³ When we talk about White Supremacy, we refer to the ideology, theory and belief that White people, and with this their cultural practices and behaviour, are superior to any other race or ethnicity. This is a stronghold belief that underpins most global societies and that feeds and reinforces systems of oppression. As detailed by Racial Equity Tools: “In the past, the term construed extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis. Now this term refers to a political and socio-economic system where White people enjoy structural advantages and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not.”

In addition to others⁴, a central policy to highlight here leading **Anti-racist Wales Action Plan** (Welsh Government, 2022). The plan lays out nationwide goals, actions, timelines and hoped for impact related to income and employment for racialised people. One of its 6 focus areas of desired actions surrounds the **experience of being part of the workplace**. It states that the desired changes in this area relate to representation, reducing employment inequalities, embedding anti-racism as an element of performance management, and probably the boldest change – for **all staff in public sector and funded bodies to receive mandatory training on anti-racism**. (Welsh Government, 2022, pg. 20).

⁴ Other legislation and policies which should be considered in this context are the **Equality Act 2010**, the **Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015**, the **Welsh Government Programme for Government** which refers to Fair Work; the **Welsh Government's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024**, which references inclusive employers; the **Welsh Government's Prosperity for All**, **The National Strategy for Taking Wales Forward**, which considers Employability as an area of life.

FINDINGS

Part 1) Understanding organisational culture – describing the air

As mentioned, one of the key areas of understanding we need to develop is what office-based culture is like, how it is seen and experienced by racialised people. It is not only hard to understand in a tangible sense but was also difficult for many people to describe – a regular phrase type used throughout our interviews was “you know what I mean” or “you get it, you can just feel it”.

In this section, we have tried to draw a picture of office-based culture as experienced by racialised people in Wales. This is so that our readers can have a starting place of understanding, something more concrete, with clear signifiers, from which to assess their own environments, recognise the insidious nature of some of these less spoken about elements, to therefore be able to proactively tackle and change them.

Policies and Procedures – One size fits all

In many organisations, policies are not fit for purpose, are taken as a one size fits all, with plenty of organisations utilising simple templates or copy paste policies. It was recognised by the majority that due to **policies being constructed from a White perspective**, that assumes the **archetypal employee to be White, male, non-religious**, policy development is ill-informed, leaving them to be inherently discriminatory from their inception.

Examples of these kind of policies included lack of **flexible working**, especially impacting those

who care for children and those with specific cultural considerations. In addition, it was noted by a few people that **hot desking** policies also contributed to in and out groups, often leaving racialised employees on the periphery.

Another policy highlighted as problematic was **performance management**. Not adapted for the role, and therefore not always a good fit, most performance management policies was **focussed on outputs and outcomes**, leaving racialised staff feeling like they had to jump through hoops to achieve. It was also recognised however, that **more social, extroverted employees who are socially “liked” in the organisations would be favoured** even if not performing well, playing into a culture of unwritten rules of behaviour for success. This connected to a sense that in many organisations, especially in the public sector, **progression was connected to length of service**, feeding into and from the hierarchical systems of the professional arena, as opposed to one based on skill and ability. Despite this however, one racialised contributor working in a prominent public sector organisation noted that although longevity of service was a barrier for them, they saw the rule of 18 months being actively broken for White counterparts.

“The time in post to qualify for progression was increased, so I didn’t have a chance, regardless of my qualifications and that my potential had been highlighted through headhunting... even though I had seen this rule bent for others... it just didn’t add up.”

Interview contributor

Moving on, with **Equal Opportunities and Bullying and Harassment policies** prominent in every organisation and well known to nearly all respondents, what was also clear from our research was that despite these policies being there, and that they should elicit positive environments, they are very difficult to implement. It was strongly felt that equal opportunity policies focussed on being not-discriminatory rather than anti-discrimination, an emphasis placed on what not to do or say rather than what to do or say to counter oppressive culture.

The use of **positive action** by employers, although seen by the majority as a positive element of the Equality Act itself, was evidenced as not something that is used regularly or proactively by organisations within their own policies and procedures. Where it was used, especially regarding recruitment, progression, and retention, its use seemed to **chafe against White employees**, with clear demonstrations of them feeling that it was not 'fair'. This is also because of the nuanced nature of the Act and the policies borne out of it, not only is it difficult to pinpoint discrimination, but the **burden of evidence** is on the victim.

The final area of policies and procedures that were most heavily commented on regarding being a key part of organisational culture, the way it is shaped and maintained, were around **Complaints, Grievance & Disciplinary Policies and Procedures**. Stemming from the conversations regarding the policies in place meant to protect minorities staff from discrimination, bullying and harassment, most people felt that when it came to seeking recourse for these, complaints procedures were seen as lip-service, not working for the victim in practice to any extent.

"Upsetting, painful disciplinary process to then be told it couldn't be upheld as its one person's word against another's. Feeling misunderstood and not believed as a person of colour concerning racism."

Survey respondent

Many of our survey respondents and contributors felt that there wasn't any time or support carried out when facing issues, for them to proactively follow up complaint's procedures. And that looking at them, having to take that on beyond their workload was too much to manage alone. It was also strongly felt that complaints procedures intrinsically couldn't be used against a superior, leaving many people unsure how to deal with issues faced within managerial relationships.

"HR suggests mediation as a tool of conflict resolution. This is problematic because it puts the victim and the perpetrator on the same level and diminishes the experiences and trauma of racism and reduces it to just a disagreement when the discrimination has been weaponised against one person."

Interview contributor

In many cases where people did seek to utilise complaints procedures against their colleagues, they were found to either **not be taken seriously**, people in charge not seeing an act as racist or discriminatory. One of the key misgivings of most complaints' procedures raised in our research, however, was the approach of **'your word against theirs'**, and, if taken further, mediation being the first port of call, pertaining to a sense of forced reconciliation, placing both the perpetrator

and the victim on the same level playing field when coming to a 'solution', simplified to an apology which was usually deemed as a 'simple mistake.'

With some contributors raising that working through the entire process had taken years, it was felt that standard complaints procedures in organisations today are not fit for purpose. Leaving marginalised people who have faced discrimination, bullying and/or harassment at work unsafe due to the lack of aftercare or consideration of the trauma and emotional impact having to take something forward like this would have on them.

A few contributors who had ended up leaving employment due to the outcome of these procedures, even if they had 'won' the case, and stayed in employment with the perpetrator, were subsequently filed with **Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)**. It is clear with NDA policies that for most organisations, the priority lies therefore in protecting the organisation and its reputation, not protecting the staff. These policies and the culture of disbelief behind them ruin people's lives.

Ways of Working – Conform to the norm

When undertaking our research, it was clear that when it comes to office-based environments and work culture, in most experiences, there is a **particular way to get things done**. This is unwritten, non-descript. If staff can pick up these ways of doing things and adhere to them then they may be able to excel in their role, but if they have been taught previously to do a task in a different manner, contributors commented that this would be seen as a failure.

There is no acceptance of diverse ways of doing things and approaching tasks. There are specific ways of giving and receiving information, utilising email and not the phone for example, or managing meetings, where agendas had to be written and minutes recorded even if neither were followed or reviewed post meeting. This meant that contributors felt that it was not possible to adapt their working styles or be creative in their roles.

"There is often no power to use your own labour or fulfil the tasks taught to you in a differing manner, there is no place for creativity as the organisation doesn't accept diverse ways of doing things. In that sense there is no diversity within workplace culture."

Interview contributor

In Welsh office environments, the working style is **task focussed**. This left people with the sense that quantity and outputs were primary. It was clear that part of the culture and way of working was that in many environments, that there **is a job to do**, things you have been tasked with, and that this was more important than professional freedom over your career or developing collegiate relationships. This culture meant that people worked under an **air of complacency**, especially in the public sector, and that there was **no real drive** to do things to progress professionally or in their career. Contributors felt they were 'not allowed to be seen to be driven', as though being at school, their White counterparts would pitch them as being a teacher's pet, not cool, and especially as a racialised person trying to develop themselves proactively.

"It's an Icarus type situation – as a Black person, if you float too close to the sun, being taken under the wing of the most Senior person, it led to people saying, 'who the hell does he think he is?' People started not being as friendly, all kinds of things were made difficult for me, so it ended in tribunal."

Interview contributor

Working Relationships – Power Dynamics & Hierarchies

Culture is very much understood as the way people behave and interact, and the impact of culture is experienced predominantly within organisational relationships, interpersonal interactions, and behaviours.

The culture and relationships surrounding **leadership were described as autocratic**. This manifested in the way that leaders were generally never seen to consult staff, only taking into view strategies but not understanding the operations and impact of strategies and culture on the ground. In regard to race equality and the experience of racialised staff, leadership seemed to focus on the reputation of an organisation being 'not-racist', focusing on policies procedures values and stances, without any recognition of the culture being manifested and being perpetuated by employees.

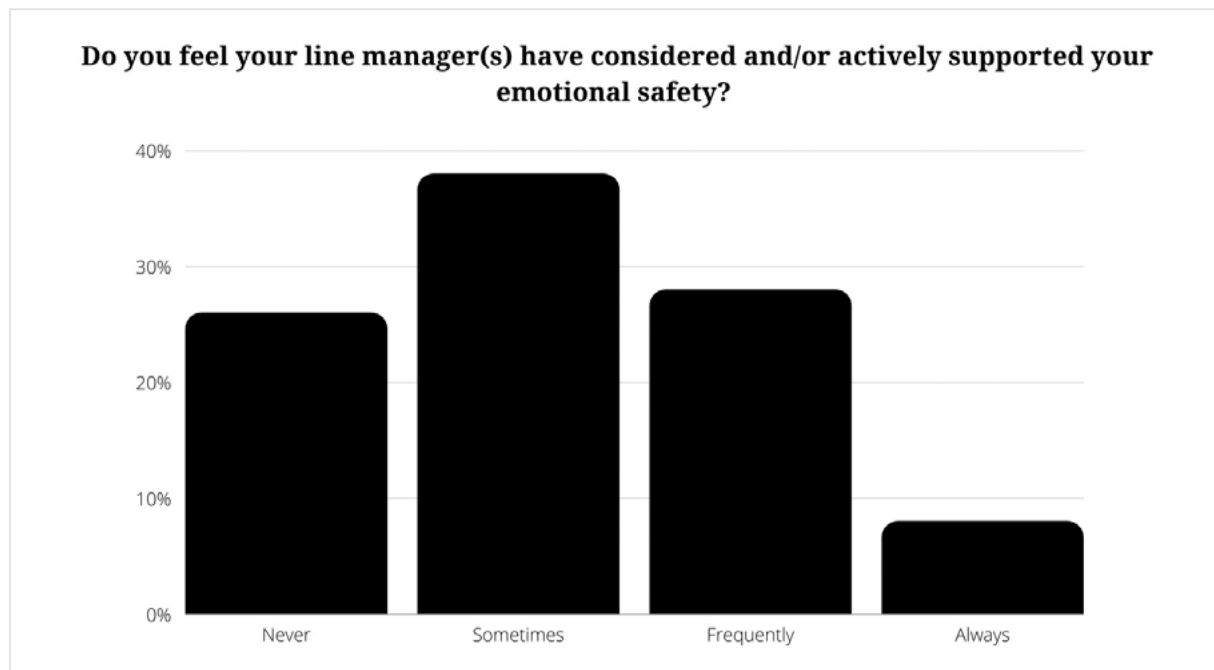
This system of autocracy was very much felt by most contributors to be intrinsic to the majority of professional White-collar working organisations which perpetuate strict **hierarchies** that uphold certain **power dynamics** within the structure. And it was very clear to everyone that these hierarchies were, in this regard, **based on race, power ascertained from being inherently White**.

It was also made clear that staff shouldn't challenge those above them, and that if they had ideas for changes, they would only be heard if they had White collegiate support. Flipped on its head then, for those contributors who had also had experiences of leading organisations, they noted that, regardless of this, the power and hierarchy was maintained.

"It looked good for them, and it felt good for them to have someone different into their leadership role, it suited their purpose and got the right message out... but the reality is that hadn't changed who and what they were and their understanding of power dynamics. I was a convenient little figurehead. When I started to ask questions about intent and purpose, that's when the discomfort started to come in. This shows just how far behind a lot of White, supposedly forward-thinking people are, regarding their understanding of the power and control they have ultimately."

Interview contributor

Moving down the ladder on the scale of hierarchy, **managers**, and their approaches to management of teams and racialised people were the next most commented on aspect of culture as demonstrated through working relationships.



In our survey, **64% of respondents said that their line managers never or only sometimes considered their emotional wellbeing, with 78% feeling that their race/ethnicity played a part in this.**

The picture that was painted by most was an arena where managers **don't take time to get to know you, downplay or don't like to deal with interpersonal problems.** The focus of management meetings is outcomes of work rather than inclusion or wellbeing, their role being one to ensure that the job is being done. This was accentuated by a feeling that policies were not embodied by managers, leaving them redundant in practice, and that managers just didn't have time to develop this supportive role and were not equipped with the skills necessary for working with diverse staff on broader issues or complaints outside of the direct task/work/project focus.

What was found therefore was that due to this style of working relationship, racialised staff felt that in most cases, they had to get on with getting to know the finer workings of an organisation and developing a sense of inclusion by themselves.

"The current work culture means that a manager's role is to get things done, therefore the minutia of the employee experience is lost or minimised. Managers are more concerned with outcomes over wellbeing and there is usually no time or effort to find and hold the difficult conversations or navigate personal relationships."

Interview contributor

One of the compounded considerations of the way in which managers interact with racialised staff was that progression was based on **cronyism**. The culture of having to be a certain 'fit' to be able to develop relationships with those in power and therefore progress. The ability to develop these relationships, where mentors chose a certain type of mentee, was broadly reserved for White employees. Within the working culture, proximity to power was seen as important for progression and professional development – something not offered to most racialised people.

Having touched on interpersonal relationships between team members and employees, something left to the individual to develop, a dire picture was painted of how this plays out. **Gossipy, bitchy, talkative** were regular descriptors. This was combined with **banter**, including racist banter demonstrating oppressive and outdated attitudes. Contributors stated that in most experiences this kind of banter was accepted in office environments, especially larger ones, where managers were not present. This side of organisational behaviour led to a very **cliquey** culture where staff behaved with an air of pack mentality, and that inclusion in social groups didn't matter if you had similar interests or not, but more so if you had the same cultural background and understanding. There was a strong sentiment that **racialised people had to actively ingratiate themselves to their White colleagues** or be forever left out, and that the perpetuation of the 'old boys' network' meant you were judged on the value of your personal relationships with others in the office.

"My relationships are more superficial or professional, whereas some colleagues I see some have very close relationships... There is a closed group mentality – but their friendship emerged in the workplace, and you don't know the reason, nobody asks you if you want to be involved, you only get invited to general socials, but never to the socials amongst different people."

Interview contributor

Within the broader context of the staffing body in white-collar organisations, many contributors reported a feeling that many staff members behaved within a remit of **political correctness**, feeling that at times people have

become so scared to get it wrong, that they would actively avoid racialised staff and not try to get to know them beyond the work context in any sort of interpersonal way.

"Wales has an interesting history of being oppressed by the English, but the average person doesn't know how to talk about the oppression of Black and Brown people – there is a felt sense of discomfort talking about Wales' role in the slave trade, a loud silence. This facilitates a culture of silence."

Interview contributor

There is a clear understanding that **conversations around race were highly uncomfortable** for many staff members and even HR teams. A **dearth in awareness** of issues was made clear during 2020 after the brutal murder of George Floyd (rest in power) where many staff and organisations stood to a 'don't bring the political into work' stance, and that if the topic was raised, then a tangible **air of discomfort** amongst White colleagues was felt, some leaning on **'colourblind'**⁵ viewpoints that actively ignored the impact on individuals of institutional and systemic racism or of hearing about racist incidents.

Cultural Hegemony

"What is key is what people don't see, the unspoken and unseen but collectively known. There is a need to clock the unwritten rules and knowledge and use that to learn how to survive."

Interview contributor

⁵ To be colour blind is to lean on the discourse that ultimately, we are all human beings, we all face difficulties, and ignoring difference regarding oppression. Colourblind principles lead to statements such as 'All lives matter'.

What was denoted by many contributors was the real sense of there being **unwritten and unspoken rules** in the workplace. Described as a 'way things are done around here', it was felt very strongly that these rules were collectively known by the majority.

With this comes then a basis of **assumptions of behaviour**, as well as an assumption of knowledge and understanding of these rules, meaning that no time is taken to support racialised people to develop these skills or to get to know how they may operate. This **monoculture** therefore means that everything within these organisations is created and understood through a **White cultural lens**, with anything out of the White cultural ordinary seen as offensive.

Unfortunately, it was also clearly recognised that there is a strong **aversion to change**, especially cultural change, within most organisations, and that attempts to do things differently, disturbing the hierarchy, leaves a **state of hostility and tension**, people digging heels in to the cultural assumptions and behaviours that have been the baseline for so long.

"When I first joined the BAME Network I thought I was championing positive changes – but there is a feeling they don't want to change or they are sacred of change – ultimately, I want to progress, don't want to be seen as the person causing an issue, so I chose to leave and keep my head down."

Interview contributor

The spiders web of office culture

The organisational culture in office-based workplaces is definitively hard to describe in all its elements because much of it is felt, but not seen. Like walking into a spider's web, where you can feel the strands stick to you, but cannot see them, office-based culture becomes a trap for many racialised people that they try to work out, but within which they become increasingly tangled. And like a web is to the spider's prey – there are some devastating consequences.

Part 2) – The impact of organisational culture – unsafe spaces

This chapter is broken down into three core areas of impact: measurable outcomes that are clearly defined; impact on sense of inclusion; and the ultimate impact on psychological safety. It is usually the first area that receives attention. What this new era is calling on is to believe, value and recognise the impact on elements that are not directly measurable – to believe someone's lived experience.

Practical and tangible impacts – the measurable immeasurable

These elements were felt to be a specific side-effect of the collective culture, rather than other elements of racism, employment, and the labour market in general.

One of the practical impacts was that of **performance**. Racialised staff commented that they consistently felt that they had to hit all performance measures because they felt a **need to prove themselves worthy**, and the need to **work harder** was consistently communicated.

Coupled with this was that racialised staff experienced a tangibly higher level of **scrutiny** than their counterparts. This was

clear through anecdotes such as contributors being actively singled out, when White counterparts had not for doing the same thing, and receiving micromanagement riddled with **microaggressions** even when working below their expected grade. This was also denoted by a clear **lack of professional recognition**, where qualifications were not recognised formally or informally; they had been shortlisted for a higher position but offered a much lower one. A culmination in this was that most contributors and survey respondents felt they had been **overlooked for progression** and opportunities for professional development. One of the main obstacles felt was that ability to progress was also based on proximity to hierarchy.

"A survey found that 'BAME' candidates wanted to progress but found that the system was impossible to navigate without support and saw cronyism and promotions given on nepotistic terms... you knew who was getting the job before it had even gone out."

Interview contributor

As mentioned, most contributors commented that absolutely **no support** was available for them to take forward issues of discrimination and the majority stated that HR was not a safe space to go to. Being known by many that the **burden of evidence** would be on them to prove discrimination, they started taking records of instances from day one, should they need to take the concern further. However, one contributor, who had taken an employer to a tribunal with the support of his Union, said that they would not recommend it to other racialised colleagues, because even though they won, they still had to leave employment for the continued discomfort working there.

For many others, they realised the only way they could progress was to **apply for more senior positions in other organisations**.

A number had to take periods of **sick leave** for work related stress or **leave their employment** as they felt they had no energy left to fight against and challenge the injustices they and others faced.

And when asking for change, a common response from organisations was that change could not be initiated as there was **'not enough BAME people/data on the experiences of BAME people'** to be able to justify the needs for change or implement evidence without contravening confidentiality and GDPR. A weak excuse, but one that is clearly not helped by the fact that racialised staff are continuously moving on.

Impact on inclusion – assimilation to survive

There is also a real impact on racialised staff members inclusion in the workplace. Given the constant 'Equality Diversity and Inclusion' drives and money that is poured into these initiatives, it is shocking how excluded racialised (and other minoritised) people are.

What was broadly commented on by interviewees and survey respondents was not only **a felt sense of exclusion**, being made to feel like they didn't belong, like they were an oddity but also **active exclusion** – not being invited to team events and chat groups, not welcomed, or involved in breaktime conversations, and not being able to join in work discussions and decisions made in social settings. Being part of such a minority, contributors commented that there was an air of 'who are you' aimed at them, with their advice or opinions regularly being rejected. And in the few occasions where contributors' commented on having non-work-related interactions with their White counterparts, it regularly felt superficial, or became a space

where they felt uncomfortable due to **people's biases and microaggressions being more freely communicated**. These experiences develop a **sense of anxiety around small talk**, for fear of having to laugh off an untoward comment, and essentially, many said they felt alienated, and just saw work as a place to come and go from, without being able to develop anything else from it.

In addition, another of the most regularly commented on elements of office based working environments, which impact racialised people sense of belonging, was that of the unwritten rules. As mentioned, these put racialised staff in a position of needing to **learn and adhere to these rules** as much as possible, assimilating to be able to succeed.

"You must become a different person when you go to an office, conform, otherwise you think you'll lose your job – people pay attention to how you talk, walk, how you approach people – even things like using your hands as a form of expression when communicating, speaking to managers, trying to mirror them, how they talk and react. You feel you must do that to progress within any organisation."

Interview contributor

This, of course, has huge ramifications on the ability for racialised staff to bring their **authentic selves** to work. One of the most reported experiences in relation to a sense of inclusion, most contributors and many survey respondents referenced experiences of **codeswitching** to try and fit in. From changing clothing, changing names to anglicised versions, or even accepting anglicised versions given to them by colleagues, stories of the need to fit in or leave poured through our data.

Contributors mentioned a **hyper awareness** of how they expressed themselves, minimising hand movements when talking, going along with banter, and recognising that it was easier to be British born with a British accent and go out and drinks than not.

Of course, the only time that contributors felt that they were able to bring elements of their authentic selves into work were during **tokenistic diversity exercises**. Being asked to join photo shoots for promotional activities and being the diverse face of the organisation, comment on issues related to race and diversity, suddenly brought forth to be the magical minority with answers to everything, left people positioned to the opposite, of wondering if they were fulfilling racialised stereotypes enough to be valued for that.

This of course, leaves many racialised people feeling **lonely and isolated** in office-based work environments. And of course, this is felt to an even greater sense where racialised people have **multiple or intersecting marginalized identities**. A multitude of sentiments of exclusion were related to exclusion due to racialised people also being LGBTQIA+, being a migrant, being younger, from a different class background, having a different accent, being Muslim and being a woman, especially a Black woman or a Muslim woman.

Impact on emotional wellbeing – psychologically unsafe

The negative impact on racialised people's psychological safety, their mental health and feeling of not being able to speak up in the broadest sense, becomes increasingly noticeable.

"It's not overt racism, it's the small things that get to you, and people think you're being oversensitive..."

“Racial microaggressions create a culture in which people of colour can’t pinpoint why something is racist or makes them uncomfortable, so we withdraw into ourselves...”

Interview contributors

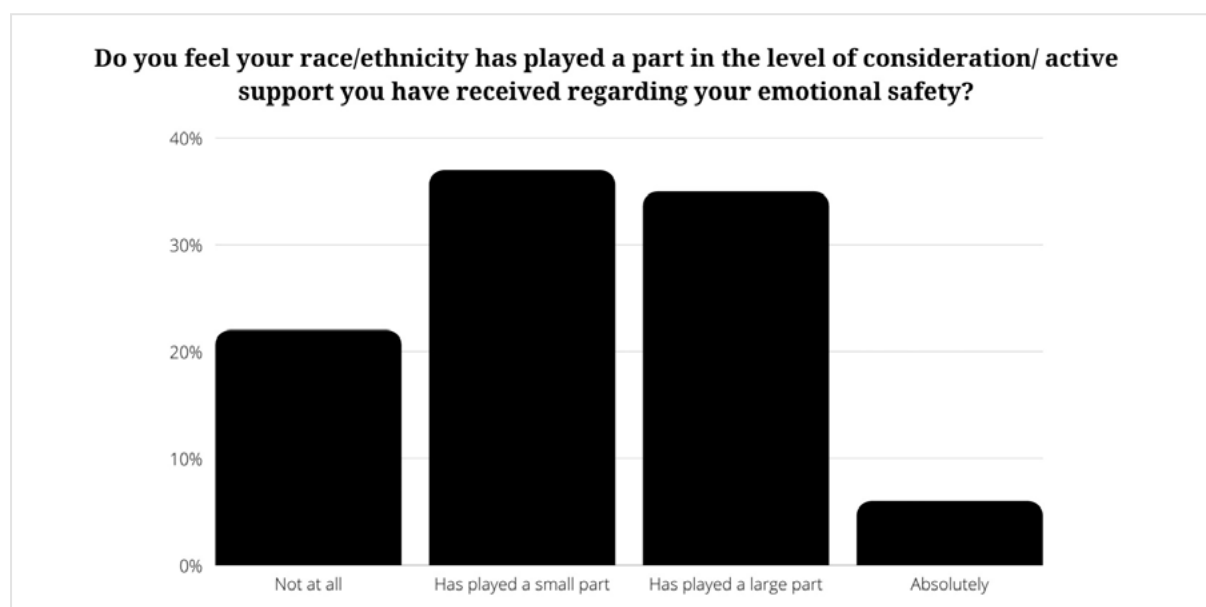
Everyone who contributed to interviews and the survey discussed some level of negative impact on their mental health due to their experiences of office-based culture. Directly impacted by constant **microaggressions**, racialised staff feel that they are under a constant attack on their sense of self, identity and worth. The regular discomfort in reaction to comments and behaviours that are hard to pinpoint was regularly commented on as something that people just had to sit with, without being able to actively process emotionally.

Part of the barrier to emotional processing was also heavily communicated as the **inability to challenge this dominant culture** and the manifestations within it.

It was made clear that racialised staff could not feel safe if the processes in place for recourse did not allow room to evidence the impact on an individual and their work, and that if anything, they would have to pick their battles carefully if battle at all.

“If you have the courage to speak out, you are ending your career. Regardless of what you see on my CV, this does not describe my confidence levels – friends ask why I talk in a self-deprecating way – because of my experiences, I have been kicked so many times, I carry the bruises. Racialised people carry that trauma daily.”

Interview contributor



With 97% of survey respondents saying they had directly faced issues at work, 81% of survey respondents felt that their race played a part in their ability to address these issues.

This inability to seek recourse was contributed to by an overarching sentiment of being labelled the **troublemaker**, seen as someone who was rocking the boat. This led to many

saying that they had actively decided to keep their head down in situations that they felt warranted comment, not making a fuss for fear of the impact on them. This even impacts racialised people's decision to join a union, again feeling that if they did, they would be viewed by their employer with an air of caution.

And when on occasion issues would be raised, nearly everyone said that they felt dismissed, that others commented it was not **an issue**, that they were exaggerating, not taken seriously, or that they were made to feel incompetent for raising something within their work. **Gaslighting from White employees** was a regular occurrence, and in many instances, it was communicated that issues, especially those linked to race, were in the minds of the racialised person.

"How do you change a culture in an organisation, if you haven't lived our experience – White counterparts don't see anything wrong, think we are overreacting, over analysing – I've been told, "Oh, it's just banter, stop overreacting, it's just the culture, just get used to it." It's easy for them to say that. I want to change that culture, but when you're told it is what it is, and you just must fit in, it makes you want to leave."

Interview contributor

This then leads to a **hostile and tense working environment**, reflecting what was described earlier, that when a racialised person tried to highlight something that could warrant change, their perceived attempt to position themselves as powerful was met with further hostility and scrutiny.

"Racialised employees face social ostracization if they complain. This creates a hostile work environment which is not easily proven and drives racialised workers to seek other employment opportunities"

Interview contributor

With equality policies stating that the victim must provide evidence of discrimination, racialised employees find it increasingly difficult to do so in instances where the impact is felt emotionally. Contributors commented that they felt no one else understood what it was like to work under these conditions, and therefore put off reporting anything due to a knowledge that they would not be believed.

"It is hard to provide evidence of microaggressions and covert hate and make people understand the issues of working under such conditions. This puts many racialised people off reporting as they feel as though they won't be believed."

Interview contributor

Comments on lack of confidence and self-esteem and suffering from **imposter syndrome** were regular, leading to markedly increased levels of **stress** due to needing to prove themselves. And the lasting impact here was a sense of being **demoralised and demotivated**, not feeling that there was any route to progress, and that they would be driven into the ground. A deep sense of **frustration** was also felt, as contributors knew they should be able to progress, but felt they were put in a condition of needing to be grateful for a job. All contributors commented on feeling in many instances **deeply unhappy**, and ultimately developing an inherent distrust of White-led organisations, due to the expectation of the hypocrisy they feel from White collectivism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- eliciting culture change - deep diversity

One of the areas we explored in our research were ideas for change and positive experiences where the culture, policies, ways of working and interpersonal relationships played out differently to the norm, allowing for our contributors to have a more positive experience, feel more included and safer

By spinning these together and thinking theoretically about how these can be harnessed in a broader cultural context, we aim to explore multiple ways in which can start to create positive spaces for racialised people to work under, in, that will not only allow space for them to thrive, but for the organisations themselves to develop and move into a world where diversity is embraced and the impact of diverse thinking, relationships, ways of working and policies goes beyond what our vision could imagine.

Below we list our recommendations, however we invite the reader to confer with the full report text to understand the details behind these. We have broken down the recommendations under who we feel should be responsible to lead on implementation, detailing how the work will be done and why it is important. It may be that some organisation's structure themselves differently, and so we ask readers again to consider with flexibility the implementation of recommendations, without losing sight of the aim therein.

Learn

Racialised staff need to feel that they are being heard, and that there is active recognition of the barriers they face due to racism in the workplace in all its forms. A culture of listening and support is imperative for leaders to cultivate to enable the right change to be considered.

WHO is going to do it	WHAT & HOW will it be done	WHY is it necessary (the aim)
Leaders	listen to racialised staff by employing an open-door policy, setting a standard of listening and believing racialised staff	to support their psychological safety, ability to bring challenge and maintain confidence in their work
HR and EDI leads	incorporate regular anti-oppression and antiracism (un)-learning opportunities for all staff through inductions and training. These learning programs must be led by racialised people and incorporate the following without limitation: the theory and applied experiences of systems of oppression, anti-oppressive practice, racism (ideological, institutional, and interpersonal) and anti-racism, power, privilege, fragility and allyship, unconscious bias, definitions, and examples of microaggressions and macro communication, the Equality Act and Positive Action	To counteract ongoing instances of microaggressions and bias
Racially privileged staff members	develop their allyship to racialised staff, through committing to the allyship journey, educating themselves, understanding and leveraging their power and privilege, and being an upstander, speaking up not over and making room for racialised staff, prioritising the comfort of those being harmed	to proactively include racialised staff in work and social activities, but also to counter gaslighting by supporting challenges and developing a more sympathetic environment
Project and line managers	ensure that adequate resource time and capacity is built into their programs of work to enable all staff to engage in learning opportunities as well as ensuring induction processes involve developing employees understanding of work-based culture in a theoretical sense as well as applied sense in the organisation	to mitigate a re-creation of cultural hegemony and unwritten rules

"When people take actions on your opinions, it reinforces your sense of self and worth – it's like a flower opening, this is me and I can contribute and work here. That safe environment is reinforced by my managers, telling me to say what I need to, reminding me I'm employed because of me, my professional and lived experience."

Interview contributor

Act

There is a necessity in this world to codify changes and culture – so this must be done with racialised staff and consultants. They must lead on a process of learning, unlearning and policy dynamism.

WHO is going to do it	WHAT & HOW will it be done	WHY is it necessary (the aim)
Leaders	provide mentoring opportunities to racialised staff	to encourage participative democratic leadership and non-hierarchical engagement and leave staff feeling more motivated, gratified, and positive towards their work environment
Managers	centralise interpersonal emotional support and check-ins over task focussed micromanagement and scrutiny, providing appropriate support	that develops a sense of value, psychological safety and understanding for racialised employees
HR	recognise Unions and provide access to Racialised Diversity Networks and support services (internal or external) for their racialised staff to access during work time	to enable access if needed to safe spaces for them to speak freely; obtain interpersonal support and garner emotional energy to combat the sense of being an outsider-within, amongst other needs that racialised staff may have
HR and EDI leads	proactively celebrate everyone's culture and achievements equally	demonstrating inclusion in practice, actively counteracting a sense of cultural hegemony
HR and EDI leads	changes must be actively monitored and evaluated by looping back around to listening and engaging with racialised staff in appropriate manners	to ensure that the desired effect is taking place
HR and EDI leads	ensure the work towards developing and maintaining a truly inclusive culture is transparent – actions and goals are broken down and communicated clearly to staff, with accountability measures in place	for staff to appreciate the efforts being made

"Take the time to train staff who are in the majority to understand systemic racism and remove the level of denial, to know they are the ones who need to put in effort to draw the best from the minority."

Survey respondent

Transform

The way we work must shift to incorporate difference and diversity. A process of exploration, space for collectively trying and collectively getting things wrong must be incorporated into organisations to allow for creative and different ways of working and for all staff, including racialised staff, to feel like they can belong and be safe in the workplace.

WHO is going to do it	WHAT & HOW will it be done	WHY is it necessary (the aim)
HR	create space for racialised people to co-create and develop policy and procedures, ensuring these are dynamic and have regular bespoke reviews	To foster inclusive and accessible formalised written policies, to formalise changes to ensure their maintenance
HR	centralise Positive Action provision in all organisational policy and procedures, centring the access to rights for racialised staff	making space for the broader staffing body and institution to move from a space of being 'not racist' to a space of being actively antiracist, that encourages racialised staff to stay and progress within an organisation
Managers	explore and make room for different, informal ways of working, by incorporating and making room for different approaches to tasks, as a process	to democratise the workplace, encourage inclusion and move away from denoting particular ways of working
Managers	encourage relationship focussed work culture, centring space for curiosity and getting to know each other as well as centring collaborative team working	to support active inclusion, allowing people to bring their full selves to work
Racially privileged staff members	engage in constructive behaviour change, moving towards deeper internal reflections as to ethically, emotionally, and practically why things are being done differently	to encourage deep set cultural transformation, again supporting a shift from being 'not-racist' to actively antiracist

"The cultural construction of the office is a kind of collective construction and promotion of ideologies. On the surface, the realm of thought is a spiritual factor, but if we understand it from the point of view that spirit reacts to the material, we will find that the words and deeds of each member in the office not only shows their individual character, but also reflect the realm of thought of office culture."

Interview contributor

CONCLUSION

We can see from this as well as our other reports that racism is institutional. It is systemic. It is societal. And it is also embedded in our culture. Culture is pervasive – it is invisible – it is a spider's web that perpetuates and upholds the values that underly it and mark the way people behave and interact towards each other. And societal culture impacts organisational culture.

We have recognised some of the elements that make up this culture – from policies being designed as a one size fits all, to ways of working being based on norms and standards of behaviour, and working relationships based on power dynamics and hierarchies.

The negative practical and tangible impacts, combined with that on racialised people's sense of belonging and psychological safety feels insurmountable for many. We feel this insidious culture, we feel the impact on us, we feel the stickiness of the web – but no one believes us.

However, we also recognise the possibility in humanity to bring about culture change. This must be a whole organisational approach, with sufficient resource and capacity at its core. And with all these recommendations, although the focus of our research was racialised people, our contributors and respondents included disabled racialised people, LGBTQIA+ racialised people, women, and non-binary racialised people. These changes can be applied to support the safety and inclusion of all marginalised people. And this is imperative. You must be inclusive of all – not just racialised people – otherwise it is a paradox within which you are living. If some people are excluded, you cannot have an inclusive, safe culture.

FULL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary workplace racism is rooted in forms of racial thinking that once underpinned imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and scientific racism.

(Ashe et al, 2019, pg.9)

The labour market is one of the core pillars of the **capitalist system** we live in and was central to the 'need' for the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of Black African people during the British, including Welsh (1919 Race Riots Collective, 2019; Akala, 2018), colonial expansion project of the 15th century, out of which bore racist theories used to justify the dehumanising practices applied to Black people, and from there, all other racialised people going forward.

The abolition of the slave trade and the consequential near-global illegalization of holding human beings as slave labour meant that a new system needed to emerge to maintain the hierarchical elitist system which kept, and maintains to keep, racialised people away from access to power, power that is in many circumstances borne out of access to finance via wage labour.

This system of oppression, underpinned by the racist theories developed in the 15th century onwards, has led to all institutions that govern and manage the societies we live in to befall to institutional, and with this, systemic racism. Sitting within a society of individuals who have also absorbed the stereotypes and biases towards racialised people, perpetuated by the media and education, these institutions which employ said people, are therefore bound to, within their culture, be inherently racist.

This report aims to explore how this racist culture impacts racialised staff, specifically considering office-based work environments, due to the high percentage of public and third sector employment in Wales. Importantly, the research considers how this culture manifests through frameworks of policy, ways of working and professional relationships. And with this, the aim is to provide clear, concrete recommendations that can be holistically adopted by employers to enable positive change that will lead to improved impact and outcomes for racialised staff in these environments across the nation.

After 3 years of extensive engagement across Wales with racialised people from a number of backgrounds and varying intersecting identities, in 2019 the All-Wales BAME Engagement Programme, run by Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team (EYST), one of Race Alliance Wales' members and Steering Group representatives, reported that amongst a number of prevailing issues that racialised people in the country wanted addressed, racism in the labour

market was one of the highest scorings (Wiegand & Cifuentes, 2018). Joining Race Alliance Wales (RAW) in 2020, EYST Members of the Alliance sought for capacity to be created to undertake an in-depth peer-led piece of research into the topic. It was also noted that the provision for policy-based action research to be undertaken in a truly independent fashion with race equality at its core was not regularly funded in Wales.

It was noted in the preceding research that 60% of racialised people in Wales feel that ethnic minority workers are treated unfairly, and that 70% of racialised staff have experienced discrimination. This is in addition to the racist microaggressions that are of a regular occurrence, and which lead to experiences of isolation and othering, directly impacting motivation and confidence, in turn having a direct negative affect on mental health, including increased cases of PTSD. However, these themes have been regularly silenced, and an understanding of the actual manifestations of organisational culture that create space for this negative impact remains unexplored in a specifically Welsh context. It is recognised that these stem from underlying values and assumptions held by the majority staffing body, which in turn reflect the society we live in. Additionally, recent research in Wales has shown that racialised staff do not experience psychologically safe⁶ workplaces. This has been set as a priority within the recently launched Anti-racist Wales Action Plan by Welsh Government.

"A holistic approach to tackling workplace inequality is needed; a dual focus on operational interventions and cultural transformation is required – these are two sides of the same coin."

(NHS England, 2019, p.67)

With this, the concept for this research was born, to plug the cavernous gap. Manifestations of organisational culture and how they impact racialised people is something which we must understand to be able to provide concrete, substantiated recommendations that Welsh employers, especially the public sector and charities, could take forward to tackle the prevailing issue.

Our findings were unsurprising – however extremely hard to conceptualise in writing. Describing the culture of office-based environments in Wales was like describing the air – something felt and understood by all but difficult to put into words. Policies were seen as one size fits all, and expectations of conforming to the norm regarding ways of working was consistent. Working relationships were based on racist power hierarchies, and within the pervasiveness of political correctness, a clear cultural hegemony is in place. The impact of these unsafe spaces is broad and deep. Beyond negative impacts on racialised staff performance and progression, access to support and recourse for issues, racialised staff were facing the need to take time off sick or ultimately leave employment. This was an active fallout more so of the sense of exclusion and isolation. Embodied in the need to codeswitch and learn unwritten rules to try to fit in, experiences in office-based environments regularly left racialised staff feeling unsafe at work.

⁶ A psychologically safe environment provides a baseline level of security that is needed for people to be able to bring their whole selves. An environment feels psychologically safe when all team members: "share the belief that within the team they will not be exposed to interpersonal or social threats to their self or identity, their status or standing and to their career or employment, when engaging in learning behaviours such as asking for help, seeking feedback, admitting errors or lack of knowledge, trying something new or voicing work-related dissenting views." (Millar et al, 2021)

The psychological impact of microaggressions and gaslighting left racialised staff being trapped in a cycle of trauma.

Importantly however, we were able to consider the view for change and consolidate ideas and experiences into a few specific recommendations that we believe, holistically with recommendations from other reports, will lead to change within office-based culture that allows racialised staff to thrive, not just survive. We understand that our findings relate to many marginalised people, however as our research focusses on racialised people a more multi strand and intersectional approach to this theme of research is needed. However, we believe that many of the recommendations towards an approach of inclusion will positively impact other marginalised people as well, especially when considered with bespoke understandings of their needs.

Employers need to incorporate direct support for racialised staff, through processes that involve deep listening exercises, especially by leaders and managers. Constructive behaviour change must be a focus to transform the culture in an organisation. And with this, a process of learning and unlearning is imperative for entire staffing bodies, ultimately embedding changes into policy with direct input from racialised staff, centring positive action where possible. For we need employment to be psychologically safe for racialised staff. Wales can again be a pioneer in the way it approaches these issues, and if these recommendations are taken on then we believe that the Antiracist Wales Action Plan (2022) and the vision laid out in the Future Generations of Wales Act (2015) can be achieved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research, reports, articles, and recommendations for change related to contemporary employment and the discriminatory experiences that racialised people face in Wales, the UK and globally are plentiful.

When reviewing the evidence base available within the timeframe this project allowed, light was shone on several shocking - but unfortunately for many - unsurprising factors related to the impact of institutional, systemic, and cultural racism prevalent across labour markets in Wales.

Stats and tangible impacts – unemployment and precarious work

We know that when it comes to **rates of employment**, racialised people are disproportionately under/unemployed. Data has shown that racialised unemployment has been 70% higher than White unemployment for the last 20 years (White, 2021), that racialised people are 58% more likely to be unemployed and 47% more likely to be on a zero-hour contract. (Bowyer & Henderson, 2021)

The total lack of security and the irregular hours of zero-hour contracts is throwing the lives of [racialised] Cardiff residents into disarray.

(New Economics Foundation, 2019, pg 11)

What is also evident is that when comparing entry into employment, racialised people in Wales are also **less likely to be aware of career support programmes**, or when they are supported, they are regularly referenced into low-paying / low-skilled occupations such as cleaning with insecure and precarious working conditions including zero-hour contracts or being self-employed – the latter being shown as a direct fallout from discrimination in the paid labour market, which makes entrepreneurship safer in that sense, though not necessarily safer in the financial sense. (Weigand & Cifuentes, 2018a, Ogbonna, 2019; Hatch, S et al, 2021; Byrne et al, 2020). It is also important to note that racialised people on non-permanent or part time contracts are more likely to receive racial harassment, meaning it makes their employment even more precarious and difficult to maintain. Ashe et al, 2019). Evidence has also been brought to light on **exploitation of racialised workers**, not being paid, and that broadly speaking, from the data available, there is an ethnicity pay gap in Wales that can no longer be ignored. (Weigand & Cifuentes, 2018a; Hatch et al, 2021; White, 2021; New Economics Foundation, 2019).

People identified racist discrimination as an exploitation of people who do not know their rights because they come from another country.

(New Economics Foundation, 2019)

With this, although evidence shows that **racialised people outperform White counterparts in higher education and qualifications**, this does not translate into outperforming in the labour market, should they even obtain a role equivalent to that which their education should provide. (Ogbonna, 2019) And we see that only 6% of senior leadership or higher positions in the public sector in Britain are held by racialised people. (Institute of Government and Public Policy, 2022) The math doesn't add up. Unless you throw racism into the equation.

'Lack of diversity at senior levels impacts the decisions taken and the direction, tone and culture of the organisation, all of which affect the lives of employees.'

(Manon, 2021)

Gaining professional employment

Much research has been undertaken on the experience of racialised people trying to enter employment / obtain certain jobs in certain fields of work. (Broughton et al, 2016; Brown, 2021; Di Stasio et al, 2020) One of our member organisations, Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team, undertook in depth qualitative first-hand research into the **experiences of 74 racialised graduates from Welsh Universities**, to understand more about their experiences trying to enter the labour market in their desired professional field.

Unsurprisingly, the findings were like other research, with some elements bespoke to Wales. Respondents commented frequently on the fact that White graduates have access to far more networks, through family and friends and prior professional experiences, than they did. They also noted that for many professional fields in Wales, due to the small size, professional networks were also insular, and it was really about who you know not what you know to be able to obtain a job. Employers clearly rely upon nepotism and these networks, meaning that active barriers were produced for racialised graduates who did not have prior access to these.

In addition to this many respondents mentioned the fact that due to being migrants and/ or having international experience, their professional background, experience, or qualifications was not recognised, meaning they felt they had to start over after graduating, and were not able to rely on this experience. This was disregarding the fact that practical experience is clearly more heavily valued when applying for jobs, rather than educational understanding, but if that practical experience be borne abroad, it would not hold weight in an application.

This added to the recognition that affinity bias towards White graduates mean that they face less judgement and scrutiny when applying for jobs, and that differences that racialised people present due to cultural and religious factors are then seen as a lack of social skill. For this reason, it was regularly commented on that employers need to anonymise recruitment processes to

mitigate this unconscious (or conscious) bias. And this anonymisation is not enough just for names – it must also apply to other elements, including the names of institutions where degrees had been obtained, it was clear that being from a Russell group university such as Cardiff University gave more prestige and opportunity than from a Metropolitan or post-92 University. In addition, it was felt by many that formal interview processes were a great barrier, as they were not diverse enough for the diversity of applicants. It was recommended that different forms of assessing people for jobs should be used, such as task-based exercises or trials, as this would allow people to demonstrate their skills and abilities, not just talk about them.

Following this, again, echoing experiences reported by many, was that racialised graduates felt they were not considered for jobs even when they had extremely high grades and that they were regularly given flimsy excuses that they could clearly counteract, such as not having management experience, too many people applying, or not having the right qualifications or giving enough evidence in an interview for an element of the job. It was strongly felt by many that their inherent difference by culture of being racialised meant that had to prove they are the same, with one respondent stating:

“Someone who has difference has the burden to get across how capable they are as opposed to someone who has no difference”.

Focus group participant

And regardless of some fields and employers focussing on diversity drives and recruiting racialised people there was a clear sentiment from participants in this research that that was where the buck stopped, and that when it came to progression, racialised people were not given a chance, because many White people don't want to see racialized people progress beyond entry level jobs (Guess, 2006). This was compounded in sectors that many felt they were funnelled into, such as care, teaching assistants, but also into sectors that were not of their educational profession and agency work – taking roles that were beneath their aspiration, just to have work.

All of this unsurprisingly left most respondents lacking confidence in the labour market in Wales due to all of these knockbacks based on inherent discrimination, including the discrimination experiences at university itself. The lack of role models here was regularly reported as disheartening, and the feeling of being labelled a troublemaker if they highlighted any of this in their field left them feeling voiceless. This led to many having to undertake extra qualifications to be able to obtain roles, and regularly codeswitching to hide their otherness, being told actively that this would be their best opportunity to be able to progress. (Morris, 2020)

“I wore a headscarf and didn't get any jobs until I took the headscarf off”

Focus Group Participant

And one of the other fallouts, not only the fact that a number commented on moving into self-employment because of it being a safer bet, but the majority noted that they had opted to move to England, as it was strongly felt that as a racialised person you were more accepted, there was more diversity, and experience of racialised people in an equal sense to White counterparts.

"I work as health care mental health assistant with a lot of other ethnic minorities. When we work with people outside of Wales, it's a different feeling. They respect you. And people I know in Bristol say they won't come to Cardiff."

"Generally, I think we could talk about Wales in any sector, as a nation behind. Bristol is so diverse. I reckon it's easier to get a job there than here. And graduates are recognising that. All my university friends."

"To be honest, Wales in future is going to be in big trouble. Most people of colour graduates from Glyndwr University graduates run out of Wrexham to Liverpool."

Focus Group Participants

Finally, the research showed that regardless of all this, deep down racialised graduates know their worth. With this, they took the time to contribute experiences and considerations that they thought help racialised graduates into employment in their relevant fields. Firstly, they mentioned what Universities could do – mobilising networks for racialised students was imperative to develop networks and gain support. In addition, they felt Universities could emphasise more vocational experience in degrees, to provide direct job skill development for those who may not have had the opportunities before. Of course, for employers, positive action was heralded as being key to promoting recruitment of racialised graduates, as well as the consideration of basing recruitment on aptitude, not experience (Davies, 2019, Equality and Diversity Forum, 2010).

When in employment, respondents stated that the approach of managers was key to their ability to progress and feel positive in the working environment. Having supportive, approachable, interested, and caring managers meant graduates felt able to thrive. In addition, having a diverse workforce made them feel safer and that others already understood diversity.

It is clear with this research that many of the similar themes are coming up – and that more understanding if therefore needed of people's experiences in employment as well regarding recruitment. It was specifically commented on that more research is needed on the experiences in Wales, as being less diverse, they can be different to the experiences in Bristol and London that dominate much research. With this, we aim to look at what stands, what does not, and, as detailed, more explicitly consider the experience of the fewer racialised people that do obtain professional employment.

In addition, it is clear from initial perception that **most of the white-collar labour market in Wales is White**. A visible lack of diversity across many organisations in Wales, especially the public and third sectors and in more managerial/senior/leadership positions, has been highlighted and has driven institutions to rapidly review their recruitment practices with an aim to visibly racially diversify their employee base.⁷ Issues to address are the disproportionately low access to graduate programmes by racialised people, with evidence highlighting that many application process are unclear and complex. In addition, barriers are created by international qualifications and evidence not being recognised. (Weigand & Cifuentes, 2018a)

⁷ Note 'visibly' – as many of the efforts are tokenistic and producing such outcomes.

And we know, from the extensive research as listed in the bibliography and beyond in this well research topic, that there are numerous barriers to obtaining professional employment for racialised people in the UK, let alone in Wales. Elements that arise before roles have even been applied for create active barriers such as such as long pay scales, discretionary starting salaries based on experience, low wages, no additional rewards for staff, rigid working hours, invisible policies and processes and staffing body, excessive jargon, only advertising internally, only accepting CVs and giving short application periods. Then active discrimination comes in at the shortlisting stage, where early on evidence for right to work is requested, applications are not anonymised, there is no shortlisting proforma with scoring, or only top scorers are given interviews. Followed by the actual interview, with all White panels who have not been trained, when the structure is not disclosed, notes are not taken, questions are posed randomly and include questions about personality traits amongst others. And coming to decision making, panellists discuss and debate candidates openly rather than scoring them, choosing the person who 'fits' the organisation and not providing any feedback. All of these elements, not only on the surface, but rife with bias, stereotypes and prejudice, disproportionately discriminate against racialised people trying to obtain professional recognition and roles.

Organisational Culture

"Racism remains an integral feature of workplace culture and everyday working life"

(Ashe et al, 2019, pg 10)

But of course, racialised people are in employment, and this diversity recruitment drive will hopefully bring people out of precarious low paid under skilled work that they are being forced into, and into organisations and positions that value and utilise their skills and experience proactively.

However, a persistent issue that must not be forgotten therefore is the experience that racialised staff face when they enter professionalised employment environments. And this experience is evidenced as, unsurprisingly, racist. Entering a racist culture, this backdrop does not allow people to feel positive about working in the space.

Over the span of 3 years' worth on engagement with racialised people across Wales, it was found that "60% of [racialised people in Wales] think that ethnic minorities are treated unfairly in the workplace [and] perceived employment as the least fair area of society." (Wiegand & Cifuentes; 2018, pg. 23)

It has been shown that between 37% and up to 70% of racialised people have experienced some form of racial discrimination at the hands of their employer, including bullying and abuse (Ashe et al, 2019). Much of the evidence around racism in employment looks at unveiling the proliferation of **one-on-one racism**, felt by racialised individuals being perpetuated by White colleagues directly at them, with the most common form being racist remarks, including verbal abuse, racist jokes, ignorant/insensitive questioning, and racist violence.

(Ashe et al, 2019). These findings from the Racism Ruins Lives report are shocking and disgusting to see only 3 years ago. However, these stats don't encompass all the **covert racism, the microaggressions and the metacommunication** that is regularly reported, with people noting changing in attitude due to religious dress, or even being told off for using their own language in the workplace. These experiences lay way for racialised staff members to **feel isolated and othered** in organisations, something not experienced by White contemporaries. (Weigand & Cifuentes, 2018a, Pennant & Hannagan-Lewis, 2021)

"the White group noted that they generally didn't feel the impact of their race... the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic group spoke overwhelmingly of feeling they stood out in the workplace... [and] reported several unwelcome remarks that they had received during [their employment]; from colleagues voicing surprise that they were articulate, to silencing around conversations on race, Blackness or Black Lives Matter, which made Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic colleagues feel even more alienated and isolated."

(Pennant & Hannagan-Lewis, 2021, pg. 5)

These experiences are accentuated by the common notion of **not fitting in to an organisation, with the team, or to company culture**. This becomes more of a problem when looking at leadership, where racialised people are more commonly seen as unsuitable because they do not fit within culturally influenced leadership personalities or traits, such as being smiley, maintaining eye contact, and holding what is considered an air of confidence, behaviours that are not universally understood or accepted in some communities. (Ogbonna, 2019; Wiegand & Cifuentes, 2018a).

'The biases and stereotypes of Black Professional Women led to many participants feeling voiceless, or the need to 'neutralise' their cultural identity.'

(Manon, 2021)

With this, a stage is set where the only way many racialised people feel they can progress in their profession, and obtain senior or leadership positions, being valued for their skills and abilities, is the regularly reported need for racialised staff members to **have to work harder due to heightened scrutiny and unfair performance measures** than their White contemporaries to gain recognition for their work. (Usmani et al, 2021; Nagesh, 2022; Ashe et al, 2019). However, this hard work isn't just task focussed. Racialised employees must put in a lot of work to **codeswitch** – in the visible changing of names, speaking with different accents, tones of voice or uses of vernacular English, but becoming nondescript in their general behaviour, characteristics and traits demonstrated at work, invoking a process of cultural assimilation in the workplace.⁸

⁸ With this, Ogbonna highlights that in actual fact, racialised "managers typically develop leadership traits and identities that draw from different traditions and experiences with distinct advantages in comparison with mainstream leadership and organisational identities", and points to the need for research attention to understanding racialised people who have succeeded against the odds, "in their willingness to take risks, their resilience, tenacity, courage to succeed, and in the way they are able to deploy cultural resources to their advantage" (Ogbonna, 2019, pgs. 315, 321) It could be interesting to undertake research into the type of work culture that successful racialised people adhere to, as their success sometimes based on successful codeswitching and assimilation, rather than standing strong in their own professional culture.

"many organizations that claim to be multicultural in fact require new participants to adapt or conform to already existing cultural norms."

(Okun, 2021, pg. 7)

Alongside this, and felt as a direct symptom of such experiences, is **the lack of progression** for racialised staff. Evidence shows that racialised staff consistently receive less training and development opportunities than their White counterparts, 19% being denied opportunities, which directly affects integration and widens the gap between ethnicities. (Wiegand & Cifuentes 2018a; Route2 2020; White, 2021). It was not surprising to read that a major study in the UK evidenced that although White employees show lower motivation for promotion, they still receive more promotions than racialised counterparts, leading them to have to leave their current place of employment to obtain positions relevant to their professional career progression. Again shocking, but maybe not surprising, given that many professions work on policies of internal promotion, positive in some senses, but not when it is understood that these processes value cultural fit within the organisations, the ability to maintain the status quo and work in the way the organisation likes to work, over job competency. (Ogbonna, 2019). And when considering the experience for Black Women specifically, it has been clearly reported that 40% do not feel they have the same opportunities for career advancement as their non-Black colleagues, and 33% feeling they would be actively looked over for promotion. (Black Women in Leadership Network, 2022, pg. 4)

"[The] archetypal leader is a White, heterosexual male, commonly with a transactional and task-oriented leadership style... leadership search in many organisations is likely to favour those that share a common heritage... By adopting a policy of internal promotion, managers increase their opportunity to homogenise organisational culture by restricting promotion to those that demonstrate competence in the espoused cultural values...making promotion decisions in ways that may privilege particular groups and work against others."

(Ogbonna, 2019, pgs. 315, 318)

The pervasiveness demonstrated herein of **institutional racism and its impact**, with power vested in senior leaders and management is prevalent across the board, leading not only to unlocked potential, but a considered detrimental impact on individuals' **psyche, motivation, and confidence**. (New Economics Foundation, 2019; Wiegand & Cifuentes, 2018) Knowing that **racial discrimination has a direct impact on mental health** and a sense of wellbeing across the UK and in Wales specifically, it is unsurprising, although rather shocking, that a calculated 420,000 cases of mental illness are a direct side effect of experiencing racism at work. (Ashe et al, 2019; New Economics Foundation; Route2, 2020) The 2019 Racism Ruins Lives report provided data that stated over 50% of racialised people had impacted their mental health, with 28% having to take an extended period of sick leave due to the impact. (Ashe et al, 2019) It has also be shown by neuroscientists that exposure to racial microaggressions can lead to similar effects that of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have on war veterans. (Reid, 2021)

"We must counter the way in which workplace racism is routinely reduced to either a series of random one-off events and/ or the implicit attitudes and unconscious biases of the individual"

(Ashe et al, 2019, pg 10)

It is known that when trying to **raise issues about racism**, employers either fail to take things seriously, ignore them, or label them as troublemakers. (Usmani et al, 2020)

Talking about and challenging workplace racism is extremely difficult, precisely because of a number of coercive and repressive practices which maintain and reproduce institutional and structural racism, and White hegemony.

(Ashe et al, 2019)

And if institutions want a business case as to why this needs to be addressed, then look to the estimated £40 billion cost that racial discrimination in the workplace carries in the UK. (Route2, 2020)

'Racism was found to be present at all levels of social, organisational and personal stages for black women in the form of unconscious bias, stereotyping, lack of social capital, lack of mentoring and lack of transparency in promotion opportunities.'

(Manon, 2021)

What we see presented across the literature is a stark picture of the fallout of racism in the labour market, and especially the direct experiences and symptoms of discrimination and inequality faced by racialised employees in professional fields, from the difficulties in finding work, the types of employment many are having to engage in, barriers to progression, to relational experiences of microaggressions from colleagues, leaving racialised staff feeling isolated and needing to codeswitch to fit in.

"Structural and institutional racism are difficult to pinpoint and address but are persistent, ever-present, mundane, and arguably more dangerous than overt racist incidents or even hate crimes"

(Wiegand & Cifuentes; 2018, pg. 3)

Gaps in literature understanding – what we aim to plug

‘While there is a vast body of evidence in relation to racial inequalities in employment, levels of income, promotion and access to training, discussion relating to the role played by workplace racism in producing these outcomes remains fairly muted. Further still, discussion of the various and cumulative impacts of workplace racism have been silenced all too often.’

(Ashe et al, 2019, pg 7)

With all this understanding of the prevalence and fall out of racism in employment in Wales, what there is less of is an exploration of the **manifestations of organisational culture, and intraorganizational dynamics** and how these in more specific ways impact racialised staff, leading them to either feeling isolated and othered, having to codeswitch to fit in and progress, and with an underlying sense of fear of repercussion on their professional career and reputation. (Ogbonna 2019)

To look at these we must understand of course what culture is, and with this, how organisational culture in Wales can be described.

Defining organisational culture

Culture can be understood and therefore explored on varying levels.

One of the most common models used to explain culture is that of the iceberg. This demonstrates that the tip of the iceberg, above the surface, is the part of culture we can see most obviously, the manifestations of culture that are observable without much exploration, behaviours, and practices such as dress, food, music, dance, language, greetings the arts and festive celebrations. Under the water are the less visible elements of cultural manifestations, such as religious/world views, attitudes towards different people, hierarchies, concepts of success and status, views on raising children, body language, etiquette, notions of modesty, fairness, cleanliness, problem solving, time, work ethics and other unwritten yet generally accepted by the majority population rules of behaviour. What underpins and drives these elements of culture is understood generally as shared values and assumptions. These underpinning values are fostered and maintained across generations through strong societal influences, including family, religion, education, and the media.⁹

“The emphasis on shared values and underlying assumptions [place] undue attention on factors imported from outside the organisation... which are especially incompatible with the multicultural nature of contemporary organisations. Research that explores understanding of which aspects of culture are useful to facilitate general everyday interaction, and which aspects are crucial for specific job-related organisational functioning and success, will be particularly valuable.”

(Ogbonna, 2019, pg 321)

⁹ It is important to note that postcolonial theories of culture are now examining the very fact that most definitions and working understanding of culture have come from the west and that, paradoxically, within itself, culture can be defined in different ways. A search brought to light 160 different definitions of culture, evidencing that, as culture differ, so does its definition. Interestingly, Ogbonna states: “Postcolonial theories help to understand how many of the values and assumptions that underpin constructs such as culture and culture management can be traced to the “omissions,” “exclusions,” “silencing,” and “othering” (Ogbonna 2019)

Culture can and is most often perceived as national in nature. However, culture can pertain to groups of people due to other common identifiers, such as their gender, hobbies, and, as we explore in this piece, **organisations. Organisational culture** and culture change management has become central to a lot of organisations HR functions, in attempts to align staff towards the vision and mission of an organisation and provide a framework to work towards, ensuring that everyone is on the same page. (Ogbonna, 2019) Value defining exercises have become more and more common in many workplaces, especially White collar/office-based organisations. And recruitment drives regularly include values/ culture fit as a marker for suitability to an organisation.

However, what is rarely explored, defined, or even considered and recognised, are the **unobservable and observable elements of culture in organisations**, which are borne from the underlying values and assumptions. It is here that we must also distinguish that although an organisation published their organisational values, this does not mean that they are truly the underlying values that are held by the staffing body, and therefore do not always drive the **cultural manifestations** of an organisation, those unobservable such as work ethic, communication methods, perceptions of hierarchy, office etiquette, or more observable, such as social opportunities, food and drink, break times... unless we challenge these and create alternatives, this makes it easy to end up replicating dominant cultures representative of capitalist, neoliberal values, that reproduce systems of oppression in organisations. (Millar, 2021)

"Organizational culture is powerful precisely because it is so pervasive, impacting every part of our work; at the same time, it is very difficult to name or identify."

(Okun, 2021, pg. 7)

As Ogbonna explains, in organisations, "these **values and assumptions are typically derived from the wider society** where ethnic minority groups are already disadvantaged through prejudice and discrimination." (Ogbonna, 2019).

It is not that easy to separate the culture of an organisation from the wider culture of the society in which it functions. And when we consider that the prevailing culture is heavily influenced by capitalism, colonial drive and protestant Anglo-Saxon work ethic, (Weber, 1905), we realise that the standards of behaviour derived from these ideological aims will inherently discriminate, disempower and oppress people of the global majority, many who run with different cultural traditions and approaches, especially to work. As Okun explains, "Characteristics of organisational culture are used as norms and standards without being proactively named or chosen by the group... many organizations that claim to be multicultural in fact require new participants to **adapt or conform to already existing cultural norms**." (Okun, 2021) This inevitably disadvantages, both professionally and interpersonally, racialised people who have not been socialised in the same way.

“The implementation of the culture construct in organisations provides the setting for the specific idiosyncrasies of the organisational context to generate disadvantages, especially where managers seek to harness culture for competitive purposes. Indeed, even where espoused, organisational values are presented as neutral, the ways in which they are understood and interpreted in everyday behaviours, and practices are commonly influenced by societally derived beliefs and assumptions.”

(Ogbonna 2019)

Organisational culture can therefore be conceptualised as how the above play out within the remit of an organisation or institution – that there are rules of behaviour that are expected as the norm to be the way in which staff members act and interact.

Geert Hofstede undertook in depth research into facets of organisational culture, and provides a framework of 6 dimensions, which he describes as means-oriented vs goal-oriented; internally driven vs externally driven; easy-going work discipline vs. strict work discipline; local vs. professional; open system vs. closed system and employee-oriented vs work oriented.¹⁰ However his focus is primarily national, and only looks to define elements, aspects, manifestations of culture within this framework, and more so their impact on the organisations function and strategy, or staff as a whole, rather than individuals, especially not disaggregated across any protected characteristics. His approach is however an interesting way to again recognise variations in organisational culture and can provide a tool for analysis as well as a lens through which to look at fostering and allowing space for different ways of working.

What this piece aims to explore are therefore the interwoven elements of org culture that are seen as the norm in Wales, the elements of an organisation that dictate behaviours, ways of working and managing relationships, both professional and personal, across an institution, let alone how these empirically impact racialised people in professional organisations. These have rarely been defined; however, they are clearly understood within the framework of the above.

Gaps in impact on racialised people

“The unique challenges that Black women face in the workplace are real, pervasive and result in complex layers of discrimination and inequality – yet, despite a wealth of anecdotal evidence, there is a woeful lack of research into them.”

(Manon, 2021)

With the context above, the research being undertaken on organisational culture, and it's direct felt impact on racialised people within the workplace is emerging. Some themes are clear but have few robust evidence bases. It is these gaps we hope to fill.

¹⁰ www.hofstede-insights.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Multi-focus-brochure-2018.pdf

"Unhealthy organisational cultures are harmful, creating physical and mental health issues which will cause people significant trauma and make your organisation ineffective."

(Millar, 2021)

The rapid review of evidence undertaken by the Welsh Centre for Public policy, ahead of the initial draft of the Welsh Government's Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, highlighted regarding recruitment, tackling workplace discrimination, and developing anti-racist policy, that the **psychological safety** of racialised members of staff needed to be a priority in actions going forward within employment. This is one of the areas that merits much further exploration therefore – a handful of reports talk to the need for psychological safety, and the TUC report Racism Ruins Lives (Ashe et al, 2019) expands on lived experiences that clarify that racialised people do not feel safe in this sense in the workplace. However we need to understand further the felt detail of what happens when people do not feel psychologically safe and recognise the larger fall out of this. This is the same with regards to racialised staff's sense of belonging, and therefore we hope we can shine a light and paint more of a felt picture of this and again, the larger fallout implications this has for racialised people.

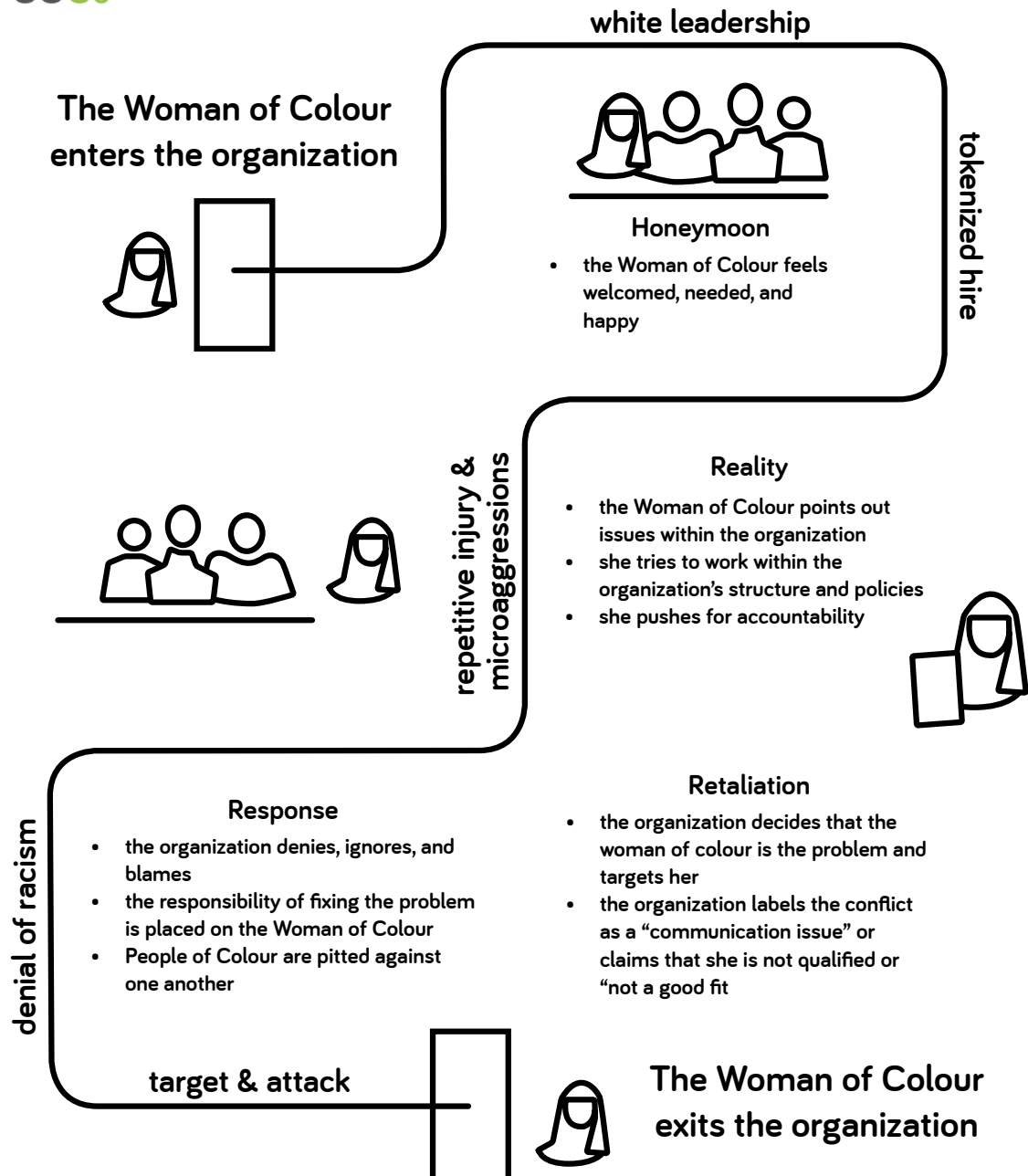
"Despite diversity, doctors told the BBC that there was a toxic "us versus them" culture in NHS trusts across the UK."

(Nagesh, 2022)

One of the fallouts of this lack of safety and sense of belonging however, which again goes underreported in real terms, is the fact that it leads to racialised people leaving employment. Although recorded in a few reports (Route2, 2020; Morris, 2022; Ashe et al, 2019), the weight and depth of this is not explored. What we see is an emphasis on diversifying organisations, recruitment of racially diverse talent, applying changes to those processes – failing once again at the experience racialised staff have once in the organisation. We need to understand why racialised people leave employment, what factors create an experience that means that leaving is their only chance for not only progression, but surviving the trauma imposed on them. With this understanding, then we can importantly retain talent we have, as well as create a space where new racialised talent will thrive.



The “Problem” Woman of Colour in the Workplace



Adapted from “The Chronicle of the Problem Woman of Color in a Non-Profit” by the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence
www.coco-net.org

"33% of Black women surveyed had resigned from a professional position due to racially related unfair treatment in the workplace, a proportion rising to 52% for those in a senior executive position."

(Morris, 2022)

In addition, one of the large gaps in research is highlighted by the heavy emphasis we see on policy change and revisiting values of an organisation to bring about the necessary inclusion we desire. Not to say this is not an important area, but this emphasis leaves a gap in understanding what the policy is trying to elicit in practice. White Supremacy¹¹ culture dictates a worship of the written word (Okun, 2021), and with this obliterates the fact that writing is borne out of reality – to write something and try to manifest it is much harder than to manifest something and to then write about it. Again therefore, we hope to plug this gap by focussing on the changes that can be made outside of policy, that will impact real behaviour and therefore culture change – which then, to not be lost, forgotten, to allow space for people to reference, can be written into policy and values for understanding.

"Cultural change was a precursor to applying an anti-oppressive or anti-racist lens to our policies... Policy is a powerful tool, when used in conjunction with efforts at cultural change."

(Okun, 2019, pg. 7)

Recommendations from the literature

The entrenched nature of workplace racism and racial inequality must be addressed through substantive structural, institutional, and legislative reform, [with] critical insights in terms of the antiracist educational work that must now be carried out... We must challenge the idea that we live in a post-racial society.

(Ashe et al, 2019)

Current recommendations spilling from reports regarding racism and employment, as denoted above, fall into a few recurring categories. These are hugely important areas to tackle and hold a lot of evidence as to why these recommendations should be implemented and the change they will bring. It is shocking how many organisations still do not seem to have received these clear messages, and still fall back on old ways of doing things. We call readers to not forget these, however in our report we will not focus on these areas, therefore. We have laid themes out below in a list for ease of reading – of course specific recommendations made are much more precise and detailed than this.

¹¹ When we talk about White Supremacy, we refer to the ideology, theory and belief that White people, and with this their cultural practices and behaviour, are superior to any other race or ethnicity. This is a stronghold belief that underpins most global societies and that feeds and reinforces systems of oppression. As detailed by Racial Equity Tools: "In the past, the term construed extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis. Now this term refers to a political and socio-economic system where White people enjoy structural advantages and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not." It is also considered that should we recognise that racialised people can and do internalise racism due to the constant societal messaging towards them of being inferior (Frantz Fanon, 1952). Given this, it is clearly put by organisers at Ella Baker School of Organising, that there should not be an assumption that White people, including those who are angry about racism, are going to be immune from any messages of Superiority. (Ella Baker, 2020)

Recommendations looking at **employee rights** focus on:

- banning zero-hour contracts
- implementing living hours and the living wage

Recommendations looking at **improving recruitment and representation** focus on:

- setting targets
- anonymising¹² recruitment processes
- expanding advertising and outreach
- having diverse interview panels
- career development programmes including mentoring and sponsorship
- reviewing language used in job descriptions and person spec requirements.

Recommendations looking at **commitments to inclusion**¹³ focus on:

- creating networks
- signing charters
- supporting charities and celebratory days like Black History Month
- updating policies including having a specific EDI policy with one person in charge
- making sure that leaders and managers¹⁴ understand these and their responsibilities.

Recommendations looking at **direct tackling of occurrences of**¹⁵ **discrimination** focus on:

- improving reporting mechanisms
- having a champion to speak for all grievances
- reviewing processes to respond to complaints
- holding a zero-tolerance approach against bullying and harassment
- providing wellbeing support to survivors

Recommendations looking at a **learning processes** for organisations and staff focus on:

- foster open dialogue by having training (mandatory for managers only), conferences, talks, and EDI info centres

Recommendations looking at **monitoring and evaluating** focus on:

- clear statements on tracking and publishing against targets and goals
- evaluating organisational systems and how the institution stands up to its equalities duties
- publishing Ethnicity Pay Gap reports
- calling for regular Governmental or EHRC reviews against racial inequality and discrimination in the workplace.

"58% of racialised people in Britain believe that employers should be taking action to try and improve social mobility."

(Social Mobility Commission, 2021)

¹² Many reports use the term 'blind' when referring to this, however we recognise that this is an ableist term and therefore support the use of anonymised instead.

¹³ Not considering inclusive practice internal to organisations

¹⁴ With no mention of the broader staffing body

¹⁵ Overactive prevention of discrimination

Gaps in recommendations

Although there is a recognition that in most workplaces, racialised people not only do not feel they fit in, but are left feeling (psychologically) unsafe, there is a lack of clear examples of how to tackle this and create safe working environments. The concept of safety is alluded to heavily, as referenced in the Welsh Centre for Public Policy report and the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (Welsh Government, 2022) (see continuation). What is interesting in the final publication, however, is that the plan includes 11 areas of life/sectors in Wales. Under each of these areas are listed broad reaching goals, which are further details with specific actions that hold the aim of reaching / contributing towards the achievement of the goal. Some of the goals consider the experiences of employees in those sectors, however some do not. And when considering the actions related to such goals, they do not seem to encompass core research and evidence to present a way in which the goal will truly be achieved. Additionally, there doesn't seem to be correlation between the goals and actions in different sectors which is disconcerting.

For example, under Health and Childcare and Play there is the **Goal: Staff will work in safe, inclusive environments, built on good anti-racist leadership and allyship, supported to reach their full potential, and ethnic minority staff and allies; both be empowered to identify and address racist practice.** (Welsh Government, Pg 67, pg 126). This is a very important and pertinent goal; however, it is not reflected in such specificity in other sections, which leaves to feel that the approach towards employees is different in such sectors.

To reach this goal, under Health, actions consider undertaking an ethnic minority led policy and procedure review, having ethnic minority led anti-racist education for all NHS staff, and getting involved in a Board Member Programme and utilising positive action to specifically support racialised people into positions. Actions under Childcare and Play, related to the same goal, consider supporting the sector to develop specific action plans; developing and promoting anti-racist training for the sector and considering if anti-racist training should be mandatory for staff; considering how to collate workforce bullying and discrimination concerns and surveying BAME staff in sector and co-produce proposals for improvements. The only cross-cutting action is an anti-racist review of policies and procedures – however in Childcare and play this is not specified to be led by racialised people.

With this, there is no real detail on how to embed a culture of safety and inclusion into an organisation. It is this gap we aim to plug, by exploring ideas from contributors, based on some of their positive experiences of workplaces and cultures, and an analysis of countering instances that lead to a feeling of risk and othering that have arisen in less positive environments. What we hope is that this report allows Welsh Government and other public bodies and publicly funded bodies to breakdown the broad actions in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan into more specific elements – but also to consider their application across organisations and sectors rather than only in a few.

Policy and Legislation Framework

Although employment law is not devolved to Wales, due to the centrality of the labour market in our society, as well as the fact that the public sector is the largest employer in Wales (not considering charities and private bodies that receive public money), the Welsh Government has a lot of power in defining how racialised people experience work and the labour market. There are a wealth of policy opportunities already in play that can be strengthened going forward to

ensure that recommendations to date as well as those brought to light with our findings are incorporated. We understand that policy documents alone aren't sufficient for change, but they lay out goals, aspirations, targets, and methods of accountability for the population to use. Here we briefly highlight several important policy documents in place that hold significance in the realm of employment, and invite the reader when utilising this report, to reference these in their lobbying for change.

The first piece to reference leading **Anti-racist Wales Action Plan** (Welsh Government, 2022), as referenced above. Covering 11 specific areas of Welsh life, the plan lays out nationwide goals, actions, timelines and hoped for impact related to income and employment for racialised people. As we have reviewed the WCPP rapid review on evidence of this, the policy one of its 6 focus areas of desired actions on the **experience of being part of the workplace**. The Action Plan lays out one of the Goals as the following:

'Staff will work in safe, inclusive environments, built on [good anti-racist leadership and] allyship, supported to reach their full potential, and [ethnic minority staff and allies; both] be empowered to identify and address racist practice.'

(Welsh Government, 2022, pgs. [67], 126)¹⁶

It states that the desired changes in this area relate to representation, reducing employment inequalities, embedding anti-racism as an element of performance management, and probably the boldest specific action – for **all staff in public sector and funded bodies to receive mandatory training on anti-racism**. Welsh Government, 2022, pg. 20)

Fair work also enters clearly into the **Welsh Government Programme for Government**, as well as hosting a defined section on moving towards eliminating inequality, specifically stating it will explore legislation to address ethnicity pay gaps and other forms of discrimination and provide funding to public bodies to address pay disparities. (Welsh Government, 2021a, pg 6)

The **Welsh Government's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024** holds long term aims of eliminating inequality caused by poverty, as well as discrimination based on protected characteristics, and that the Welsh public sector leads the way as an exemplar inclusive and diverse organisation and employer, detailing several specific actions, expected outcomes, achievement dates and progress measurements under each Aim and Equality Objective. (Welsh Government, 2020)

More specifically, the Welsh Government also produced an **Employability Plan** in 2018 which looks at the Governments responsibility to prepare people living in Wales for the world of work and remove barriers, irrespective of protected characteristic. This plan contains several recommendations and targets as well as detailed actions that the Welsh Government propose to implement. Included in these are specific community outreach initiatives and a concerted promotion of inclusivity. (Welsh Government, 2018)

¹⁶ It is interesting however that this goal is stated only under Health and ChildCare and Play, and something we shall be pushing for is for it to be incorporated under every section, as we can see, the issues go beyond only some sectors.

The last, but very much not least, piece of policy to note is the **Welsh Government's Prosperity for All, The National Strategy for Taking Wales Forward**, published in 2017, although borne out of the previous Programme for Government, as the party in power has not changed, we expect similar to be continued going forward. Again, looking at 5 broad areas of life in Wales, Skills and Employability are noted, specifically looking at tackling regional inequality and promoting fair work, as well as equipping people with the right skills for the future of work.

Finally, we look to highlight a few pieces of legislation that we believe are important when considering tackling issues of racism in employment in Wales.

Firstly, we would like to reference the **(1965) International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the (1966) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**, developed by the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) and equally ratified by the United Kingdom. The former specifics the right to just and favourable conditions to work Under Article 5, and the latter details equal opportunities for promotion in employment and safe and healthy work conditions under Article 7, amongst other details. (OHCHR, 1956; OHCHR, 1966)

Largely however, is the **Equality Act 2010**, which deems it illegal to discriminate, bully, harass or victimise anyone based on their protected characteristics, which regarding racialised people includes race, ethnicity, religion, belief, and encompasses identifiers of such including religious celebrations, nationality, dress code, hair type and other aspects. The Equality and Human Rights Commission published following the Act an **Employers Statutory Code of Practice** to detail the specifics in application of the act to employment. Here, details are given about what the act says regarding these protected characteristics, as well as the different types of discrimination and importantly the provision of Positive Action, something too largely missed as an opportunity by employers when trying to drive diversity and inclusion, as well as indicators on how to avoid discrimination in employment and developing equality policies. (EHRC, 2011) This Act also denotes the **Public Sector Equality Duty** (EHRC, 2019) and the **Socio-economic Duty** which have both now been enacted in Wales and provide further provision for the call to end racial discrimination in the workplace.

Finally, in Wales, we are proud to have brought into legislation in 2015 the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act**. With 7 incorporated well-being goals, the Commission has detailed under **A Journey to a Prosperous Wales** specific actions related to providing Decent Work, and under **A Journey to a More Equal Wales**, specific elements are described related to Fair Work. This Act all encompassing, provides a wealth of avenues to push for the recommendations in this report and beyond to be implemented across the nation, not just by the public sector or those funded by it, but by all employers based in nation.

Conclusion to the literature

Lack of clarity about and feedback on working goals leads to a sense of ambiguity and confusion among staff and that this in turn evokes stereotyping and discriminatory behaviours... when staff members are under stress, overworked, feel unsupported and marginalised by leaders, and where there is a culture of blame, this limits staff engagement levels, reinforces in/out-group behaviours and creates a climate which fosters stereotyping, psychological distance, and discrimination.

(Hatch, S; Woodhead, C; Rhead, R, & Connor, L; 2021, pg. 25)

What has been understood therefore, is that organisational culture disadvantages in a practical way, related to recruitment, progression, and leadership racialised people in the workplace. We are also starting to shine a light on the psychological oppression experienced due to the same. However, the felt sense of this is not clearly painted – and people who do not experience racism are faltering at being able to really understand the impact on racialised people of the ingrained culture within which they work.

Participants perceived that organisational culture is set by those who lead and steer it. Without exception, the senior leadership of the organisations for which the interviewees work was shown to be entirely White and, commonly male.

(Manon, 2021)

As it stands, we still function within the capitalist system – and with this White Supremacy and racism prevails. Here, we know that the written word is that of worship – changes are only made with robust evidence bases to show that they will bring about desired change – because change needs resource, resource needs money, and institutions don't want to put money into considerations that they cannot exemplify as having payoff. With this therefore, we aim to explore the real impact here, allow our White readers to try and further understand, feel, and importantly believe the impact that racism is having on their racialised colleagues, friends, family, neighbours, and with that, elicit a desire for change from within the essence of humanity. It is with this essence that we can start to dismantle capitalist oppressive systems, but we must start within ourselves, and within the institutions with which we hold power and space.

“Good cultures, much like anything else in your organisation, come from attention, practice and being willing to try new things, make mistakes and grow from them.”

(Millar, 2021)

METHODOLOGY

To undertake this work, it was decided to build on RAW's previous process of basing research in Grounded Theory¹⁷, one angle that we believe we can decolonise research. This means that although a literature review was undertaken, this was to ascertain gaps in the field, rather than provide evidence on the preconceived research question. We did not highlight a problem, but rather posed an open question to which we aimed to answer.

From research design to analysis, the active research project took four months to complete and aimed to answer the following questions:

How does internal organisational culture impact racialised people in office-based workplaces?

This was considered through exploring policies and procedures, ways of working, and working relationships, taking into consideration the following:

- What is the practical/tangible impact on racialised staff, on opportunity and outcomes?
- What is the impact on racialised staff members emotional safety?
How are they left to feel?
- What is the impact on racialised staff members sense of inclusion?
Do they feel they fit in and belong?
- How could these three elements of an organisation present differently to induce a positive impact on racialised staff?

Within the scope of research, we sought to consider impactful policies such as Anti-bribery, Conflict of Interest, Capability, Complaints, Disciplinary, Equal Opportunities, Flexible Working, Dismissal, Grievance, Harassment and Bullying, Lone Working, Probation, Sickness, Behaviours and Dress, Wellbeing, Whistleblowing, Intellectual property, Values, Performance Management, Learning and Development, Inductions and Progression.

Additionally we considered commonly informal practices present in most office based workplaces such as ways of working including ways of communicating (giving and receiving information, document sharing), working hours/ work life balance, skill sharing, relationship development, socialising, meeting management, flexibility, collaboration, delegation, task focus, reflection, evaluation, creativity and innovation, quantity/quality, perfectionism, monitoring, strategy; and working relationships with a focus on interactions that demonstrate organisational culture, for example: accountability, challenge & criticism, delegation, collaboration, expression, innovation, communication, recognition & value (of work, difference), feedback, socialising, relationship development, approach to inclusion and diversity, supervision, support, leadership.

To achieve this therefore, researchers decided to gather evidence via two main means. The first was qualitative interviews with 12 stakeholders, including Union representatives, Senior Diversity and Inclusion Leads, 'BAME' Network Chairs and fellow researcher/academics, from across public,

¹⁷ "Grounded Theory is an inductive methodology... It is the systematic generation of theory from systematic research. It is a set of rigorous research procedures leading to the emergence of conceptual categories. These concepts/categories are related to each other as a theoretical explanation of the action(s) that continually resolves the main concern of the participants in a substantive area. Grounded Theory can be used with either qualitative or quantitative data". (Glaser & Strauss, 2014)

third sector and academic institutions, who could talk to the topic in regard to their own as well as other's experiences due to their understanding of others experiences obtained via these positions, i.e. connecting with and supporting racialised staff specifically in White collar organisations/roles.

This method had the aim of having a heavier emphasis on policies and procedures, slightly less emphasis on ways of working, and less emphasis on interpersonal, wanting to understand from a broader perspective what are some of the recurring issues (if any) that racialised staff present in regard to the themes above, the impact of these issues that are recurring, and/or elements that are raised as ways to try and change org culture.

The initial analysis of the interview data then allowed for us to supplement the evidence gathered via interviews with a part quantitative part qualitative landscape survey, targeted at racialised people who have experience working in office-based environments, where people have interactions with other staff/team members. This survey, for which we had 226 responses, 87 whom provided verbatim responses, took the aim of a heavier emphasis on interpersonal experiences, equal emphasis on ways of working, and less emphasis on policies and procedures. The aim was to understand how individuals perceive and experience these elements that form part of organisational culture, how they impact them, what issues are, and how they can see things being done differently and if they have had positive experiences of organisational culture/ change.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent and avoiding deceptive practices

Informed consent was a particular driving factor to ensure all participants received a great deal of transparency with regards to what we were trying to achieve. We provided in depth information sheets to participants reminding them of the scope of the research as well as their rights, which we reiterated at the start of all interviews. The participants could choose to leave the research study at any time and the peer researchers explained the right to withdraw at the start of all interviews.

Minimise risk of harm

We spent time thinking about potential risks to participants when taking part in the study. A particular concern was due to the nature of conducting interviews online. If someone had relayed an experience that was difficult and traumatic through video chat, it is difficult to know what to do after the interview to ensure participants receive the appropriate support. We clearly outlined the range of perceived risks that could occur due to taking part in the study in the information sheet provided to participants. Due to the nature of this study, it was very important to also consider staff wellbeing as they may share difficult lived experiences expressed by participants. We utilised support from each other as in the event of triggers arising from difficult topics discussed and encouraged support and self-care after interviews. The researchers also extensively considered additional ethical issues that could arise, particularly around bias, perceived power imbalances between participant/researcher, and intercultural sensitivities, giving light to these to allow for openness and transparency.

Right to privacy; protect anonymity and confidentiality

We stored all data relating to the research study in line with General Data Protection Regulation (2016). All data was stored in a password-protected account whereby only the RAW team could access. All data, including survey responses and transcripts were anonymised using codes for each participant. All interviews were delivered between researcher(s) and participants only, via Zoom. All content of interviews adhered to confidentiality unless something of concern which could endanger someone's safety was raised.

As referenced earlier, in an attempt to decolonise the practices in this research project, all contributors to surveys and interviews were given the explicit opportunity to opt-in to having their names added to the research paper as contributors, and if they so wished, to be explicitly pertained to in relation to quotes used. This offer was considered again regarding breaking down the perpetuation of researchers owning stories and contributions, and not recognising that these are owned by the people to whom they pertain. Some of the contributors decided to opt into this offer and have been listed in APPENDIX 1. Others decided to not, and in such, their confidentiality has been maintained.

Limitations

COVID-19

With COVID-19 taking precedence during 2021, this research study has taken place in one of the most challenging times to ensure accessibility and participation for participants. On the one hand, utilising technology such as video chat software allowed greater engagement with a broader demographic across Wales. On the other hand, the research would undoubtedly benefit from a larger sample size and a longer timeframe to generate a more cohesive study of the racialized population across Wales.

Representative sample

Due to networks and connections, interview respondents were primarily based in South Wales, a recurring limitation to Wales based research when the research base is in South Wales. We surveyed a contribution from a variety of different racial groups, allowing people to self-determine their ethnicity, including African, Welsh North African, African American, Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Asian American, Asian Afghani, Bangladeshi, Black, British Filipino, British Pakistani, British Chinese, Chinese, Latino, Indian, Mixed White and Black Caribbean and Spanish, with people who were Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, non-religious, as well as diversity across migration status.

The gender divide was a close 50/50 male-female divide, with a couple of non-binary contributors, and few defined as LGBTQIA+. Most people had between 3-6 years of experience in office-based environments, followed by an even split of people with more than 6 years and less than 2 years. There was a roughly even split of contributions from the third, private and public sector in the survey responses, and 86% of respondents had spent most of their career in White-led/predominantly White staffed organisations, with the majority working in organisations of between 30-100 staff (40%) closely followed by small orgs of 11-30 staff (37%).

Due to the low number of contributors in total however, and the lack of time and capacity, it was not possible to disaggregate the results and compare between different groups to try and understand an intersectional picture beyond that reported directly in verbatim comments. As always, it may be worth considering how to engage with those in areas which were less represented than others in future.

In addition, perhaps the White British/Welsh experience could have been considered to draw up a comparative study between the groups to see where the underlying problems are in the system.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Part 1) Understanding organisational culture – describing the air

Although the aim of this research was to ultimately understand how we can change office based organisational culture so that it creates a positive environment for racialised people in Wales, one of the key areas of understanding we need to develop therefore is what office-based culture is like, how it is seen and experience by racialised people. As we noted in the literature review, the concept of culture is broad – not surprising seeing as it something born out of culture itself (like the brain naming itself...), with over 160 definitions existing. With this, it is not only hard to understand in a tangible sense but was difficult for many people to describe – a regular phrase type used throughout our interviews was “you know what I mean” or “you get it, you can just feel it”. The term culture for too long has been thrown around as though there is a general understanding of what it means and what it is to a group of people – yet ask someone to explain to an alien what office-based culture is, they will struggle, as too often we do not put culture under the microscope it needs to enable change.

What we have tried to do by analysing the comments, anecdotes and descriptors is to start to draw a picture of office-based culture as experienced by racialised people in Wales. This is so that our readers can have a starting place of understanding, something more concrete, with clear signifiers, from which to assess their own environments, recognise the insidious nature of some of these less spoken about elements, to therefore be able to proactively tackle and change them. It is also imperative that we take this picture, recognising that the signifiers stand together, and but changing only one, culture will not change. Collectively, they make up office-based culture, and collectively they must be tackled.

Given that our work centres around the aim of progressive and positive change, in this section we shall describe more so the elements of office-based culture that were seen to have a negative impact on racialised people, practically, psychologically and regarding their inclusion in an organisation. Where our contributors commented on positive elements, we have brought these together in the final part of this section, to paint a picture of possibility, combined with opinions on ways to change and present culture differently, ultimately feeding into our recommendations for employers.

As the culture of any group of people contains many elements, we shall paint this picture through the lens of our framework, starting with the rules of office-based culture (policies and procedures); the actions (ways of working and approaching tasks) and the behaviours (playing out in interpersonal relationships). Of course, one challenge writing up in this fashion, and trying to describe culture in written form, is that many of these overlaps and intertwine, one element feeding another and circling back round again. Therefore, reference may be brought back or linked forward as we pull this image together, so it doesn't present too linear or compartmentalised. However, although it is, as mentioned, imperative we consider culture, it is by breaking it down like this that we can start to make changes.

Policies and procedures – One size fits all

Case study – Tanya

Progression and ambition is not welcome

When considering adapting and improving organisational culture, employee progression and longevity within an organisation should be a key element of the employee experience. During interviews, Tanya expressed that there was a lack of employee satisfaction or care from the outset when working for a large public sector organisation in Wales, which translated into an inability, on behalf of senior management, to support career progression, or inspire a desire to achieve more in the workplace. The city was remarked to Tanya as being the *“graveyard of ambition”* by many public sector employees, and they found that this sentiment was widely applicable to many of the public sector positions Tanya had held in Wales.

Tanya began their account by noting the unspoken hierarchal structure within their public sector role which meant that every employee had to *“do their time”* to justify career progression or advancement. *“Having to do your time”*, regardless of skills or experiences gained before entering the public sector, was used to discourage and stifle colleagues from enquiring about progression. In many ways, the skills that were desirable and appreciated during recruitment were not capitalised on during their period of employment, leaving progression and ambition to be after thoughts, as the comfort of middle management discouraged changing or improving systems.

“The unwritten value and the juxtaposition of ‘we’re really flexible you know, we value work-life balance’ but actually, you have to make sure you do the time and nothing is given to you, you’re basically working for everything but it’s disguised under ‘yeah we’re very flexible and you can be free.’”

Within Tanya’s excerpt is this pervading sense of disorienting juxtaposition between the purported flexibility and adaptability of the public sector and the reality of having to fulfill the mandatory time and work before being able to benefit from the flexibility. Tanya described the feeling as

“yeah we’re flexible but you have to work hard for everything, it’s not free”, and this leads into a distinction they made between a Job and a Profession when discussing public sector. They described a job as being ‘told what to do’ and a profession as *‘the freedom to set your own agenda’* and this shaped much of their further points and discourse.

“The organisation reflects the society that it’s in - majority-white from other places around the city, very few [people] actually from the city. There’s also this idea [of what] Wales is - obviously doing some great progressive stuff, but not without a lot of fight and battle and struggle over many years and although it’s difficult when they are [implementing] changes, because of the resistance that is still there. Like, Wales has this interesting position with this history of being oppressed and its language and stuff like that, versus being like more progressive than England but at the same time the average person doesn’t even know how to talk about certain things.”

Tanya noted an element of worthiness being attached to grade and title within the public sector, specifically colleagues being introduced by their grade in a way which exerted overt power. Conversely, racialised colleagues overpopulated the lower grades indiscriminate of qualifications or background owing to the strict hierarchies of power within the organisation, as well as the aforementioned issues with longevity of service equalling progression. Tanya explicitly linked this complacency towards career progression to the hierarchies of power within public sector organisations. Complacency with encouraging employee progression meant that many of the people occupying the lower parts of the organisation were overqualified and under-stimulated and those on top were too comfortable to shift or progress so stifled those below, therefore the goal posts for progression were always moving.

Of course, there are a myriad of policies and procedures that exist within an organisation that govern the way certain institutional, organisational, employee and employer considerations are undertaken. In many organisations, policies are not fit for purpose, are taken as a one size fits all, with plenty of organisations utilising simple templates or copy paste policies. Not all this impacts directly on organisational culture, but for those that do, this can have a devastating effect on racialised employees, especially with the broader experiences they have working for an organisation, as we shall see in part 2. It was recognised by the majority that due to **policies being constructed from a White perspective**, that assumes the **archetypal employee to be White, male, non-religious**, policy development is ill-informed, leaving them to be inherently discriminatory from their inception, leaving many underlying inequalities unaddressed and essentially therefore ineffective.

Examples of these kind of policies included **flexible working**, or rather a generalised lack of, not allowing for people to work - even when possible - to their own schedules, especially impacting those who care for children, disabled people and those with specific cultural considerations or ways of working. This included stringent policies on break times, which again impacts disabled people especially, as well as people who wish to take time to pray, these two contributing to a culture of adherence to preconceived working patterns.

In addition, it was noted by a few people that **hot desking** policies also contributed to in and out groups (a core element of office-based culture, expanded on later), often leaving racialised employees on the periphery, both figuratively and literally. Respondents painted a clear picture of this contributing to racial divides and feeling like a spotlight was on them should they, as the few racialised people in the open plan office, congregate at any point. The shift to **working from home** had also heightened issues felt, that management were not able to notice discord in the working environment and provide necessary support or implement changes – however people also noted it did allow them to be more themselves, not feeling so much the pressure to assimilate (expanded on later).

“There is a focus more on the job and fulfilling your role than being a human being with human needs.”

Interview contributor

Another policy highlighted as problematic was **performance management**. Not adapted for the role, and therefore not always a good fit, most performance management policies were **focussed on outputs and outcomes**, leaving staff feeling like they had to jump through hoops to achieve. It was also recognised however, that **more social, extroverted employees who are socially “liked” in the organisations would be favoured** even if not performing well, playing into a culture of unwritten rules of behaviour for success. This connected to a sense that in many organisations, especially in the public sector, **progression was connected to length of service**, feeding into and from the hierarchical systems of the professional arena, as opposed to one based on skill and ability. Despite this however, one racialised contributor working in a prominent public sector organisation noted that although they were headhunted for their entry level role, demonstrating their developed skill and ability, when pursuing progression, although longevity of service was a barrier for them, they saw the rule of 18 months being actively broken for White counterparts, something that caused them to ultimately decide to leave the institution.

“The time in post to qualify for progression was increased, so I didn’t have a chance, regardless of my qualifications and that my potential had been highlighted through headhunting... even though I had seen this rule bent for others... it just didn’t add up.”

Interview contributor

Moving on from this, many references were made to **The Equality Act 2010** and organisational policies that have been borne out of its introduction, and the presence of its predecessors. With **Equal Opportunities and Bullying and Harassment policies** prominent in every organisation and well known to nearly all respondents, what was also clear from our research was that despite these policies being there, and that they should elicit positive environments, they are very difficult to implement, and leads to a culture of political correctness (expanded upon later). It was strongly felt that equal opportunity policies focussed on being not-discriminatory rather than anti-discriminatory, an emphasis placed on what not to do or say rather than what to do or say to counter oppressive culture. In some organisations, zero tolerance policies are also brought in to tackle discrimination, however there was concern that this either leaves people maintaining a politically correct culture when in the office, and if they are found to have been a perpetrator of discrimination then they end up taking their prejudice views and behaviours with them to their next employment.

The use of **positive action** by employers, although seen by the majority as a positive element of the Equality Act itself, is not something that is used regularly or proactively by organisations within their own policies and procedures, for employees or for service provision. Where it was used, especially regarding recruitment, progression, and retention, its use seemed to **chafe against White employees**, with clear demonstrations of them feeling that it was not ‘fair’, something reported in many situations. This demonstrated a real lack of understanding of the reasons behind the provision of positive action. In addition, it was also felt by many that organisations implemented actions that at their core were performative and not really based on a deeper understanding of oppression – especially after the resurgence of Black Lives Matter, contributors felt there was a show of window-dressing, organisations demonstrating their support for short while. It left many feeling that approaches were artificial, especially when the media emphasis of the movement died down and light was shone on other areas of inequality, evidenced a by a categoric shift away from anti-racism to gender equality and violence against women after the Sarah Everard case.

“It’s artificial. You get third and public sector people engaging and feeling they have been cleansed – that they need to engage with this and that – but practically what difference have they made on how inclusive their orgs are – that’s the evidence we don’t see.”

Survey respondent

It was felt that this is due to the way in which the 9 protected characteristics in the Equality Act leave organisations approaching discrimination from a single strand angle, meaning that those who experience specific discrimination because of an intersecting identity find it even harder to prove that this has been their experience.

"The Equality Act was a missed opportunity – by introducing protected characteristics it simplifies it for organisations telling them this is the way to work."

Interview contributor

This is also because of the nuanced nature of the Act and the policies borne out of it mean that not only is it difficult to pinpoint discrimination (as we will see in the impact on marginalised people's psychological safety and sense of inclusion), but that the **burden of evidence** is on the victim, a similar failure of Bullying and Harassment policies.

"Often issues are reduced to my race or my sexuality never the combination of both in regard to White working culture so if something isn't a fit because it's too White or too heterosexual, I'm seen as not being a team player or not putting up with it."

Survey respondent

The final area of policies and procedures that were most heavily commented on regarding being a key part of organisational culture and the way it is shaped and maintained were around **Complaints, Grievance and Disciplinary Policies and Procedures**. Stemming from the conversations above regarding the policies in place meant to protect minorities staff from discrimination, bullying and harassment, most people felt that when it came to seeking recourse for these, complaints procedures were seen as lip-service, not working for the victim in practice to any extent.

"Upsetting, painful disciplinary process to then be told it couldn't be upheld as its one person's word against another's. Feeling misunderstood and not believed as a person of colour concerning racism."

Survey respondent

Many of our survey respondents and contributors felt that there wasn't any time or support for them to proactively follow up complaint's procedures, and that looking at them, having to take that on beyond their workload was too much to take on alone. It was also strongly felt that complaints procedures intrinsically couldn't be used against a superior, leaving many people unsure how to deal with issues faced within managerial relationships.

"HR suggests mediation as a tool of conflict resolution. This is problematic because it puts the victim and the perpetrator on the same level and diminishes the experiences and trauma of racism and reduces it to just a disagreement when the discrimination has been weaponised against one person."

Interview contributor

In many cases where people did seek to utilise complaints procedures against their colleagues, they were found to either **not be taken seriously** and people in charge not seeing an act as racist or discriminatory (expanded on later as core to organisational culture). One of the key misgivings of most complaints' procedures raised in our research, however, was the approach of **'your word against theirs'**, and, if taken further, mediation being the first port of call, pertaining to a sense of forced reconciliation, placing both the perpetrator and the victim on the same level playing field when coming to a 'solution', simplified to an apology which was usually deemed as a 'simple mistake'.

There may be processes in place for employees to seek safety, however these can be lip service and don't offer support or deal with matters appropriately. This can lead to tension in the office between the complainant and the person they feel victimised by. Depending on the aggressor's popularity in the office, this can then lead to the complainant being labelled as "not a team worker" or "selfish" or "sensitive" and lead to them being excluded...

Survey respondent

With some contributors raising that working through the entire process had taken years, it was felt that standard complaints procedures in organisations today are not fit for purpose. Leaving marginalised people who have faced discrimination, bullying and/or harassment at work unsafe due to the lack of aftercare or consideration of the trauma and emotional impact having to take something forward like this would have on them.

"Complaints procedures are toxic and poisonous procedure that ruin people's lives due to a lack of safeguarding around the procedures and a lack of after care."

Interview contributor

It was literally felt that these policies and the culture of disbelief behind them ruin people's lives. A few contributors who had ended up leaving employment due to the outcome of these procedures, even if they had 'won' the case, having to stay in employment with the perpetrator, were subsequently filed with **Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDA's)** by their previous employer. It is clear with NDA policies that for most organisations, the priority lies therefore in protecting the organisation and its reputation, not protecting the staff.

"Organisations are so worried to be labelled racist that when a colleague says or acts inappropriately, they may want to sweep it under the carpet rather than address it and have it publicly known that that sort of behaviour occurs in their offices."

Survey respondent

Ways of Working - Conform to the norm

As reviewed, ways of working, i.e., managing workload, approaching a task, meeting a desired outcome, or producing a specific output can be varied. However, when undertaking our research, it was clear that when it comes to office-based environments and work culture, in most experiences, there is a particular way to get things done, and this is unwritten, non-descript. As an employee, if you do not conform to the norm, expectations that are broadly applied to all staff, then the impact can, as we shall see in the following section of this report, be extremely negative. If staff can pick up these ways of doing things and adhere to them then they may be able to excel in their role and develop the social capital even to progress, but if they have been taught previously to do a task in a different manner, contributors commented that this would be seen as a failure.

Generally speaking, it was felt that there is no acceptance of diverse ways of doing things and approaching tasks. For example, contributors specified that there were specific ways of giving and receiving information, utilising email and not the phone for example, or managing meetings, where agendas had to be written and minutes recorded even if neither were followed or reviewed post meeting, and that if they didn't comply in doing things the way their manager told them to or tried to do things in a different way, they again would not be seen to achieve the metrics of success set out in performance management procedures. Together with red tape in place in many organisations, this mean that contributors felt that it was not possible to adapt their working styles or be creative in their roles.

"There is often no power to use your own labour or fulfil the tasks taught to you in a differing manner, there is no place for creativity as the organisation doesn't accept diverse ways of doing things. In that sense there is no diversity within workplace culture."

Interview contributor

There was also a consensual feeling that in Welsh office environments, the working style is **task focussed**, job being primary and wellbeing being off the radar. This left people with the sense that you have to stay until the job is done, and if you are seen to **leave on time** it is a view that you are shirking off, not pulling your weight - together with the sense that quantity and outputs were primary, and that people were employed to be able to achieve this – not for having the skills or ability to develop working relationships with diverse colleagues. This meant again that if you didn't work in this way, your ability to develop positive working relationships would be harder than others. (Expanded on later.)

In addition to this, it was clear that part of the culture and way of working was that in many environments, there is a **job to do**, things you have been tasked with, and that this was more important than professional freedom over your career or developing collegiate relationships. It was strongly felt that this culture meant that people worked under an **air of complacency**, especially in the public sector, and that there was **no real drive** to do things to progress professionally or in their career. With this, although most contributors felt they held a culture of hard work and loyalty within professional realms, they felt that they were 'not allowed to be seen to be driven', as though being at school, their White counterparts would pitch them as being a teacher's pet, not cool, and especially as a racialised person trying to develop themselves proactively.

"It's an Icarus type situation – as a Black person, if you float too close to the sun, being taken under the wing of the most Senior person, it led to people saying, 'who the hell does he think he is?' People started not being as friendly, all kinds of things were made difficult for me, so it ended in tribunal."

Interview contributor

Working Relationships – Power Dynamics & Hierarchies

Case study – Julian

Power based on more than just hierarchies

The white working culture has created a structure that renders racialised people expendable, in particular people associated with blackness – ethnically or politically. Julian was a CEO of a third-sector organisation in Wales and was at the mercy of the white trustees and a white management team to who they regret acquiescing. The period in this position was characterised by Julian as being isolating, a lone wolf and alone which had long-term impacts on Julian psychologically, regardless of what sector Julian was operating within. The long-term mental effects of oppressive organisation cultures were noted anecdotally as being worse for racialised people as compounded by racism and intersecting oppressions. Most of the Julian's employment history has been coloured by negative experiences and restarting their careers multiple times. In this way, it is evident to see that oppression is compounded in a white working culture where policies and non-disclosure agreements are used to silence people. Julian highlighted that the culture of non-disclosure agreements was used to protect organisations, not individuals a shift from their original intent in the employment area. An employment tribunal is not a mark against a person, linking to what Anton spoke about dissenting being permissible but at the same time not allowed because of the unspoken rules of the oppressive organisational structure. Therefore, strategic fighting is needed because dissenting can effectively end your career in a field or organisation and you risk being a social pariah.

"What we've learnt in the last couple of years, is just how far behind a lot of white, supposed forward-thinking people, really are in terms of their understanding of the power and control they have ultimately."

Similarly to Tanya, Julian also highlighted an invisible hegemonic arrangement that sought to maintain the status quo and control and characterised it as pervasive, difficult to navigate or orient a pushback against. It could manifest

in polite welcoming microaggressions, or heavy scrutiny and Julian questioned how do you structurally formulate a challenge against that when seemingly being at the top of the hierarchal structure was interpreted as having power?

"This is just white people treating a non-white person in a way they think is appropriate" resulting in a power dynamic that takes precedent over organisational structure. Julian speaks to intersecting oppressions but more specifically echoes the adage that 'silence will not protect you' and that power does not buffer against racism, even when you are the top dog and you're warmly welcomed you can be disregarded just as easily. White privilege engendered white colleagues and workers to usurp Julian as the organisation still operated under whiteness despite Julian being puppeteer as the diverse face of a white organisation. Ostensibly, the optics of recruiting Julian made the organisation look progressive and as though the change was being made but the 'different leadership' which made the organisation look good amounted to tokenship in the end. The earlier quote signifies the whole of Julian's experiences with whiteness in the working culture, for Julian organisational culture was a space for prolific racism and discrimination and a space where white privilege allowed them to gaslight, critique and attempt to render him incompetent.

When Julian drew attention to the lack of intersectionality in the third sector organisation's clients and messaging, they noticed that their purpose had ultimately been to be a figurehead to signal diversity, not to challenge the structures.

"It looked a certain way publicly and sent a message out, the reality of that was that it hadn't changed who and what they were and their understanding of what the power dynamics were and how they wanted to exert their influence on the organisation."

Following the above, working relationships were the core part of organisational culture that were described and commented on. This is unsurprising, given that culture is very much understood as the way people behave and interact, and the impact of culture is experienced predominantly within organisational relationships, interpersonal interactions, and behaviours.

Working from the top, literally, the culture and relationships surrounding **leadership were described as autocratic**. This manifested in the way that leaders were generally never seen to consult staff, only taking into view strategies but not understanding the operations and impact of strategies and culture on the ground. In regard to race equality and the experience of racialised staff, leadership seemed to focus on the presentation and reputation of an organisation being 'not-racist' or even anti-racist¹⁸, focusing on policies procedures values and stances, without any recognition of the culture being manifested and being perpetuated by employees. It was felt that this style led to oppressive working cultures and environments, fostering much of what has been described and follows this.

This system of autocracy was very much felt by most contributors to be intrinsic to the majority of professional White-collar working organisations which perpetuate strict **hierarchies** that uphold certain **power dynamics** within the structure. And it was very clear to everyone that these hierarchies were, in this regard, **based on race, power ascertained from being inherently White**.

"The hierarchy of the [public body] is based on power and inherently being White, most executives and pretty much all senior management is White. This is relayed into actions like making refreshments. Executives are treated differently, so a colleague may make an executive a cuppa but not others, relaying understanding of the spoken and unspoken power dynamics."

Interview contributor

Exploring this, it was defined as a cultural system within which it was made clear by staff being introduced by their grade pay scale, this exerted power and subordination and bringing in elements of snobbery, including when elevating Oxbridge university graduates. It was also made clear that staff shouldn't challenge those above them, and that if they had ideas for changes, they would only be heard if they had White collegiate support. Flipped on its head then, for those contributors who had also had experiences of leading organisations, they noted that, regardless of this, the rule of not challenging those at the top was maintained while they also experienced many challenges and difficulties from subordinates in the organisation.

"It looked good for them, and it felt good for them to have someone different into their leadership role, it suited their purpose and got the right message out... but the reality is that hadn't changed who and what they were and their understanding of power dynamics. I was a convenient little figurehead. When I started to ask questions about intent and purpose, that's when the discomfort started to come in. This shows just how far behind a lot of White, supposedly forward-thinking people are, regarding their understanding of the power and control they have ultimately."

Interview contributor

¹⁸ Antiracism has become a term that is being used by many without understanding the key practices or demonstratable factors that would make an organisation be truly anti-racist. Here we would reference Ibram X Khendi's book and framework, which is applied, seems most organisations as assimilationist rather than antiracist.

The sense that is left therefore with the culture of organisational hierarchies is one that is premised on **White comfort**.

"A lot of the work culture prioritises maintaining White comfort over addressing racialised people's discomfort – this was notably different when I worked in a space with majority racialised people – I suddenly felt comfortable bringing my work culture into my working space."

Interview contributor

This is because of the prevalence of White fragility; White staff not being accepting of relevant challenge due to the feeling of discomfort. Many anecdotes related to this were shared, some detailed above when looking at complaint's procedures, but also within the continuation of considering dynamics and working relations, which leaves racialised staff feeling gaslit (expanded on later).

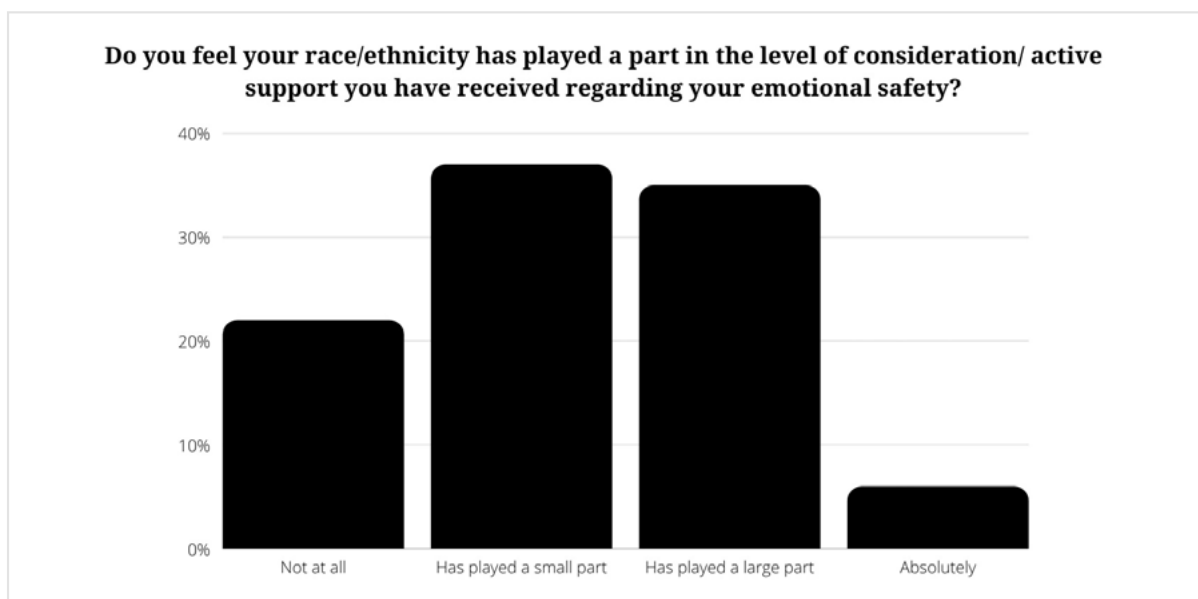
"White people really don't like to be called out or challenged by Black people. That's why it's the name of a book – Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race¹⁹ – it takes them somewhere where they have lost the power, it's so unfamiliar to them, they react."

Interview contributor

Moving down the ladder on the scale of hierarchy, **managers**, and their approaches to management of teams and racialised people were the next most commented on aspect of culture as demonstrated through working relationships. In our survey, 64% of respondents said that their line managers never or only sometimes considered their emotional wellbeing, with 78% feeling that their race/ethnicity played a part in this.



¹⁹ Reni Eddo-Lodge, 2017.



The picture that was painted by most was an arena where managers don't take time to get to know you, downplay or **don't like to deal with interpersonal problems**. The focus of management meetings is outcomes of work rather than inclusion and wellbeing, their role being one to ensure that the job was being done. It was felt that the culture created a distance from management in many arenas, and where contact was made it was under a sense of control and subjugation. This was accentuated by a feeling that policies were not embodied by managers, leaving them redundant in practice, and that managers just didn't have time to develop this supportive role and were not equipped with the skills necessary for working with diverse staff on broader issues or complaints outside of the direct task/work/project focus.

On the small number of occasions, they did consider wellbeing or interpersonal situations, it was still treated as a tick box, formulaic checking in process, from which managers would move on quickly to task related discussion. Unfortunately, what was found therefore was that due to this style of working relationship, racialised staff felt that in the most case, they had to get on with getting to know the finer workings of an organisation and developing a sense of inclusion by themselves, nothing being done to facilitate other working relationships, and the consideration of interdepartmental relations was only for those with the self-confidence to develop them independently.

"The current work culture means that a manager's role is get things done, therefore the minutia of the employee experience is lost or minimised. Managers are more concerned with outcomes over wellbeing and there is usually no time or effort to find and hold the difficult conversations or navigate personal relationships"

Interview contributor

One of the clear impacts of hierarchies based on race and the way in which managers interact with racialised staff was that progression was based on **cronyism**. Expanded on in tangible impact later, it is important to describe here however the culture of having to be a certain 'fit' to be able to develop relationships with those in power and therefore progress. The ability to develop these relationships, seen in internal mentoring programmes, where mentors chose a certain type of mentee, was broadly reserved for White employees. Within the working culture, proximity to power was seen as important for progression and professional development – something not offered to most racialised people.

"Whiteness can bond in that way that leaves racialised people excluded."

Interview contributor

Having touched on interpersonal relationships between team members and broader employees, something left to the individual to develop, a dire picture was painted of how this plays out. **Gossipy, bitchy, talkative** were regular descriptors, with contributors noticing how people would talk behind their backs. This was combined with **banter**, including racist banter demonstrating oppressive and outdated attitudes. Contributors stated that in most experiences this kind of banter was accepted in office environments, especially larger ones, where managers were not present. This side of organisational behaviour led to a very cliquey culture where staff behaved with an air of pack mentality, and that inclusion in social groups didn't matter if you had similar interests or not, but more so if you had the same cultural background and understanding. There was a strong sentiment that **racialised people had to actively ingratiate themselves to their White colleagues** or be forever left out, and that the perpetuation of the 'old boys' network' meant you were judged on the value of your personal relationships with others in the office – longer standing members of staff also holding more weight.

"My relationships are more superficial or professional, whereas some colleagues I see some have very close relationships... There is a closed group mentality – but their friendship emerged in the workplace, they are friends and colleagues, and you don't know the reason, nobody asks you if you want to be involved, you only get invited to general socials, but never to the socials amongst different people."

Interview contributor

This also translated to **socialising outside of the office**. Unsurprisingly, most social activities would be planned at either meat-based eateries or alcohol-based establishments, including lunchtimes. For many contributors this was an active barrier to their participation, some not because they don't drink alcohol, but because they don't drink the copious amounts of alcohol as their White counterparts would in after work socials.

"Behaviours that are difficult to emulate, such as going out drinking (copious amounts of alcohol) if you don't go, you lose out on that informal relationship... you will be forgotten or left behind."

Interview contributor

This does not only impact their ability to develop relationships with colleagues and other staff, but also became for many a specific barrier to engaging in certain work discussions that would take place without their involvement, some noting that decisions on projects would be made in these settings, especially over food, which they were not able to participate. Additionally, the combination with these and Christmas as an opportunity to develop work-based relationships left many out, especially when no other religious celebrations were advocated as a chance for staff socials, and if they were, people wouldn't turn up, which made racialised staff with different religions feel uncomfortable.

"The going out for drinks working culture (daily or weekly) that allows colleagues to gain better social understanding is inaccessible for those who may not drink or enjoy pub/bar culture."

Interview contributor

"A positive and negative experience can be one and the same. For example, the office cultures of going for drinks after work can lead to you feeling more a part of the wider office network and family. However, it can be negative as you can see an ugly side to people if they drink too much or you see your work friends excluded and side-lined as they don't drink or aren't considered the right sort of people to go drinking with."

Survey Respondent

Political Correctness – Gone mad?

Case study – Aiyla

Organisations reflect the society we live in

A recurring theme within this research was a prevailing sense that organisational culture was directly influenced by societal culture. This is expressed in all elements of a company structure particularly working relationships between staff but also how language and reasonable adjustment were discussed. Aiyla situated themselves firmly in their own racialised background but was adamant in highlighting how their whiteness may have mitigated some of what they experienced in a sense. However, the foundational assertion was that organisational culture and workplace cultures as a whole, often have unwritten and unspoken rules that those who are alien to the culture may never know or be enlightened to.

Aiyla highlights like many other interviewees, that organisational culture directly correlates with societal culture. Therefore, there is a stark difference in the organisational culture of companies which are cosmopolitan and international and therefore operating on an expectation of diversity. Conversely, Aiyla notes that the third sector roles located in less diverse areas of Wales can and do struggle to recruit diverse candidates but was reluctant to attribute this solely to geographical location.

Aiyla resists the use of the term race 'because race is social construction' but asserts that racial stereotyping and ideologies surrounding race constitute much of the basis for the interactions that are negative for racialised people. *"Affinity bias"*, grouping racialised people by metonymy and stereotyping is obvious and almost expected and Aiyla highlights that it inherently excludes racialised people from participating in this banter and leans heavily into racism. A lot of the contention between White and racialised colleagues is due to the barrier between those who are 'in the know' regarding organisational culture versus those who are not. There is an expectation that organisational culture is just known and understood, so staff members who aren't Welsh, white and in the know are seen in a negative light and it's held against them – a critique Aiyla had of general work culture. *"Democratising the workplace"* for everyone can alleviate the pressure of being socially apparent, the urge to work harder to compensate for race and participate

in work-life for all staff, says Aiyla, however, this would have to follow structural changes concerning role models, organisational support, flexibility and empathy.

On a whole, workplace culture is inherently toxic and pervasive culture and Aiyla reiterated that in their research they concluded that it was not an individual issue but a structural systemic issue. *"We don't just leave the society of norms outside when we enter the workplace, nor do we leave the workplace culture in there when we go outside"* and this is embedded into wider Welsh culture. Suggestions to better adapt working culture by Aiyla were the likes of different rolling assessing periods instead of hard deadlines, and diverse working for those who may be disabled or have other commitments in their personal lives. They were resolute in their opinion that dynamic policy structures that don't seek to homogenise the workforce or treat diverse employees as tick box exercises' with no support but instead engage and build with racialised people so that diversity and inclusion are embedded into the soul of an organisation.

Creating safe spaces for employees to develop relationships with one another and could be open about their triumphs and trials. Aiyla used the example of being excluded from WhatsApp groups in their current post, which details their colleagues going out for socials and attributed this to being othered but also their struggles with English. Exclusion due to language skills was not uncommon for Aiyla and they detailed colleagues not understanding how to work with people who spoke English as a second language and were impatient and judgemental negatively affecting workplace relationships. In one drastic scenario, communication between Aiyla and a colleague had to occur through a line manager as the colleague who spoke English as a first language was adamant they couldn't understand Aiyla. Therefore, creating a safe space was important to Aiyla as they suffered as a result of that interaction as they didn't trust themselves to speak English, or complete their work, resulting in low self-esteem and lack of respect from colleagues.

Within the broader context of the staffing body in White-collar organisations, many contributors reported a feeling that many staff members behaved within a remit of **political correctness**, feeling that at times people have become so scared to get it wrong, that they would actively avoid racialised staff and not try to get to know them beyond the work context in any sort of interpersonal way. It was described by many that racist culture, beliefs, thoughts, prejudices, are pervasive everywhere, but the extent to which their signifiers are communicated depends on how comfortable staff feel to express themselves.

“Wales has an interesting history of being oppressed by the English, but the average person doesn’t know how to talk about the oppression of Black and Brown people – there is a felt sense of discomfort talking about Wales’ role in the slave trade, a loud silence. This facilitates a culture of silence. There is a need to encourage these conversations - the personal is political.”

Interview contributor

Building on and contributing to this is a clear understanding that **conversations around race were highly uncomfortable** for many staff members and even HR teams, with a general feeling that White colleagues were reluctant to provide support or actively help around issues related to race. A **dearth in awareness** of issues was made clear during 2020 after the brutal murder of George Floyd (rest in power) where many staff and organisations stood to a ‘don’t bring the political into work’ stance, and that if the topic was raised, then a tangible **air of discomfort** amongst White colleagues was felt, through the continued **silence around issues**, not wanting to talk about them, or leaning on ‘**colourblind**’²⁰ viewpoints that actively ignored the impact on individuals of institutional and systemic racism or of hearing about racist incidents. This is experienced directly through the minimal understanding of racism and microaggressions, leaving many contributors feeling that their **experience is actively minimised**, something we shall expand on later in the emotional impact of this.

“Most managers start based on colour blindness. This impact is devastating for BAME workers as it essentially means not recognising disadvantages.”

Interview contributor

²⁰ To be colour blind is to lean on the discourse that ultimately, we are all human beings, we all face difficulties, and ignoring difference regarding oppression. Colourblind principles lead to statements such as ‘All lives matter.’

Cultural Hegemony

Case study – Anton

The Unwritten Rules, Known by Some

Organisational culture for racialised people is inherently based on race and unwritten rules. This was epitomised in Anton's employment experience in the corporate department of a nationwide public body. In the quote, *"it is clear to me that there is an overlap between issues to do with race and gender, and also race and class in terms of the workplace, and I've seen that manifested in terms of my relationships with colleagues who look like me or similar to me - whether they're black or brown or from a mixed-heritage."*

There was a clear assertion that there needed to be a shift away from tolerance as a notion in policy-making alongside neutrality as a strategy against racism. Anton stated that they *"don't like the word tolerant, I do not want to be put up with"* which correlates with modern anti-racism agendas which do not tackle racism as a structural issue but instead as an individual misstep or problem. Inclusivity which is purported is not necessarily for the benefit of racialised people especially women, this intersectionality was brought to attention by Anton within their interview. Anton counselled a young Muslim colleague, who identified as a woman and who'd just joined the company and whose name was anglicised by the IT systems at work, but who felt like she didn't want to rock the boat and tell her line manager what had happened. They were directed to Anton, who encouraged them to challenge the name change and to use their chosen name but Anton was critical of upper management for not questioning this change based on the context clues of the woman. It is here internal oppression, as coined by Anton comes into play as white colleagues and management are comfortable with racialised people making allowances for their ignorance and the inability to pronounce names correctly or adapting themselves to white working culture. However, there is not the same comfort afforded to ensure that racialised people, especially women are comfortable with challenging and being their authentic selves in the workplace.

Due to the unwritten organisational culture, Anton has found that there is an expectation of code-switching and amenability.

"I am very fortunate that I have a resilience, an internal resilience, a confidence and hopefully not an arrogance, self-esteem, lived experience of my time on this planet and I hope a bit of brain in my head to know the games that people play. And there are rules that are spoken and there are rules that are unspoken, and what I've observed in terms of colleagues coming into the workplace is that sometimes there's a lack of knowledge and experience of some of those things."

These unwritten rules dictated the young Muslim colleague's responses as well as others around Anton. Despite Anton making it apparent that they do not indulge in the games and power plays within the organisation, especially as *"there's a hierarchy within [this organisations] system that is based on power obviously and inherently based on being white"*. These notions are represented by the company executives who were treated differently because of their positions which place a type of social obligation on lower people in the organisation hierarchy, an example being making tea and coffees.

Anton used the term *'the cat can look at the queen'* to describe their disregard for office politics and the purposeful avoidance of catering to the machinations and games. Anton noted an experience in which it was solidified to them that their colleagues expected them to be chastised and lose their job for challenging the upper management. This interaction solidified the idea that having a dissenting opinion and challenge was seen as an affront to the system and there's an assumption that you shouldn't or won't dissent to advance. The cultivation of this culture is both toxic and problematic for all employees within the organisational structure but especially racialised people.

What has been covered in this chapter is a cross section of elements that make up the culture in predominantly White, office-based organisations. A picture that is hard to paint in detail, as much of it is characterised not only by the behaviour of staff, and in this context the experiences therefore of racialised staff of such, but also by a felt sense of culture, collectively understood by those who are not part of it.

“What is key is what people don't see, the unspoken and unseen but collectively known. There is a need to clock the unwritten rules and knowledge and use that to learn how to survive, that is a skill and not everyone can live within those confines.”

Interview contributor

What was denoted by many contributors was the real sense of there being **unwritten and unspoken rules** in the workplace. Described as a ‘way things are done around here’, it was felt very strongly that these rules were collectively known by the majority, something that has expansive tangible and intangible impacts on racialised staff as we shall see. These rules were felt to encapsulate the minutiae of the office working environment and used to elicit **subtle games** with the workspace.

“When working in an organisation made up of people from the same background – there are assumptions about how to behave, stereotypes – no time is taken to get to know each other, as opposed to international environments.”

Interview contributor

With this comes then a basis of **assumptions of behaviour**, as well as an assumption of knowledge and understanding of these rules, meaning that no time is taken to support racialised people to develop these skills or to get to know how they may operate and understand things differently. This **monoculture** therefore means that everything within these organisations is created and understood through a **White cultural lens**, with anything out of the White culturally ordinary seen as offensive. Clear examples given of this, with colleagues in offices who wanted to burn joss sticks being labelled an old hippy, and food being brought in by others been commented on for their smell or how they looked, anything out of the White ordinary seen as offensive. Here, with a **predominantly White male mindset** in place, people would buy into the culture, not recognising that this is how power is maintained.

“We must criticise work culture – this impacts all marginalised people, not just racialized people – there is a certain mindset, based within hierarchy, about doing more, producing more. There is no empathy or understanding – work culture is so masculine. This is how workplace culture is toxic.”

Interview contributor

Office based work culture was therefore regularly described by many as **toxic**. And this toxicity is felt throughout an organisation, mentioned by many as being underhand, and perpetuated through progression routes, keeping similar people in higher level positions.

Unfortunately, it was also clearly recognised that there is a strong **aversion to change**, especially cultural change, within most organisations, and that attempts to do things differently, disturbing the hierarchy, leaves a **state of hostility and tension**, people not only being stagnant and static in their ways, but digging heels in to the cultural assumptions and behaviours that have been the baseline for so long.

"When I first joined the BAME Network I thought I was championing positive changes – but there is a feeling they don't want to change or they are sacred of change – ultimately, I want to progress, don't want to be seen as the person causing an issue, so I chose to leave and keep my head down."

Interview contributor

Ultimately, what is understood is that all of this falls out from **structural racism** and maintains **institutional racism** at its core. Subtle racism, unconscious racism, pervasive, insidious, in people's minds, between the lines in policy that are used as flags and bring about no real change. Racialised people are spending a concerted amount of their time in these organisations, and as we shall see in the following two sections, the negative impact on them is devastating.

"For many White people in the workplace there are ancestral advantages that breed cultural capital in the workplace, helping to maintain status quo and stereotypes."

Interview contributor

The spiders web of office culture

Culture, as noted earlier in this report, is regularly communicated through the analogy of an iceberg, where some parts are more visible and obvious, but the majority is invisible, and can only be understood on deeper inspection. If we stick with this analogy, in office-based work environments in Wales, we have policies that tip the iceberg, that are visible to all. However, as we have seen, these do not always denote the reality of cultural practice, and scratching below the surface, we see how people work - different styles of communication and approaching tasks, professions, and projects - are assumed rather than denoted. Deeper still sit the interpersonal relationships described, which are upheld by oppressive systems including White Supremacy (ergo systemic and institutional racism), something we know that no organisation can escape or be rid of.

However, what this analogy misses, is that although culture is, yes, made up of different elements, they are not separate in their existence. They intertwine, impact one another, and many cannot be without the others existence. We therefore use the analogy of a spider's web here. All the elements are intertwined, and they touch upon every part of an organisation's infrastructure.

The organisational culture in office-based workplaces is definitively hard to describe in all its elements because much of it is felt, but not seen. Like walking into a spider's web, where you can feel the strands stick to you, but cannot see them, office-based culture becomes a trap for many racialised people that they try to work out, but within which they become increasingly tangled. And as some strands may break, more is replaced, parts challenged, others are quickly reinforced.

As we explored what the culture was like for racialised people, it was very hard for focus to be drawn to the positives (this was elicited however and contributes to our conclusive remarks on how to address some of these issues). The feeling of the culture, and the negative impact it has on people, was central to most of the discourse and survey responses. And like a web is to the spider's prey – there are some devastating consequences.

"I felt that – it's a feeling, I can't really describe it – unless you are in our shoes you can't really acknowledge the experience we go through."

Interview contributor

Part 2) The impact of organisational culture – unsafe spaces

A shift in organisational culture in office-based environments is not just necessary, it is imperative. As we will see in the upcoming section, racialised people are facing such detrimental impact to their practical opportunities and outcomes, as well as their psychological safety. This is not just unfair – it is unjust and has dire consequences outside of the workplace. If racialised adults cannot thrive within the labour market, then the whole societal system we live in will continue to see racialised people disproportionately affected – worse physical and mental health outcomes, housing situations, attainments, to list a few. Most people spend most of their adult life at work or undertaking some form of labour to be able to make money. If they don't, they are usually looking for some form of labour to make money. This is a core field to most people's lives, and when living as a racialised minority, the core experience becomes harder hitting when having to navigate the detrimental cultural aspects outlined earlier, let alone the impact this has.

We invite readers to take this section seriously. This chapter is broken down into three core areas of impact: practical and tangible – measurable outcomes that are clearly defined; impact on sense of inclusion - belonging, fitting in, being able to being their full authentic selves to work; and the ultimate impact on psychological safety – regarding mental health and a sense of being able to speak up, bring challenge and innovation. It is usually the first area that receives attention. Systems like to be able to measure impact. What this new era is calling on is to believe, value and recognise the impact on elements that are not directly measurable – this is what it means to believe someone's lived experience, this is what it means to acknowledge the deeper impact on the people who work for you, and with this, we can start to understand the gravity of the situation, and recognise the need for true change.

Practical and tangible impacts – the measurable immeasurable

Case study – Maab

Working twice as hard to get half the amount

For Maab, organisational culture has meant living the saying that *'you have to work twice as hard to get half as much as they have'* whilst they were employed in a local authority. Maab maintained that the department they were in, which worked directly with local people, was ahead of others within the local authority in comparison, but that the Black Lives Matter protests were a trigger for movement within racism and discrimination aspects in policy and day-to-day operations. Like other interviewees, Maab noted that the expectation of having to work twice as hard to prove their value and contributions within their job left them overworked and pressured to maintain extraordinarily high standards that weren't expected of their white colleagues.

A 'straw poll' was conducted on career progression whilst in position at the local authority which revealed that *"out of 122 senior managers, how many do you think were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background? 5, out of 122 ... Out of that 5 only 1 is a woman and that woman is not local"*. This revelation was in direct opposition to the local authority stance on diversity and investment in *"homegrown talent"*. The lack of investment in *"homegrown talent"* is part of the reason that contributes to racialised people leaving on mass from the council.

Maab noted that the local authority was set up as having *"10 grades in the hierarchy would be an operational manager and above, however, for BME staff their career peak was at a four or five which left BME staff stagnating or leaving the organisation"*. Regarding being questioned about career progression, Maab stated that *"career*

progression? There is none" adamantly and communicated that the survey provided evidence for the explanations that Maab had heard across the organisation. The survey found that racialised candidates desired progression but found that the system was impossible for them to navigate without the support and so knew that when promotions were been given out who would be given the roles based on nepotism and cronyism, therefore career progression was only possible when you left the organisation.

Maab's experience within the local authority epitomised the realities for racialised people. Maab was led by a senior manager who instructed a team of 10 and was the only member of the cohort 2 grades lower than her white counterparts, despite having equal or more responsibilities than their fellow team members, who were all at the higher grade, a clear pay discrepancy when revealed. Furthermore, Maab reveals that they had worked for the council for 30 years and that was used as a positive for their progression, yet countless managers below them matched Maab's grade without coming near their length of time with the organisation. Whilst, the organisation had diverse representation, racialised people must work twice as hard and the results aren't comparative. Maab is representative of how the past racial agenda did not do enough to tackle the unconscious bias and microaggressions that permeate the society in which we live. Verbal commitments to diversity doesn't address the insidious nature of racism that is reproduced in the workplace which is symptomatic of society as a whole.

When painting a picture of the practical, tangible impact felt by racialised staff from the organisational culture, a few key areas were raised. Of course, they are impacted in much broader ways as we have seen in the literature review, but these elements were felt to be a specific side-effect of the collective culture, rather than other elements of racism, employment, and the labour market in general. We have tried to place these in a way that shows the knock-on impact of one to another as well, which of course is inevitable, as detrimental effects are rarely experienced alone.

Starting off, one of the practical impacts of the type of culture as denoted in policies and work style was that of **performance**. Racialised staff commented that they consistently felt that they had to hit all performance measures, even if that wasn't the culture of the organisation, because they felt a **need to prove themselves worthy**, that they could do well and jump through hoops for recognition.

As in other research, the need to **work harder** was consistently communicated, as many recognised the sense that White counterparts saw them as a **minority hire and tokenised** in the role. To be able to draw on their abilities, consistent effort was made to create a niche in their work, otherwise they felt consistently devalued, and recognition was given to the fact that they felt they couldn't rest, as anything seen as slacking would be used against them.

"When you walk into an org and see a sea of White, it says I need to work twice as hard. White people don't understand the importance of having someone who looks like you to look up to."

Interview contributor

What coupled with this was that racialised staff experienced a tangibly higher level of **scrutiny and micromanagement** than their counterparts. This was clear through anecdotes such as contributors being actively singled out, when White counterparts had not for doing the same thing, and receiving micromanagement rife with **microaggressions** even when working below their expected grade. These experiences impact greatly on people's ability to work effectively and focus on meetings. This was also denoted by a clear **lack of professional recognition**, where qualifications were not recognised formally or informally; or they being shortlisted for a higher position, but offered a much lower one; other examples included noticing discomfort when being introduced as a project manager, and proposals at meetings being met with active resistance, attempts flung at rendering them incompetent and not giving value to their ideas, or opposed, White counterparts taking forward concepts on their behalf because of this.

"It can make you think that there is no point in working to the best of your ability if you won't get the opportunities for advancement from it"

Survey respondent

A culmination in this was that most contributors and survey respondents felt they had been **overlooked for progression** and opportunities for professional development, as they had not been in a space that allowed them to thrive. In some instances, there were clear examples where a racialised employee was posed with more questioning for a position that his White counterpart when they compared experiences, and as alluded to earlier, longevity in post was considered as more important than ability for role – goalposts for this being actively moved within a short term

of employment for one contributor. However, in addition, one of the main obstacles felt was that ability to progress was also based on proximity to hierarchy, and, as we have seen, the culture denies many racialised people the opportunity to develop these relationships. The fall out of this, on the grander scale, is the **ethnicity pay gap**, which we have mentioned earlier, and is facing a lot more scrutiny now – and, where instances of public sector organisations paying racialised managers less than White counterparts, this has a long way to go to being addressed.

"A survey [we ran] found that 'BAME' candidates wanted to progress but found that the system was impossible to navigate without support and saw cronyism and promotions given on nepotistic terms... you knew who was getting the job before it had even gone out."

Interview contributor

With these experiences in place, most contributors commented that absolutely **no support** was available for them to take forward issues of discrimination. The majority stated that HR was not a safe space to go to, and without having a network or union in place, they were left out to manage situations alone.

"The organisation I worked for did not take the time out or provide resources to be actively supportive when I asked for help. I felt let down and undervalued whilst others who had asked for help, had support put in place."

Survey respondent

This was signified in the number of people who noted having to start records of incidents, as it was known by many that the **burden of evidence** would be on them to prove discrimination, and so they started record taking of instances from day one, should they need to take the concern further. However, one contributor, who had taken an employer to a tribunal with the support of his Union, said that they would not recommend it to other racialised colleagues, because even though they won, they still had to leave employment for the continued discomfort working there, and they felt they were now marked going forward. A similar anecdote came through from another experience, where a staff member took an issue through grievance, and ended up facing no recourse due to the system saying it was **one word against another**, which was extremely upsetting and painful. Here, the advice was also to generally not proceed with complaints due to the lack of ability to obtain due recompense.

"Only once I had been off work for months with mental health problems was when my emotional safety was thought about - however very quickly forgotten."

Survey respondent

For many others, they realised the only way they could progress was to **apply for more senior positions in other organisations** rather than consider climbing the ladder in one organisation as most of their White counterparts would be able to do. A number had to take extended period of **sick leave** for work related stress, and even more deciding to leave employment, due to the persistent microaggressions, hostile environment and even direct racism they had faced and that they had no energy left to fight against and challenge the injustices, and only when they had handed in their notice were they able to be direct about the racism they had faced in all its forms (Khendi, 2019), albeit still not obtaining any form of recourse less the satisfaction of not having to remain in a silent fear.

And, to end this section of practical impact, it is important to note a regular comment made by many, that is directly fed into here. Many explained that when asking for change, a common response from organisations was that change could not be initiated as there was **'not enough BAME people/data on the experiences of BAME people'** to be able to justify the needs for change or implement evidence without contravening confidentiality and GDPR. A weak excuse, but one that is clearly not helped by the fact that racialised staff are continuously moving on. It would be interesting to know if there could be sectorial data on the turnover of racialised staff specifically – but we may face the same excuse.

Impact on inclusion – assimilation to survive

Case study – Nour

Hyper-Aware Codeswitching

If organisational culture is a microcosm of society, then the same tactics employed by racialised people in wider society are evidenced within an organisational culture. Nour highlighted how code-switching is parallel with employee advancement and how this disproportionately affects women of colour. A common saying echoed by Nour was that *“racialised people have to work twice as hard as their white counterparts and that has not changed”*. Nour draws attention to how organisational culture is used to disguise microaggressions as banter or misunderstandings, the insidious nature is ignored in favour of white ignorance. The maintenance of an oppressive white silence in the environment makes it difficult for racialised people to call out or draw attention to the subtle racism of day-to-day office life and encourages the habit of racialised people second-guessing themselves and questioning their experiences.

Gaslighting and avoidance tactics are utilised to maintain oppressive organisational cultures. Banter, as a method, is weaponised to convey to the racialised person that you ‘have to fit in or leave’ and especially in regards to banter, you’re expected to find humour in self-deprecation and stereotyping. Due to this, Nour conveyed a sense of having to adapt to progress within the organisation, having multiple personas being aware of how you as a Black man is perceived and what people think of your demographic and trying to mitigate that from the jump. Nour tells us that adaption, awareness, conformity and assimilation result in a type of hyperawareness and insecurities with your position. This hyper-awareness is detrimental as it is all-encompassing, controlling your expressions, your stature, and how you talk and forces racialised people to not be themselves at work. Nour drew attention to how policies are misread to feed racist ideology and gave an example of an experience in which their afro was deemed unprofessional by upper management, ‘justified’ by the hair colour policy in uniform policies. Nour felt this was unjust and left the role soon after but the event highlights how employees are coerced into conforming as the only other option is to leave.

“A lot of young people think that they have to conform in order to progress. Because they haven’t experienced difference, as once you’re experienced different offices and had 10 or 15 years’ experience then you know that this [treatment] is wrong”.

However, many organisations are preying on young racialised people’s ignorance and even navigating these unconscious bias and microaggressions is seen as a sort of rite of passage for racialised people, racism and discrimination is to be expected at some point.

Nour also knows that there is a dichotomy between the experiences of racialised people and their white counterparts, especially when applying for the same roles. The example given was one in which Nour and a friend had applied for a senior managerial position both having had practically the same application and experiences but their treatment was distinctly different. Nour was asked seven questions during their interview as opposed to their counterpart’s three, also Nour’s questions were progressively harder than the others. Nour does attribute this to unconscious bias but they have real-life consequences for racialised people. Within Wales, being associated with historically Black areas such as Butetown gave rise to stereotypes based on Black male aggression and islamophobia. Nour brought to the forefront that their sister experienced more workplace and organisational culture issues due to being a visible hijab-wearing Muslim woman and that in-person working had become very difficult for her. Additionally, any assertion from Nour was taken as aggression in previous roles, an adjective that was commonly associated with their Blackness specifically. Managers felt Nour was aggressive and said that they made them uncomfortable. This was coupled with a profound sense that Nour’s ideas were lesser ideas than their colleagues and lastly that as a Black person Nour was not qualified or had the right experiences to fulfil the job requirements. This links to the hyperawareness Nour attributes to being other in a predominantly white space and never feeling as if they could fully assimilate within.

With the above practical and tangible impact, there is also a real impact on racialised staff members inclusion in the workplace. Given the constant 'Equality Diversity and Inclusion' drives and money that is poured into these initiatives, it is shocking how excluded racialised (and other minoritized) people are in the minutiae experience.

What was broadly commented on by interviewees and survey respondents was not only a **felt sense of exclusion**, made to feel like they didn't belong, like they were an oddity, or an air of 'who do you think you are' in rare instances of obtaining professional recognition, but also **active exclusion**, not being invited to team events and chat groups, not welcomed or involved in breake-time conversations, and not being able to join in work discussions and decisions made in social settings. When being part of such a minority, contributors commented that there was an air of 'who are you' aimed at them, with their advice or opinions regularly being rejected – leaving them feeling not only unwelcome at work but also in the country they are in. And in the few occasions where contributors commented on having non-work-related interactions with their White counterparts, it regularly felt superficial, or became a space where they felt uncomfortable due to **people's biases and microaggressions being more freely communicated** as they slipped into their home, personal selves, rather than the politically correct staff member in the workplace. This develops a **sense of anxiety around small talk**, for fear of having to laugh off an untoward comment, and essentially, many said they felt alienated, and just saw work as a place to come and go from, without being able to develop anything else from it.

"There is social capital in performing the expected behaviours, and so adherence to the ways of communicating is rewarded."

Interview contributor

In addition, another of the most regularly commented on elements of office based working environments that impact racialised people sense of belonging was that of the unwritten rules. As commented on earlier, this environment puts racialised staff in a position of needing to **learn and adhere to these rules** as much as possible, assimilating to be able to succeed.

"You must become a different person when you go to an office, conform, otherwise you think you'll lose your job – people pay attention to how you talk, walk, how you approach people – even things like using your hands as a form of expression when communicating, speaking to managers, trying to mirror them, how they talk and react. You feel you must do that to progress within any organisation."

Interview contributor

This, of course, has huge ramifications on the ability for racialised staff to bring their **authentic selves** to work. One of the most reported experiences in relation to a sense of inclusion, most contributors and many survey respondents referenced experiences of **codeswitching** to try and fit in. From changing clothing - something not available to Muslim women who wish to wear a hijab - changing names to anglicised versions, or even accepting anglicised versions given to them by colleagues, stories of the need to fit in or leave poured through our data. Contributors mentioned a

hyper awareness of how they expressed themselves, minimising hand movements when talking, going along with banter, and recognising that it was easier to be British born with a British accent and go out and drink than not.

"As I am British born I have Westerner tendencies, such as drinking, going out clubbing, wearing clubbing attire and western clothes. For these reasons, as I am seen to be assimilated, I find I am treated better than others who are visibly religious or foreign and do not partake in certain activities."

Survey respondent

Comments were made on the feeling of needing to **'perform Whiteness'** to be able to progress, leaving Black culture at home for a fear of the impact it may have on a sense of professionalism. This connected to a sense that some British-Asian contributors mentioned about feeling the need to perform the **model minority role**, not being confrontational, and trying to become a non-entity in the workplace. However, it was recognised that this was not something available to Black contributors, which left them feeling especially excluded.

"As an Indian and a Sikh, I am more 'palatable' to some people. I find as frequently it is Black or Muslim people that are shunned by the workforce at large. As I do not fall into these categories I am considered a more 'acceptable' minority to the workforce."

Survey respondent

Of course, the only time that contributors felt that they were able to bring elements of their authentic selves into work were during **tokenistic diversity exercises**. Being asked to join photo shoots for promotional activities and being the diverse face of the organisation, comment on issues related to race and diversity, suddenly brought forth to be the magical minority with answers to everything, left people positioned to the opposite, of wondering if they were fulfilling racialised stereotypes enough to be valued for that. Even more so if in an equality focussed role, contributors felt that here, to their organisation, they were nothing more than their race.

"One part of me wanted to present White and the other wanted to present as 'fresh off the boat' because there is an internal war between acknowledging racism and its confrontation, versus being for everyone or wanting to be a non-entity."

Interview contributor

This **carrying of multiple personas** and a need to assimilate adapt and conform leaves people **drained**, with some saying it was not only **tiring and taxing**, but also terrifying to consider what the implication could be should elements of their distinct culture be communicated, feeling actively more excluded when displaying cultural difference, leaving people confused in their identity.

"As a person of colour, you must have multiple personas and adapt, assimilate, and conform resulting in a type of hyper awareness. This hyper awareness includes your expressions, your stature, how you talk, and it is oppressive and isolating."

Interview contributor

However, regardless of the extent to which these rules are learnt and code-switching is performed, their position as racialised people is still marked, leaving them held in a position of relative exclusion – as commented by most, racialised staff are positioned as **outsiders-within**²¹, part of yet still exploited by the organisation and relatively excluded. Ultimately disregarded and dismissed by management, a significantly large number of contributors mentioned a felt sense of being othered, as though they were an oddity in the workplace.

"Social expectations must be met so as to not be isolated. You must go to the pub and give to gifts and make coffee and be the good racialised person even if it's not reciprocated or else everyone dogpiles on you because you're the other. You're the one who ruins everything, any changes must have White support or your being an interloper changing the culture to be non-White. Its taxing and terrifying to be a visible minority and no one lets you forget that."

Survey respondent

What all this continued performance yet exclusion leads to is a feeling of deep-rooted discomfort, therefore not wanting to spend more time within the work environment or with their colleagues than needed, removing themselves where possible, form of **self-exclusion** driven by this cultural environment, leading some to say they felt it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

"Racial microaggressions create a culture in which people of colour can't exactly pinpoint why something is racist or makes them uncomfortable so they withdraw into themselves. This makes me wary of making friends in the workplace – I just feel like a bit of an oddity."

Interview contributor

This of course, leaves many racialised people feeling **lonely and isolated** in office-based work environments, even more so given the regular position of being the only person of their identity in their work environment. And of course, this is felt to an even greater sense where racialised people have **multiple or intersecting marginalized identities**. A multitude of sentiments of exclusion were related to exclusion due to racialised people also being LGBTQIA+, being a migrant, being younger, from a different class background, also impacting accent, being Muslim and being a woman, especially a Black woman or a Muslim woman, as recognised in the literature.

²¹ Coined by Patricia Hill Collins in relation to the experience of Black women in domestic work, the term shines light on situations in which racialised people, although in a position to see, experience and engage with White people and their culture, are still exploited at the core of their experience within these spaces. (Collins, 1986)

"Asking for adjustments to be made for the likes of Ramadan or for non-drinkers can be socially isolating for employees and create greater divides in the workplace."

Interview contributor

People felt even more so that they were belittled, not believed, spoken over, singled-out, scrutinised, and pinned as the Angry Black Woman or the demure Asian woman. It was clear throughout work that these identities led racialised people to face harsher exclusion as described above, and that for them, no matter the extent to which they attempted to assimilate, there was never a position in which they could feel included in the slightest in a predominantly White office based working environment steeped in White masculine working cultures, as we have seen.

"I feel like being an LGBT+ black person has meant that all the negatives' tropes of being a black femme means that I'm never believed. Also, regarding working culture being at an intersect means that often issues are reduced to my race or my sexuality never the combination of both regarding White working culture."

Survey respondent

"As a woman, it is harder to be believed or be taken seriously by others. It also means we can be written off as 'sensitive' as opposed to having valid worries and complaints."

Survey respondent

Impact on emotional wellbeing – psychologically unsafe

It is at this point that the spiders web starts to tangle and overlap, as the negative impact on racialised people's psychological safety, their mental health and feeling of not being able to speak up in the broadest sense, becomes increasingly noticeable. What we describe below is directly caused by the combination of all the elements of office-based work culture and those tangible and isolating impacts described in the last two sections.

"It's not overt racism, it's the small things that get to you, and people think you're being oversensitive..."

"Racial microaggressions create a culture in which people of colour can't pinpoint why something is racist or makes them uncomfortable, so we withdraw into ourselves..."

"Daily abuse in the form of microaggressions is a social deterrent for racialised employees..."

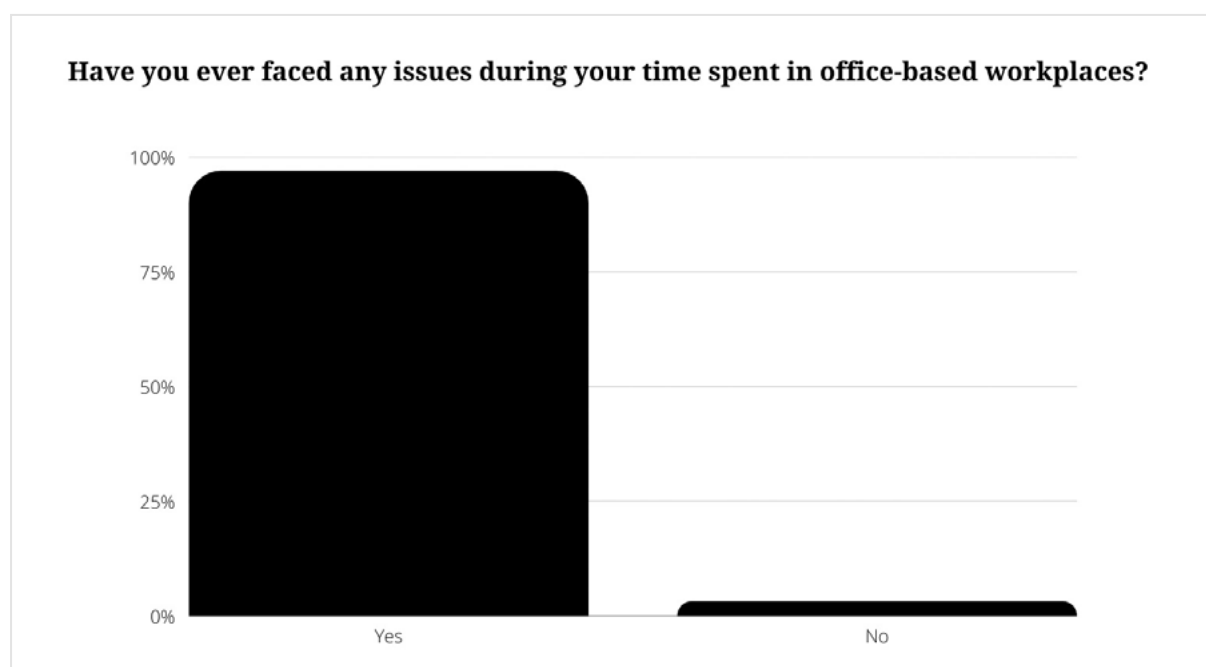
Interview contributors

Everyone who contributed to interviews and the survey discussed some level of negative impact on their mental health due to their experiences of office-based culture. Directly impacted by constant **microaggressions**, racialised staff feel that they are under a constant attack on their sense of self, identity and worth. The regular discomfort in reaction to comments and behaviours that are hard to pinpoint was regularly commented on as something that people just had to sit with, without being able to actively process emotionally.

“You are placed in a pervasive hegemonic arrangement that seeks to maintain the status quo and control. It is difficult to navigate and orient a pushback against. How do you structurally formulate a challenge against that?”

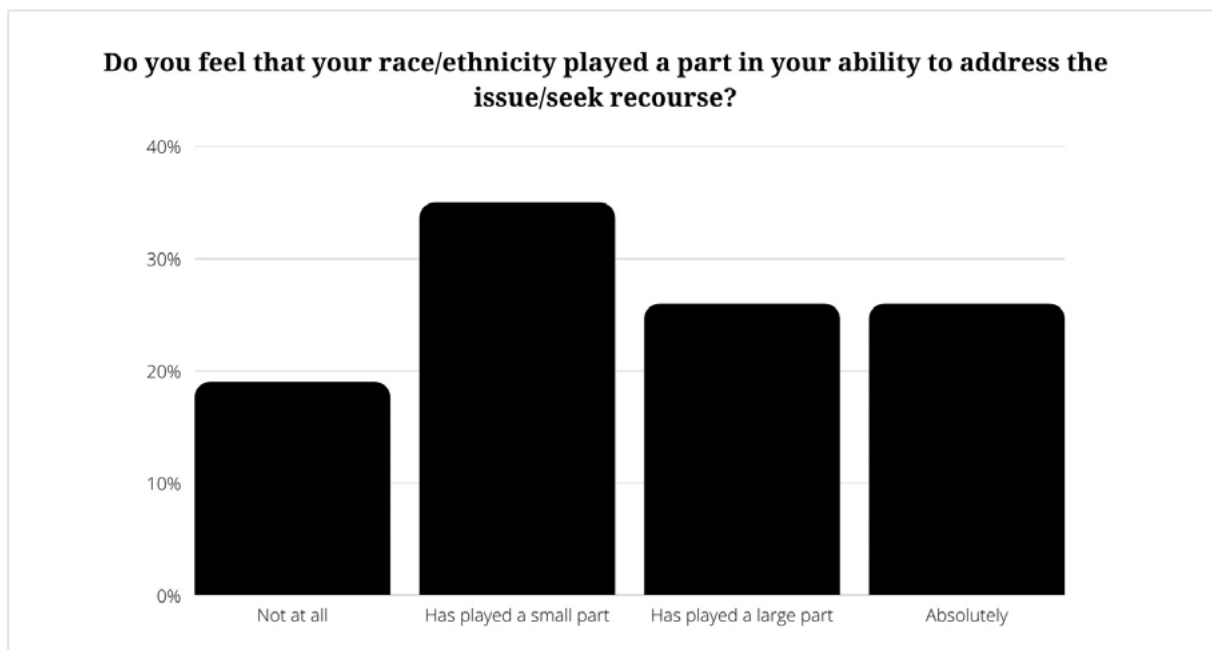
Interview contributor

Part of the barrier to emotional processing was also heavily communicated as the **inability to challenge this dominant culture** and the manifestations within it. With 97% of survey respondents saying they had directly faced issues at work, it was made clear that racialised staff could not feel safe if the processes in place for recourse did not allow room to evidence the impact on an individual and their work. As mentioned, contributors commented on being actively told that they should not challenge a senior member of staff on any aspect of work, added to the sense that a racialised person should not dissent, and that if anything, they would have to pick their battles carefully if battle at all.



"If you have the courage to speak out, you are ending your career. Regardless of what you see on my CV, this does not describe my confidence levels – friends ask why I talk in a self-deprecating way – because of my experiences, I have been kicked so many times, I carry the bruises – it doesn't take much to go back to those places. Racialised people carry that trauma daily."

Interview contributor



81% of survey respondents felt that their race played a part in their ability to address issues faced at work. Be those to do with racism or just more broadly speaking. This was contributed to by an overarching sentiment of being labelled the **troublemaker**, seen as someone who was rocking the boat. This led to many saying that they had actively decided to keep their head down in situations that they felt warranted comment, leaving things as they are, not making a fuss for fear of the impact on them, putting their reputation above their integrity for work. This even impacts racialised people's decision to join a union, again feeling that if they did, they would be viewed by their employer with an air of caution.

"Because the power isn't ours, it's easy to make a lot of noise and then not get invited in again. That is the danger. So, we must be wary of not taking ourselves out of the game in the way we articulate ourselves. Regardless of the Angry Black Woman stereotype – you'll get this anyway – we must be considerate in how we can push back in a meaningful way."

Interview contributor

And when on occasion issues would be raised, nearly everyone said that they felt dismissed, that others commented it was **not an issue**, that they were exaggerating, not taken seriously, or that they were made to feel incompetent for raising something within their work. **Gaslighting from White employees** is a regular occurrence, and in many instances, it was made clear that issues, especially those linked to race, were in the minds of the racialised person.

"How do you change a culture in an organisation, if you haven't lived our experience – White counterparts don't see anything wrong, think we are overreacting, over analysing – I've been told, "Oh, it's just banter, stop overreacting, it's just the culture, just get used to it." It's easy for them to say that. I want to change that culture, but when you're told it is what it is, and you just must fit in, it makes you want to leave."

Interview contributor

This then leads to a **hostile and tense working environment**, reflecting what was described earlier, that when a racialised person tried to highlight something that could warrant change, their perceived attempt to position themselves as powerful was met with further hostility and scrutiny. In the end, most contributors said they would suffer in silence, as the implications for any sort of challenge was worse on their mental health than not.

"Racialised employees face social ostracization if they complain. This creates a hostile work environment which is not easily proven and drives racialised workers to seeking other employment opportunities"

Interview contributor

And what this suffering in silence plays out as is extremely unhealthy. Not only are racialised people gaslit as described above by the White colleagues, but many commented on the personal **gaslighting** they inflicted on themselves. With repeated experiences as above, many have ended up questioning their own sanity, wondering if they are being too touchy or sensitive, if they were crazy for thinking something was an issue, convincing themselves that the issue was a non-issue.

"Often you question yourself, am I being touchy or sensitive – you almost talk yourself out of it, telling yourself it didn't happen."

Interview contributor

With equality policies stating that the victim must provide evidence of discrimination, racialised employees find it increasingly difficult to do so in instances where the impact is felt, emotionally, the action micro, without an overt pinpointed element to it. Contributors commented that they felt no one else understood what it was like to work under these conditions, and therefore put off reporting anything due to a knowledge that they would not be believed.

"It is hard to provide evidence of microaggressions and covert hate and make people understand the issues of working under such conditions. This puts many racialised people off reporting as they feel as though they won't be believed and end up experiencing gaslighting from others in response, as well as from themselves."

Interview contributor

And the reporting of the emotions felt as an impact of this was **heartfelt and saddening**. Comments on lack of confidence and self-esteem, suffering from **imposter syndrome** were regular, and this leading to markedly increased levels of **stress** due to needing to prove themselves. Furthermore, this impacts directly on racialised people being able to feel comfort in their roles and career, considering all of this beyond their ability to shine and thrive many felt **intimidated**, unable to demonstrate their ability to deliver a profession over a job and manage autonomy and independence.

A deep sense of **paranoia** was communicated, where racialised people feel nervous to contribute in general in every interaction, with all eyes on them. And the lasting impact here was a great sense of being **demoralised and demotivated**, not feeling that there was any route to progress, and that they would be driven into the ground. A deep sense of **frustration** was also felt but never communicated outwardly, as contributors knew they should be able to progress, but felt they were put in a condition of needing to be grateful for a job. All contributors commented on feeling in many instances **deeply unhappy**, and ultimately have developed an inherent distrust of White colleagues and White organisations, due to the expectation of the hypocrisy they feel from White collectivism.

"It can demoralise and defeat you, making you feel unwelcome not only at work but in the country that you're in. It also makes you think why bother working to the best of your ability if you'll be passed over for promotions etc."

Survey respondent

We know what it's like, being trapped in the trauma

There is absolutely no way to deny that for the majority of racialised people in Wales who have experiences in majority White office-based environments, their working life contributes to the trauma they must manage due to the strong hold that White Supremacist ideologies have in society. As we see here, not only are racialised people not able to access progression routes in employment - as highlighted by Ogbonna in his work, due to the organisational culture - but racialised employees are navigating a constant sense of insecurity and fear of their every interaction. In the way that many women for example recognise the slight tension that rises when we are in a space alone with a man, racialised people experience this same sense when surrounded by White people. In the working space, it is felt by many that they are moving through experiences with their breath held tightly in their chest. This is forcing racialised people to leave the workplace, or not engage beyond their direct duties and timeframes. How can we expect racialised people to thrive, to move towards a society where we experience

representation and equality, if there is a constant wariness of attack on the horizon? This is real, and the combination of all these experiences is not only going to impact mental health but ultimately physical health.

Racialised people are starting to look to platforms that review employers on how inclusive they are of diverse staff – not just on the face of it, but how racialised and other minoritised employees have felt. Forums are developing, in which people will only share jobs in organisations that they feel are safe to work in. And in many cases, these are few and far between. These stories trickle out due to the fear of repercussion– but they are everywhere, and as was clear in our research, the fact is, when a racialised person starts telling an anecdote related to any of the points above, another racialised person could finish that story nearly word for word. We nod, we know, we smile empathetically, because in these environments, we have faced it all. Now we call on these White-led organisations to look to the next chapter, and beyond, to consider how this can actively be changed, so that we may feel truly included, be ourselves and thrive, not just survive.

Part 3) Eliciting culture change – deep diversity

Given the context, this is probably the most important section of the research findings. Yet, given the context of the web that has been described and the impact of becoming trapped in it has on racialised people, it was also one of the hardest areas to consider for our contributors and within the analysis of the evidence. This is because, although many examples of good practice were shared, not many of the contributors felt that they had any entire professional experience of feeling like they could bring themselves to work, be safe in bringing forth innovative challenge, or take issues forward if they presented themselves. However, by spinning together the elements of positive culture that have been experienced by many, and thinking theoretically about how these can be harnessed in a broader cultural context, we aim to explore multiple ways in which, if drawn sound together across the web of culture, can start to create positive spaces for racialised people to work under, in, that will not only allow space for them to thrive, but for the organisations themselves to develop and move into a world where diversity is embraced and the impact of diverse thinking, relationships, ways of working and policies goes beyond what our vision could imagine. Organisations where not only the work but the staff are valued, internally and externally, for what they bring to the sectors.

We must learn – and to do this we need to listen and support

Unsurprisingly, one of the central factors to managing culture change and fostering a truly inclusive culture for racialised people is within the **approach of leadership**. All our contributors recognised that senior leaders in organisations are the ones who set a cultural standard for an organisation, embodying, and communicating out the different ways of working, the interpersonal professional relationships, and how policies and procedures are not only designed but implemented. Many leaders however do not take an approach of leading the culture in an organisation. Rather, we find leaders who lead the work, the outputs, the face of an organisation, but internally, stand aside and apart from their staffing body and the cultural functions within.

When it comes to inclusive cultures, it was very strongly communicated that leaders and management must be reflective of change and embody this in their ways of working. They have a direct responsibility to encourage people to try things differently, and where they support policy development, they must also be very clear and active on the implementation, especially regarding its EDI lens. Policy must be something that can transcend into individuals' ways of doing things, and leaders have a key role when directing in embedding these, otherwise they remain as pieces of paper, artificially in place.

However, central to this leadership, to providing guiding practice by being exemplary in the behaviour that demonstrates the culture you want to manifest, **leaders must listen**. Again, too many leaders are expected to know it all, to be able to bring forth all the answers. We do not expect that leaders, or anyone who does not have lived experience, will truly know the best way to go forward with inclusive culture change. So, what was communicated most heavily, was creating space to listen. **Organisations must listen**. It was clearly communicated that minorities are the experts of their minority and the impact of their minoritisation - and that doing things in the name of racialised people without talking to racialised people is deemed to fail – as the measure of change can only be assessed by those directly impacted themselves. And with this, what was highlighted as key was the **removal of hierarchies** in interactions of such. Moving away from a line manager line manage and being clear that these listening activities are not falling within that scope and remit, racialised people will automatically feel more comfortable communicating thoughts and feelings, ideas, and challenges, knowing that it is not in a hierarchical context that the space has been opened up. Here, it was highlighted by some that where they had positive experiences, Senior Leaders had very clearly and directly communicated to them an **open-door policy**, that if they ever wanted to approach and address anything, they could turn up, literally, and would **be believed**, making them feel more comfortable about raising an issue²².

“When people take actions on your opinions, it reinforces your sense of self and worth – it’s like a flower opening, this is me and I can contribute and work here. That safe environment is reinforced by my managers, telling me to say what I need to, reminding me I’m employed because of me, my professional and lived experience.”

Interview contributor

Beyond senior leadership therefore comes the **role of managers**. Taking a regular role in an employee's work life, everyone communicated how important it is for managers to go beyond just managing the work and the project, but **centralise a checking in process** with racialised staff, taking an approach to reviewing needs for additional support and reasonable adjustments – not based on disability but based on psychological safety of individuals. It was strongly felt that in positive experiences, managers had also set the tone for how welcomed and included an individual felt, and it was totally in their power to **reinforce feelings of safe environments, reminding staff of their worth** and creating a sense of comfort in the workplace that is so important for being able to thrive in your profession. Providing the right care for racialised staff's sense of safety provided most with incredible motivation for their work and accommodating and facilitating the bringing in of staff to spaces allowed for a deeper sense of proactive inclusion

²² This can be seen as a challenge with distance working set ups, where people will feel less able to reach out and literally walk into the office of a senior leader, as a proactive decision to make a phone call or set up a meeting must be made. Considerations are therefore needed on how this could be fostered – one suggestion being that Senior Leaders have surgery times during which staff could contact them and know they are free and available.

in the workplace, impacting team and collegiate relationships as well. It was clear that diverse management skills are key, being able to **prioritise the engagement with people on an interpersonal level**, and that with this, the work will flow.

With this listening, it was also made clear by nearly all the contributors and many survey respondents that having proactive **White Allies** in an organisation, especially in leadership or management positions, was key to creating a culture of inclusion. Until the broader culture changes, many explained that they felt most confident, supported, and listened to, when White colleagues would **leverage their privilege**, creating bridges for topics to be raised, offering direct support and help to challenge institutional racism. Beyond this, leaders especially are encouraged to implement Positive Action and proactively **mentor racialised staff**, demonstrating allyship to them in this relationship, democratising the workplace and working with racialised people as consultants on relevant areas. Some of the core elements understood in developing and demonstrating allyship include the following elements, all of which must be considered holistically, many of which overlap and involve other recommendations made in this report. Educating oneself and committing to the journey is crucial, and with this people need to understand who they are allying for. They must check in with people, actively listen more and better, do their own research, and go beyond the single story they have been fed. They must also be proactive, committing to the ally mindset, learn how to approach instances of oppression and educate people, reflect, and change habits. Allies need understand power, privilege, and fragility. Seek and accept criticism, work on their reactions to being challenged, take time for personal reflection and be able to name their privileges. They must be OK with being wrong, and move past guilt and mistakes, leaving their ego behind. And they must speak up but not over, while making way for others. Allies must remember it's not about them, to not centre themselves, to listen more and talk less and be aware of taking up space. They should be motivated for the right reasons, not be a performative ally. Allies must be an upstander in the workplace, and with this, recognise and change barriers to inclusive culture, push for structural change, target normalised behaviour, and model inclusive behaviour and language. (Usmani et al, 2020)

"Racism was only viewed as racism when verified by a White person."

Interview contributor

With this, one of ways described by contributors to create a space of listening that felt valuable to them as racialised people was to create proactive **'BAME' staff networks**. It was clear that here, importance was made to ensure that these were specifically for racialised people and stood apart from other equality strand networks – though importantly had a way of connecting to these.²³

Such networks contributors and survey respondents described as being invaluable to providing support for racialised staff, allowing them to know and feel that they are not alone in their organisation or with their experiences, combatting feelings of personal gaslighting and providing a sense of safety within the workplace. These networks **allowed space for staff to speak freely**, collectively opening conversations on the racialised experience while providing an opportunity for them to assert their individuality, recognising that different people within the network have very different experiences.

²³ As noted in the research by Pennant and Hannagan-Lewis (2021) – issues face for example women of colour, having to select which network to sit in, rather than being able to connect across the two, and choosing the gender based one due to fears that the race based one was seen as more confrontational and holding a higher risk of being seen as a troublemaker. Proactive collaboration between networks, but maintaining safe spaces, is therefore imperative in these developments.

Obtaining support from other racialised colleagues to be able to take issues forward was also noted as key and inaccessible without networks in place, but also was the opportunity to develop proactive relationships between racialised staff and HR as well as other White colleagues, especially those who maybe experience oppression due to different characteristics and occupy spaces on other diversity networks, creating spaces for sharing working cultures and norms of behaviour. Where possible also, having senior racialised representation on these networks allowed staff to feel like they had access to more role models, and that directly they felt that their motivations in work would be more clearly understood, taking away the racial lens through which their interactions and behaviours were analysed. In addition, providing **access to external support organisations** in work time, especially if there are not enough minoritized staff to elicit the need for diversity networks, and prioritising this, is extremely necessary for racialised people who are situated in organisations that are not racially diverse – the value of being able to make connections and share experiences and obtain support from people like you must not be undermined. This should also include access to free/subsidised **mental health support** or counselling which is appropriate for racialised staff and allows them to access racialised counsellors or therapists.

“The most pressing need in organisational culture is external support organisations and staff associations to provide support that understands the needs of BAME employees.”

Interview contributor

And of course, one of the key elements of listening is to **act**. And be accountable for these actions. We will explore some of the actions that can be taken going forward in this section and in the final recommendations, but one of the key areas of taking action that was raised by contributors and survey respondents was to communicate around issues and the action being taken. Recognising that change cannot happen overnight, a central element to creating a culture where people feel heard, safe, and included, is to create space for conversation about issues between staff, beyond the networks. It was clearly imperative, as we have seen with the place for White Allies, to create a sense of comfort for White people to engage proactively in topics of racial oppression in the workplace, especially when this oppression is demonstrated through culture and the behaviours stemming from that. This is a learning process and a practice, and facilitating **interactive communication** is key. Expanded on in the section below about training, with this, and being clear and **transparent** on where actions are in the pipeline, provides a substantial feeling for racialised people that their contributions are not being exploited or tokenised, and that the issue of racist culture, and its impact on them, is not being forgotten.

We must act, and centre processes to learn and embed changes

Building on the way in which leaders and organisations engage with racialised staff and develop an inclusive culture, many contributors also commented on the broader need for organisations and those who represent them to **show racialised people they care**. In practice, this was commented on as demonstrating value by giving staff responsibility, **celebrating** not only the culture of everyone in the office, for example placing equal emphasis on Eid celebrations as Christmas, but also the achievements of all, and demonstrating a commitment to change via accountability measures (which shall be expanded on in the continuation of this

section and the recommendations) – this demonstration of care for marginalised and racialised staffs wellbeing was see the biggest commitment needed to people feel psychologically safe.

“Where there is clear, unequivocal boundaries and procedures set that are followed by organisations, it is easier to have your emotional safety protected. Also, where there is nuance behind these policies and real understanding, they are more successful. Places that believe their staff and have proper procedures that are followed correctly are the ones with the most protected workforce.”

Survey respondent

Following on from a shift in culture as described above, the next pertinent area commented on by contributors was the need to embed this culture and way of behaving through **formalised policies**.²⁴ As details in the previous section however – these **policy changes and development MUST be led by racialised staff** – and if not available in your context, then bringing in consultants is key. It was clear from all our contributors as well as many survey respondents that this direct lead from racialised staff was central to ensuring that policies were being written through a diverse lens, that would really bring about systemic change. **Incorporating bespoke reviews** with people who come into your office space was also flagged as a missed trick – if you are going to ask new staff to read and understand your policies, ask them at the same time to comment on any perceived changes they think could strengthen your policy – as circumstances change with new people entering your organisation, your **dynamic policies** should also do the same, and when communicated out these will reinforce the continuation of an inclusive culture.

Some simple **examples of small policy changes** that were communicated during our research included Wellbeing Policies that incorporate the support details above of access to networks and mental health practitioners; not having dress codes for work, and actively encouraging people to wear what they want to express themselves; flexible working policies that incorporate religious working hours, demonstrating that life outside of work is valued as much as that inside work, and clear progression policies that highlight promotion based on skill not longevity, and how those skills will be proactively harnessed and developed in someone’s role.²⁵

“The policies need to be rewritten for more than just White people. The basis for everything is Whiteness - from what it means to be professional, to accents, to accessibility. Rewriting policy would allow diversity to be embedded into the system...”

Survey respondent

In addition to having racialised people lead policy development, one of the other key elements to consider in organisational policy is **Positive Action**. Capitalised to draw the attention it deserves, Positive Action is, as highlighted, a greatly underused element of the infamous

²⁴ Note, importantly, the cultural changes need primary focus – usually we see policies receiving a lot of attention, and emphasis is placed on putting things in writing and hoping that people will follow suit. This does not work. The culture change must come without worshipping the written form – formal policies are only to create a legacy and reference point for the way you wish current and future staff to behave and demonstrate the new inclusive culture of an organisation.

²⁵ We did not focus on providing a list of policy changes, as from our understanding of culture change, it was clear that policies do not change culture, and therefore we did not want to fall into the trap of providing examples of policy change as a list to check off, running the risk that this would be the focus of those reading this report. These are a few raised – but we call readers to not lose sight of the central message, that racialised staff must lead policy, and that change comes from outside this realm first.

Equality Act 2010. Allowing for direct and specific provision to be put in place for employees with specific protected characteristics²⁶ to enable their participation, representation or engagement with employment or services,²⁷ Positive Action is the key to not only developing equitable policy but ensuring that it can be implemented with justification. This demonstration of valuing diversity as well as understanding the needs that societally marginalised racialised people face would not allow for racialised staff to thrive and feel safe but would also show that inclusion is at the forefront of decision making and culture. As noted by one interview contributor – the Equality Act 2010 holds a lot of provision but also limitations – what should be **considered first are Human Rights**²⁸ – and Positive Action is one of the elements of the Equality Act that legally provides for human rights to be fulfilled where society limits their access from certain sectors and people. Positive Action should therefore be central to the development of policy – but not simply put – it must also be made very clear to the broader staffing body why positive Action is needed. This is to combat the backlash that was mentioned earlier, and to explain, within broader training programmes, that this provision is bound in UK law due to the recognition of the need to support the equity and, future equality of racialised and other marginalised people. It is essential to prevent possible discord between White and racialised employees.

“Take the time to train staff who are in the majority to understand systemic racism and remove the level of denial, to know they are the ones who need to put in effort to draw the best from the minority.”

Survey respondent

With this is the need for **broader training, induction and processes of learning and unlearning** for staff within organisations. Unsurprisingly, this continues to be commented on as an essential criterion to dealing with **racism, culturally, institutionally, and systemically** – and yet so many employers and organisations broadly speaking continue to fail in embedding quality provision (if any at all) for their staff. Again, it was highlighted that training needs to be informed by racialised people, and if possible, racialised staff in the organisation, to ensure that the context is applicable to the situations at hand. This learning needs to ensure that people not only understand the theory, but also the applied and lived experiences of **systems of oppression, anti-oppressive practice, racism (ideological, institutional, and interpersonal) and anti-racism, power, privilege, fragility and allyship**.

Also, highlighted by all, was the consideration that **microaggressions and the macro communication** they hold must be clearly defined, with examples to hand, and that, although not the only element of learning, **unconscious bias** must also be taught and tackled, developing a more nuanced understanding of racism and its impact (Atewologun, 2018). By only providing theory, people escape the recognition that this is something they also perpetuate and misunderstand the real impact these racist structures on real people. They then don't make

²⁶ The 9 protected characteristics under the Equality Act are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. Regarding the Act and Positive Action, these can be disaggregated and specified, for example applying to a specific ethnic group only, or even an intersectional identity.

²⁷ “What the Act says: Where an employer reasonably thinks that people who share a protected characteristic: a) experience a disadvantage connected to that characteristic; or b) have needs that are different from the needs of persons who do not share that characteristic; or c) have disproportionately low participation in an activity compared to others who do not share that protected characteristic the employer may take any action which is proportionate to meet the aims stated in the Act (the ‘stated aims’). The ‘stated aims’ are a) enabling or encouraging persons who share the protected characteristic to overcome or minimise that disadvantage (referred to in this chapter as ‘action to remedy disadvantage’); b) meeting those needs (‘action to meet needs’); or c) enabling or encouraging persons who share the protected characteristic to participate in that activity (‘action to encourage participation in activities’). (EHRC, 2010, pg 162)

²⁸ (OHCHR, 1965, 1966)

changes to their own behaviour, or culture. They must realise racism isn't just overt slurs/systemic issues. This clarity around microaggressions and bias also allows for racialised people to be able to take issues of complaint forward, with a basis on which to prove the occurrence, rather than being gaslit or diminished by those in power²⁹.

In addition, people need training to **understand culture**, how it differs and how it is developed and perpetuated, including **work-based culture**, ways of working, communicating, making decisions, addressing conflict and more. And of course, what was heavily commented on by contributors and survey respondents was the need for these processes of learning and unlearning to be ongoing – not a one-off tick box, but something that is engaged with regularly by all staff and made compulsory from the get-go. Done in a conscientious safe way, led by racialised people/organisations, these processes of engaged experiential learning are key to developing a staffing body where, in this case, the White majority can support minorities through their allyship and create a space where people feel psychologically safe. Where colleagues are willing to learn, this enables racialised staff to feel supported.

It's time to transform by curating and evaluating

Moving into the final section of this chapter, building on the shifts in leadership approaches, listening to racialised staff, making policy changes and encouraging learning and unlearning from broader staff, real **cultural transformation must be encouraged**. This means that the ways of behaving, doing things, communicating, must be broadened to encompass different styles and move away from tradition, usually colonial capitalist manners of approaching work and labour.

With all the above, the understanding is people's mindsets will change, but behaviour must be constructively changed. Like when raising a child, teaching them the culture of society, to eat with a knife and fork for example, we don't just tell them. We show them, and we work with them to learn over an embedded period. We are **constructive in the behaviour change**, praising change and development, being patient with setbacks, and remembering that it takes a month to learn a habit – and that is what needs to happen with any behaviour change. It is **not worth finger pointing** and telling people off – this only shows what they shouldn't do, rather than what they should. This has been a downfall for many policies processes and training around diversity – don't do this, don't say that – and what feeds the culture of being politically correct as detailed earlier. Concrete explanations and demonstrations need to be made about **why things are being done differently** and changes are being implemented– exemplifying the benefit not just to racialised staff, but to broader staff teams, individuals, and the organisation. This is where the focus shifts from being **actively anti-racist, not just 'not racist'**

Several contributors and survey respondents commented on the following as being central to eliciting culture and behaviour change regarding diversity: **exploring different ways of working**, approaching tasks, and incorporating them proactively, demonstrating to staff that aims can be achieved by different means – and that **making room for that difference** is OK. And with this don't forget that **the experts are at your door**. If you have racialised staff – consult with them – they are your consultants. **Democratise the workplace – allow room for creativity and initiative**. Allow people to bring their work culture into the office. One contributor notably commented that when they experienced working in international workforces, a common work

²⁹ In the meantime, it was clear that anonymous complains processes need to be instated to provide safety to racialised staff.

culture was less defined – they didn't feel the need to fit in, because there was nothing to fit in to – everyone was different, as was their ways of doing things – and with this, **space for curiosity was created**, with people taking more time to get to know each other and find out the best way to work together, rather than dogmatically leaning into the 'way things are done around here.' With this it was made clear therefore that one thing that organisations should not do is try to homogenise the workforce. Even with diversity initiatives, we seem to consider ways in which we can align everyone's values and get everyone to follow policies and ways of working to a T – this is not conducive to diversity and different work culture.

And this is where the final clear element of ways of working was communicated – that we must start to **centre relationship focussed ways of working** over task focussed. Where **collaborative team working** is encouraged over siloed roles, where room is created to discuss projects, move forward together, and develop a sense of team accomplishment, a sense of encouragement, having support from colleagues and teammates is brought about. This inevitably, in the experiences commented on by contributors and survey respondents, allows for better working and achievement of goals and tasks in the end anyway. In addition, it brought people together, created a deeper sense of collegiality and even changed social activities for some when it was recognised that there are many other things beyond going for food or drinks that can be enjoyed collectively. How wholesome that sounds. How achievable it is.

And finally, however, it is only achievable when everything is applied holistically, and when the **effect of changes is monitored and evaluated**. As detailed earlier, one of the predominant sentiments shared was that diversity and other efforts are a tick box in many circumstances. Our contributors and survey respondents held a definite call for actions to be consistent, maintained over time and given proper resources. **Accountability measures** for racialised staff was extremely important, so they could see and monitor the changes themselves, utilising this as a force for their own emotional safety and wellbeing. And **transparency** – regular updates and follow ups – it is difficult to express just how important it is to people's sense of belonging, value, that it is clearly shown that changes are being made, that they are being heard, that their experiences and expertise is important. Racialised people know change doesn't come overnight. We are not asking for that. So be honest, and tell us what is happening, and we will support those actions and be patient for the change if we know the effort is being put in.

"The cultural construction of the office is a kind of collective construction and promotion of ideologies. On the surface, the realm of thought is a spiritual factor, but if we understand it from the point of view that spirit reacts to the material, we will find that the words and deeds of each member in the office not only shows their individual character, but also reflect the realm of thought of office culture."

Survey respondent

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Learn, Act, Transform

We can see from this as well as our other reports that racism is institutional. It is systemic. It is societal. And it is also embedded in our culture. Within this sits the organisations that employ us. To believe that organisations are immune to racism in the ideological, institutional, and interpersonal manners is naïve. Research has and continues to evidence how racialised people across the world, especially in the West/Global North/White majority countries such as Wales, face racism at all these levels in nearly every environment of their life's experiences. Culture is pervasive – it is invisible – it is a spider's web that perpetuates, demonstrates, upholds the values that underly it and mark the way people behave and interact towards each other. And societal culture impacts organisational culture. We as humans do not turn one part of ourselves completely off when we enter a different context. We may hide it, manage it – but eventually it comes out in micro (or macro) aggressions, in the ways we insidiously encounter others, as well as interact with power and hierarchy.

We have seen in this piece of research how hard it is to define culture, to describe the ways in which it manifests in our office-based employment contexts. We have recognised some of the elements that make up this attempt to paint a picture, to spin a web, that is connected and entangled, that cannot be separated and defined – from policies being designed as a one size fits all, to ways of working being based on norms and standards of behaviour, and working relationships based on power dynamics and hierarchies. We have understood how many of the current approaches to tackling discrimination and bias that ignore these elements lead to political correctness rather than real unlearning, and how our approach to culture is to perpetuate a hegemonic system that does not allow for real diversity, beyond the surface.³⁰

First-hand accounts combined with broader anecdotes have proven that here in Wales most office-based work environments are not safe for racialised people. Physically safe maybe, but otherwise racialised people are drowning, and their day to day lived experience is one of trauma and re trauma, faced with a smile, because the context does not allow for anything else. The negative practical and tangible impacts, combined with that on racialised people's sense of belonging and psychological safety feels insurmountable for many. We feel this insidious culture, we feel the impact on us, we feel the air, the stickiness of the web – but no one believes us.

However, not everything is lost. We continue to strive for change. We continue to hope – because without hope we have nothing. We recognise the possibility in humanity to bring about culture change. Through learning, listening, acting, demonstrating, embedding, cultivating, and evaluating, we know it is possible to transform the experience of racialised people in White-collar work environments in Wales, for the betterment not only of us but of all those around us.

³⁰ We do not mean with this to ignore or undermine the wealth of research and important recommendations already made in relation to the labour market and racism. These are also imperative, and we wish with the research and recommendations we lay out to add to what is already being called for, to address a more holistic change in the workplace. Nor do we proclaim that by implementing these recommendations only that all necessary change be made and racism in the workplace be eradicated. We call on all reads to act on these recommendations in tandem with those from other prominent papers referenced and to come to elicit complete change, that will take at least 10 years to experience in it's fullest.

Below we lay out a set of recommendations that we hope employers and policy makers can consider in their entirety.³¹

This must be a whole organisational approach, with sufficient resource and capacity at its core. Just like whole school approaches. Piecemeal picks won't work. It is a combination of the entire picture that will bring about a sense of safety. If we consider how Health and Safety has gained traction in employment law and rights, developing the Health and Safety Executive. What if we considered mental health as part of health? These changes would need to be incorporated. What if we took the Equality Act as seriously as Health and Safety Law? Let's be pioneers in this, in the way that Wales has led the way in so many other areas of life. And with all these recommendations, although the focus of our research was racialised people, our contributors and respondents included disabled racialised people, LGBTQIA+ racialised people, women, and non-binary racialised people. These changes can be applied to support the safety and inclusion of all marginalised people. And this is imperative. You must be inclusive of all – not just racialised people – otherwise it is a paradox within which you are living. If some people are excluded, you cannot have an inclusive, safe culture.

Building on the recommendations set out in our Manifesto, From Rhetoric to Reality³², which focus on increasing racialised people's participation in the workforce and adding more specificity to the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, we recommend that employers implement the following actions to enable current and new racialised staff to feel safe and included at their place of work.

We have broken down the recommendations under who we feel should be responsible to lead on implementation, detailing how the work will be done and why it is important - the aim of the recommendation. It may be that some organisation's structure themselves differently, and so we ask readers again to consider with flexibility the implementation of recommendations, without losing sight of the aim therein.

³¹ We also call on reads to consider these recommendations in a pragmatic manner. We know that not all workplaces and organisations are the same, in size, location, type of work and make up. Where we recommend the importance of racialised people leading the work, we do not mean that we recommend they do the work. Leaders lead. They show the way, they bring cause to move forward, they be a reason and a motive for change. They are in charge, they organise and direct, set a process in motion. They have experience in a particular way of life. They bring initiative in action, provide an example for others to follow, provide information that helps to resolve problems. (Oxford Languages, 2022) If you do not have racialised people in your organisation, do not have many, or do not have any that wish to take this work up, then bring in and equitably pay racialised consultants who have taken on this mantle to lead you. Do not rely on sparsely funded charities to do the work for you for free. There is a myriad of consultants available – if you can't find any, you're not looking hard enough. Do not tokenise your staff – racialised people are diverse in comparison to each other and in themselves – one cannot speak for all, and one can also speak for many other things, not just antiracism. Use this to combat all systems of oppression.

³² From Rhetoric to Reality: Our Manifesto for an Antiracist Wales, Race Alliance Wales, 2020 <https://racealliance.wales/research/>

Learn

WHO is going to do it	WHAT & HOW will it be done	WHY is it necessary (the aim)
Leaders	listen to racialised staff by employing an open-door policy, setting a standard of listening and believing racialised staff	to support their psychological safety, ability to bring challenge and maintain confidence in their work
HR and EDI leads	incorporate regular anti-oppression and antiracism (un)-learning opportunities for all staff through inductions and training. These learning programs must be led by racialised people and incorporate the following without limitation: the theory and applied experiences of systems of oppression, anti-oppressive practice, racism (ideological, institutional, and interpersonal) and anti-racism, power, privilege, fragility and allyship, unconscious bias, definitions, and examples of microaggressions and macro communication, the Equality Act and Positive Action	To counteract ongoing instances of microaggressions and bias
Racially privileged staff members	develop their allyship to racialised staff, through committing to the allyship journey, educating themselves, understanding and leveraging their power and privilege, and being an upstander, speaking up not over and making room for racialised staff, prioritising the comfort of those being harmed	to proactively include racialised staff in work and social activities, but also to counter gaslighting by supporting challenges and developing a more sympathetic environment
Project and line managers	ensure that adequate resource time and capacity is built into their programs of work to enable all staff to engage in learning opportunities as well as ensuring induction processes involve developing employees understanding of work-based culture in a theoretical sense as well as applied sense in the organisation	to mitigate a re-creation of cultural hegemony and unwritten rules

“Often people who have felt unsafe in groups before, because of their identity, are most keenly aware of violations of group culture. However, the burden should not be placed on them to hold others to account; accountability needs to be collectively held and enacted... as a way of offering support to each other and to decision-makers, and for increasing transparency for those impacted by decisions.”

(Millar, 2021)

Act

WHO is going to do it	WHAT & HOW will it be done	WHY is it necessary (the aim)
Leaders	provide mentoring opportunities to racialised staff	to encourage participative democratic leadership and non-hierarchical engagement and leave staff feeling more motivated, gratified, and positive towards their work environment
Managers	centralise interpersonal emotional support and check-ins over task focussed micromanagement and scrutiny, providing appropriate support	that develops a sense of value, psychological safety and understanding for racialised employees
HR	recognise Unions and provide access to Racialised Diversity Networks and support services (internal or external) for their racialised staff to access during work time	to enable access if needed to safe spaces for them to speak freely; obtain interpersonal support and garner emotional energy to combat the sense of being an outsider-within, amongst other needs that racialised staff may have
HR and EDI leads	proactively celebrate everyone's culture and achievements equally	demonstrating inclusion in practice, actively counteracting a sense of cultural hegemony
HR and EDI leads	changes must be actively monitored and evaluated by looping back around to listening and engaging with racialised staff in appropriate manners	to ensure that the desired effect is taking place
HR and EDI leads	ensure the work towards developing and maintaining a truly inclusive culture is transparent – actions and goals are broken down and communicated clearly to staff, with accountability measures in place	for staff to appreciate the efforts being made

"A psychologically safe environment provides a baseline level of security that is needed for people to be able to bring their whole selves... A good culture helps creativity thrive and supports people to work at their best – to try new ideas, take risks, make mistakes, and bounce back."

(Millar, 2021)

Transform

WHO is going to do it	WHAT & HOW will it be done	WHY is it necessary (the aim)
HR	create space for racialised people to co-create and develop policy and procedures, ensuring these are dynamic and have regular bespoke reviews	To foster inclusive and accessible formalised written policies, to formalise changes to ensure their maintenance.
HR	centralise Positive Action provision in all organisational policy and procedures, centring the access to rights for racialised staff	making space for the broader staffing body and institution to move from a space of being 'not racist' to a space of being actively antiracist, that encourages racialised staff to stay and progress within an organisation
Managers	explore and make room for different, informal ways of working, by incorporating and making room for different approaches to tasks, as a process	to democratise the workplace, encourage inclusion and move away from denoting particular ways of working
Managers	encourage relationship focussed work culture, centring space for curiosity and getting to know each other as well as centring collaborative team working	to support active inclusion, allowing people to bring their full selves to work
Racially privileged staff members	engage in constructive behaviour change, moving towards deeper internal reflections as to ethically, emotionally, and practically why things are being done differently	to encourage deep set cultural transformation, again supporting a shift from being 'not-racist' to actively antiracist

"Building a relational culture which prioritises sustainability, care, and connection to create an environment where people can come to work as their authentic selves, in the knowledge that they will be treated with respect and dignity – allows people to be vulnerable and share when they've made mistakes or need help... If you can make your culture strong at the level of the team, it is much more likely to be strong at the level of the organisation."

(Millar, 2021)

APPENDIX 1

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³³ Note that some contributors asked to remain confidential, so this list is not exhaustive.

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