

What are the barriers to social mobility and key drivers?

Consistent with the findings from Dr. Sam Friedman's research that underpinned *The Class Ceiling: Why it pays to be privileged*, the following key drivers were addressed:

1. **The 'Bank of Mum and Dad'** - where parental wealth acts as a form of insulation or safety-net. This level of support allows individuals from more privileged backgrounds to take risks and pursue uncertain opportunities (e.g., unpaid internships), which may have a greater medium to long term effect on an individual's future prospects. Those from less privileged backgrounds are unable to take such risks and so may fall behind.
2. **Informal culture of sponsorship** - those in senior positions are more likely to take junior staff under their wing to fast track their careers where they have shared lifestyles, interests, etc. This is often connected to social background, even if not recognised as such by the individuals involved.
3. **Misrecognition of merit** - following on from point (2) above, dominant behavioural codes (such as tastes, lifestyle, how individuals present themselves, etc.) govern who is perceived to fit within a business. This results in assumptions being wrongly made about who is talented and relies on subjective perspectives about who has the right 'polish' to go far within the profession.

Has the conversation matured and is there momentum?

"In 2021, you are still 60% more likely to get a professional job if you come from a privileged rather than working class background."

Although the statistics highlight that there is still a vast amount of progress to be made, the level of awareness and dialogue is increasing, particularly within professional service firms (such as law and accountancy) which hopefully will spread to other industries. However, although the conversation is maturing, there is not a huge change off the back of that yet as organisations need to continue to take tangible steps to challenge entrenched viewpoints (including misplaced perceptions around how meritocratic an organisation is) and break down the barriers to social mobility.

Why is intersectionality so important?

Intersectionality needs to be front and centre. Organisations cannot take a one dimensional approach - individuals need to feel that they can bring their whole selves to work. There is clear evidence that class when placed alongside gender, ethnicity and other characteristics can vastly impact lived experience and result in individuals facing a 'double disadvantage'. It's therefore important to hone in on intersections and understand the distinct experiences. If organisations do not address this, it can be counter-productive and further exclude individuals.

Positive steps organisations can take include ensuring connectivity and collaboration between different inclusion and diversity groups, ensuring visibility of different stakeholders who demonstrate intersectional characteristics, and ensuring data is used in a consistent manner to allow challenges to be faced together. It is clear that structures built to promote inclusion should not be allowed to result in differing forms of exclusion (including through damaging battles for profile or resources within an organisation).

How can organisations break down behavioural codes which inhibit inclusive cultures?

Behavioural codes are unconnected to talent and are arbitrary, but due to reasons of history and class culture in this country, they continue to be misrecognised as legitimate measures. Organisations need to pull those apart by breaking them down. One important way organisations can do this is through those from privileged backgrounds recognising the behavioural codes and creating a culture which allows individuals to call it out.

It's a common trend that technical areas tend to be more open to and receive candidates from those from lower socio-economic backgrounds due to the criteria being transparent. Whereas, in positions where the required knowledge is ambiguous, privilege and the knowledge of behavioural codes it provides, acts as a route through the ambiguity - this is a common theme in higher paid professions.

Why should organisations be collecting data in this space?

Data allows for robust discussions about social mobility, rather than simply reflecting on the issue without a grounded reference point, and can be used to benchmark progress. Data can also be used throughout an individual's career trajectory to monitor trends - allowing organisations to identify barriers to progression and points at which socially mobile candidates may fall away.

Parental occupation when an individual is 14 years old is perceived as one of the key factors of their final destination in life. However, this one data point is clearly not determinative, and individuals' identities need to be explored in-depth, alongside the quantitative data, through interviews, surveys and focus group meetings - categorising social class is complex and individuals have nuanced experiences. It's also important to give people the chance to self-identify as objective measures don't always capture everything that is going on, and this also creates a further insightful set of data for organisations.

Should class pay gaps be published and social mobility targets set?

Publishing pay gaps and setting social mobility targets is a fairly new area in this space and so it's yet to be seen what impact this may have. Pay gaps are powerful, however, as it allows organisations to see differentials after adjusting for meritocratic factors. Though targets can be fairly blunt instruments, they also symbolise maturity in an organisation's inclusion and diversity efforts, and it's encouraging that organisations have moved on from talking about the issue to being willing to be held to account.

Should unpaid internships be banned?

Although in isolated situations this opportunity may support those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, it's more likely to help advantage those from connected backgrounds and who have the financial insulation to take on an unpaid position. Instead, organisations should open up recruitment funnels as broadly as they can and ensure there is a fair process which accommodates individuals from different demographics, rather than using a tool which is criticised for advantaging particular groups in society.

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