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SKANSKA

Upfront magazine
Diversity and
inclusion issue

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SEARCHING FOR DIVERSITY

THE CHANGING FACE OF CONSTRUCTION

Breathing new life
into the diversity
and inclusion debate

All in the mind
The danger of
unconscious
discrimination

Inside this issue

Best-selling author
René Carayol MBE

Entrepreneur
Josephine Fairley

Business leader
Neil Bentley

Architect
Siobhan McMahon

Recruitment expert
Kate Headley

Consultant
Chris Moon MBE

How to solve the construction
industry talent pool crisis



Role models

Robert K. Merton
born 1910, died 2003

The phrase 'role model' was coined by the eminent sociologist Robert K. Merton, who is regarded as an important scientific figure of the twentieth century. His role model theory has been highly influential.

A role model is someone who is looked up to, and their behaviour is copied, by an individual or group. The role model is part of a reference group that others compare themselves with. This is because they occupy a social role which an individual or group aspires to.

The concept of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' was also developed by Merton.



Ade Adepitan

Adepitan was born in Nigeria in 1973. He contracted polio when he was 15 months old. It left him unable to use his left leg and only partially able to use his right leg.

He represented Great Britain twice at the Paralympic Games, at Sydney in 2000 and then again at Athens in 2004 when he won a medal. He has also won medals at the European championships and the Paralympic World Cup.

He is now a successful TV personality and role model for many.



Richard Saw
Editor

Welcome

The themes of this edition of *Upfront* are diversity and inclusion. It follows on from a Skanska event last year, 'The changing face of construction', looking at how the industry could be more representative of society.

In this edition, leading experts and thinkers examine how the industry can become more attractive to a wider range of people.

Featured in issue #6:16

- 04 Seizing the moment: Skanska's Mike Putnam says we must be more diverse
- 06 **Mind the gap:** Talent-spotting with recruitment expert Kate Headley



- 12 **Cover story: Fur coat madam?** Best-selling author René Carayol calls for new thinking



- 16 The hidden self within: Dan Robertson discusses unconscious bias
- 26 It's a woman's world: Architect Siobhan McMahon on the sector
- 30 **Glad to be gay: Let's be open about sexuality, says Neil Bentley**
- 38 Demachoification: Josephine Fairley discusses women and construction
- 44 A unique personal journey: Tales of endurance from Chris Moon

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“We need to recognise that the employment world is changing and be bolder.”

Mike Putnam

Seizing the moment

The construction industry has a unique chance to become more diverse, says Skanska UK’s President and CEO **Mike Putnam**

I often ask myself what the construction industry can do to be more representative of society as a whole.

I genuinely believe that, right now, it has a once-in-a-generation chance to become more diverse and inclusive because of the skills gap and growth in the sector. We can’t afford to let that chance go. We need to recognise that the employment world is changing and be bolder.

At Skanska, we’re taking on that challenge. In our work to be more diverse and inclusive, we’ve joined The 5% Club, a group which aims to increase the number of young people in training schemes at work. We’ve doubled the number of young people we take on and we’re considering dropping

requests for qualifications when we take on apprentices to focus on candidates’ strengths instead.

I also think there is more the industry can do to attract a greater number of women and people from minority groups. Statistics show that women make up only around 2 per cent of the on-site workforce (women make up about 12 per cent of the total UK blue collar workforce) but there’s no reason why women shouldn’t build a successful career on-site. In Skanska, around 28 per cent of our employees are women in the UK, and we want that figure to rise to at least 30 per cent by 2020, on and off-site.

Skanska also actively promotes an inclusive culture, which I think is as important as increasing diversity. We need to make people feel welcome

and be part of the team, whatever their background and recognise the potential contribution of those from non-traditional backgrounds. For example, we work with a young offenders programme to help people who have taken a wrong turn get a new start.

By the end of 2017, each of our projects will have its own diversity and inclusion plan. It will show how they’re engaging with schools or recruiting in an inclusive way. In essence, we’re asking every individual in Skanska to help push forward cultural change.

Role models have a big part to play, of course, exemplars who can inspire people to join the sector. At Skanska, we recognise the importance of role models and mentors. In our mixed mentor training scheme we pair up experienced male managers to mentor young women and established female managers to coach young men. It helps to break down silos and encourage wider thinking. All parties have something to gain.

Our customers also recognise the benefits of our approach: the scheme was praised by Highways England in a diversity and inclusion audit.

Increased diversity will bring a lot to the construction industry. New thinking and different ideas on how to do things are just a few of the advantages. The world is changing, and quickly. We need to be ready to change just as fast. ■

Mind the gap

Opinion: Consultant **Kate Headley** sets the construction industry a number of challenges to beat the skills shortage

I think things are changing in the construction industry. It's different to how it was a decade ago. For example, you can see there are more senior women within the industry. There is also now a huge amount of engagement around diversity and inclusion.

One of the things that struck me, when I went to Skanska's event 'The changing face of construction', was that it was completely oversubscribed, with people from all parts of the industry coming along. That wouldn't have happened five years ago. It shows how things have improved.

However, the industry feels quite isolated compared with other sectors, in terms of diversity and inclusion. It has survived and evolved over time, but the world around it has changed. This has affected other industries too, such as banking. But increasingly, particularly over the last two

years, the construction industry is suffering from a talent shortage. That means the drive for change is much stronger.

There has to be an impetus for change. Historically, for the sector, that hasn't been there – it has managed to get by. It hasn't changed as much as other industries.

Now, we're back to a candidate-driven market. There has been a loss of people because of the recession. There is an ageing population and changing demographic. You can't just go out and say you'll have somebody who's done this job before from a competitor, because the people with the right skills are just not there. However, somebody outside the industry might be just the ticket.

Improving recruitment practices is important in promoting diversity and inclusion. If we don't give hiring managers the tools of the trade to recruit objectively and inclusively, then they will take



Kate Headley
Diversity and inclusion consultant, with a track record of working with the government and big businesses, Headley specialises in recruitment and is a fully qualified human resources professional.

She began her career at Marks & Spencer. She then worked for Manchester City Council, before moving to a recruitment company. Headley has formed a network of senior diversity and inclusion experts in the UK to promote and publicise their work and enable them to share expertise.

a risk-averse approach. They will recruit someone who looks and feels like them and has the same interests. They will make what feels like a comfortable, safe decision. That is not necessarily assessing the skills of the person.

I think the construction industry needs to change the selection process. Many of the job descriptions you see aren't fit for purpose. They are a long wish list. Often, they are focused on what the employee should put into the job – do they have drive, determination and so on – not what the role should deliver. We need to strip back job descriptions, so they are about outputs, not inputs, and then you're in a better place from a diversity and inclusion perspective.

I'll give you an illustration. I went to the Paralympic World Cup in Manchester and watched the 100m. What struck me was that whoever gets over the line first wins, so long as they didn't break the rules. But everybody in that race did it differently because they had various disabilities. The focus was to win, and that's how we have to write job descriptions. If we dictate in a very detailed way what somebody has to do on a day-to-day basis we're not going to change anything.

I think the industry needs to move to skills-based assessments or work trials, especially for operatives. There is also the opportunity to link up with pre-employment skills companies. This brings in talented people at an operational level who just haven't had the chance before.

One of the issues for many companies is biased recruitment. People looking for a job are still asked about their hobbies and interests. You have hiring managers say to you: "This gives me a feel for the individual and who I am getting."

The opportunity for personal bias to creep in is huge. These managers need education, because they are not doing this deliberately.

Who's doing it well?

There are lots of examples of good practice in the construction, highways and infrastructure sectors. National Grid has done some amazing work, linking up with special educational needs schools and bringing in young people and training them. It has helped people with autism to do office-based roles, such as data processing or marketing, which they wouldn't have had the aspiration to do originally.

British Gas has successfully brought in women to do maintenance and repairs, traditionally a male-dominated area, so it's very relevant. They advertise in women's magazines and have images of women in hard hats climbing up telegraph posts and it's really successful. There is an opportunity for construction companies to give a really modern view of what a site is like.

However, it's about more than just recruitment campaigns. It's about being authentic. There are some examples of targeted campaigns, aimed at women, in the transport industry. When people started the job, they realised there weren't separate changing rooms. The clothes didn't fit women.

You need to have an environment that respects people with different needs. It's the same if you have returning mothers or somebody with a disability, or particular religious belief.

Leading from the front

What's needed is a cultural shift. It's vital that change is led from the top: good leadership is essential. If you don't have that, then the approach tends to be bottom up, with small pockets of people doing amazing stuff, usually initiative driven.



“What’s needed is a cultural shift. It’s vital that change is led from the top: good leadership is essential.”

Kate Headley

“Role models, as distinct from leaders, are also very important.”

Kate Headley

But they don't tend to resonate across the whole of the organisation. You need real leadership commitment to get cultural change in an organisation.

Leadership has to be about more than just talking about diversity and inclusion. Actions speak louder than words. It's about getting the fundamentals right, such as employee resource and networking groups, so you can learn about the make-up of your workforce and how it feels.

My biggest tip to leaders would be: stop guessing, don't assume you know what the needs of your organisation and different people are. You need to have mechanisms in place so you can find out where you are now, what is getting in the way of being more diverse and inclusive and what you can do about it.

It may be surprising, but a lot of firms don't know that much about the demographic composition of their workforce. They carry out monitoring, but they have very

high non-disclosure rates, perhaps as high as 80 per cent or more. If you don't have basic information, then you can't start to be more diverse and inclusive. You have to build up trust to enable people to share information. You need to give people the chance to share with you the impact of their life and work circumstances.

Tips for change

We worked with a technology company, which had a high non-disclosure rate. Through a process of communication and consultation, we changed that. It can't be a tick box exercise. You can't just tell people that you're setting up a new network group for people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, so please sign on the dotted line.

People will ask: “What's in it for me?” There has to be some positive action by the organisation first. Then, people will start to share their experiences.

Many people are also afraid that if they disclose they have a



A personal story of disability

I have vasculitis, which is caused by an inflammation of the blood vessels. I've lost the sight in one eye, and I could lose my vision in the other one.

I think the biggest thing is the loss of independence, it's infuriating. I can't drive anymore. I can't see people's faces, so that's tricky in a social situation. I have a support worker, and lots of adjustments on my computer.

I think there needs to be more education. For example, I still find I am asked to fill in a form when I go to appointments. Each time I have to say I can't read it.

When you think you're being accommodating, you might not be as much as you think. For example, early starts are a problem for me, because of the amount of drugs I have to take with food, before I leave home.

disability, they will not get the job, so they don't. That means that organisations are hiring people with disabilities, but are not aware of it. I've seen examples where people are being performance managed, but actually they have a disability. A reasonable adjustment could solve those issues.

It's no good if a CEO promotes diversity and inclusion throughout the year, but then stands up on stage and says to the sales director: “Well done. I might not agree with your methods, but you get results.”

If you reward bad behaviour, people will feel you're disingenuous. It sends out the signal that high-ranking people do not have to be inclusive.

Role models, as distinct from leaders, are also very important.

They need to be authentic and not tokenistic.

E.ON has done a lot of work with role models. It has people on its careers website, talking about their experiences. This could be an adjustment or some support they received that enabled them to flourish and succeed.

I like it because it's so real. It's not about someone on the board saying: “I'm a black woman, and I've done really well.” It's about people at the operational level, where a modification in their work environment has been life-changing. These are people you can relate to.

I think there are industries that have made significant progress on diversity and inclusion. The financial services industry is one.

You see companies such as Barclays and HSBC winning award after award for their work. I think PwC remains a great place to work, with very strong diversity leadership.

With financial services, the regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority, is strong on diversity, and is focused on this area. Companies have to report what they are doing. It helps firms aspire to do things differently.

The construction industry has a golden opportunity, right now, to become very much more diverse and inclusive, building on the existing foundations. It just needs to take it. ■

Find out more

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Fur coat madam?

Best-selling author **René Carayol** says new thinking is needed to kick-start greater diversity

"T

here needs to be more leadership on diversity and inclusion," says best-selling business author René Carayol.

"Over the last 20 years, I've seen more strategies on diversity and inclusion than you can imagine. But over the last 10 years, I haven't seen any new thinking. The issue is cultural. To get the transformation we need, culture is much more important than strategy. Not many people will remember what you said you would do, but everyone will remember how you made them feel."

"It's about being bold, and taking action," says Carayol. "We can

say we're going to do anything. Irrelevant. It's what we actually do that's important."

Carayol, a visiting professor at Cass Business School, specialises in leadership, culture and transformation, drawing on his experience on the boards of major international organisations, like Marks & Spencer and Pepsi. He has worked closely with some of the world's greatest leaders, including ex-US President Bill Clinton and former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Carayol draws on an example from his own life. He was hosting an event in Barcelona. He was at the

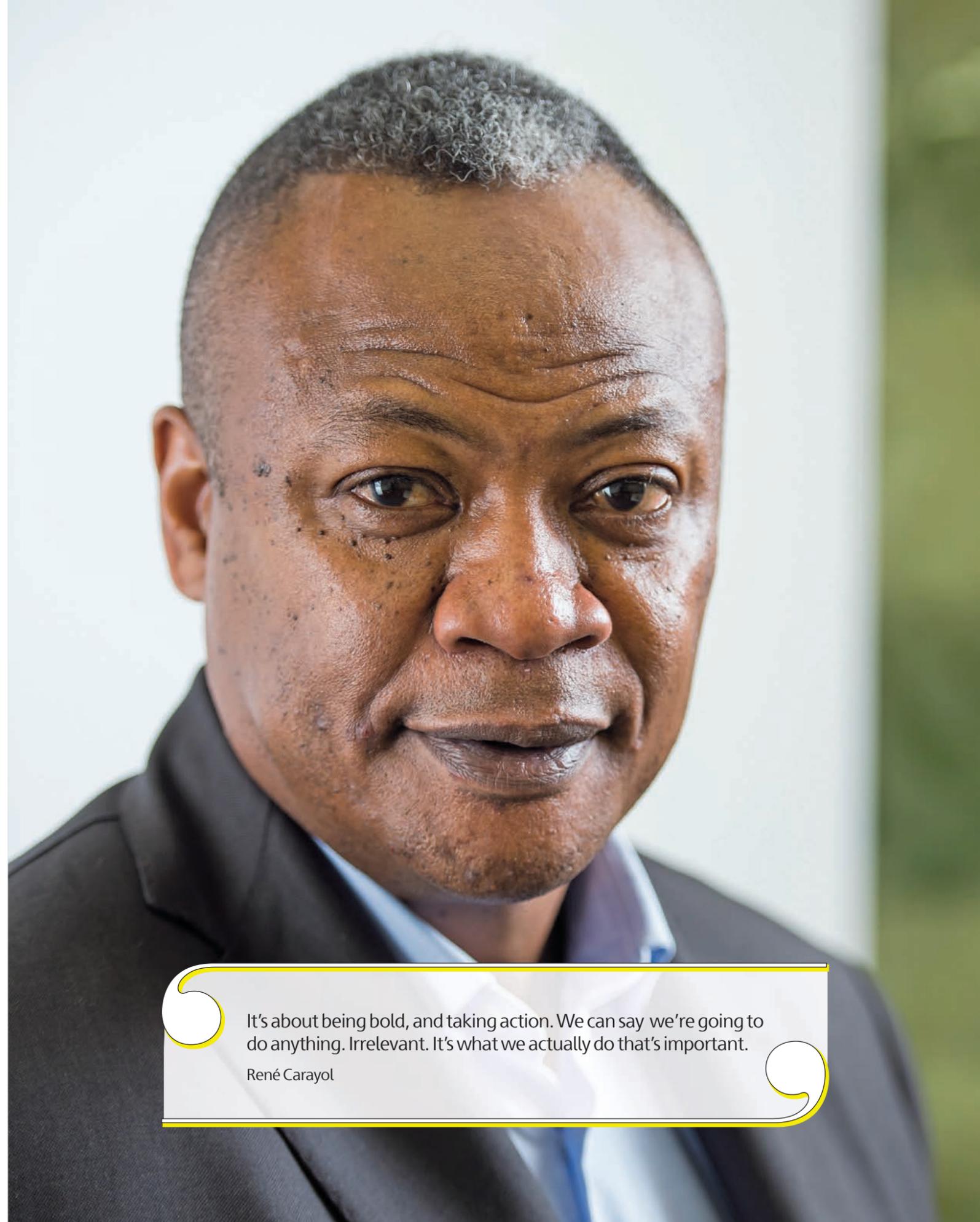
venue, when an immaculately dressed woman got out of a Rolls Royce. She asked him where the event was taking place and he replied: "downstairs in the ballroom". She thanked him and then put her fur coat on his arm and went downstairs. Carayol was lost for words.

The event was about to start, so he went on stage with the fur coat and asked the woman to come and get it and share her story.

"When I was on-stage, giving her the coat," continues Carayol, "I asked myself the question: 'Was it racism, xenophobia, unconscious bias, implicit bias or just incorrect assumptions?' Either way, it was a great learning opportunity for her and the audience.

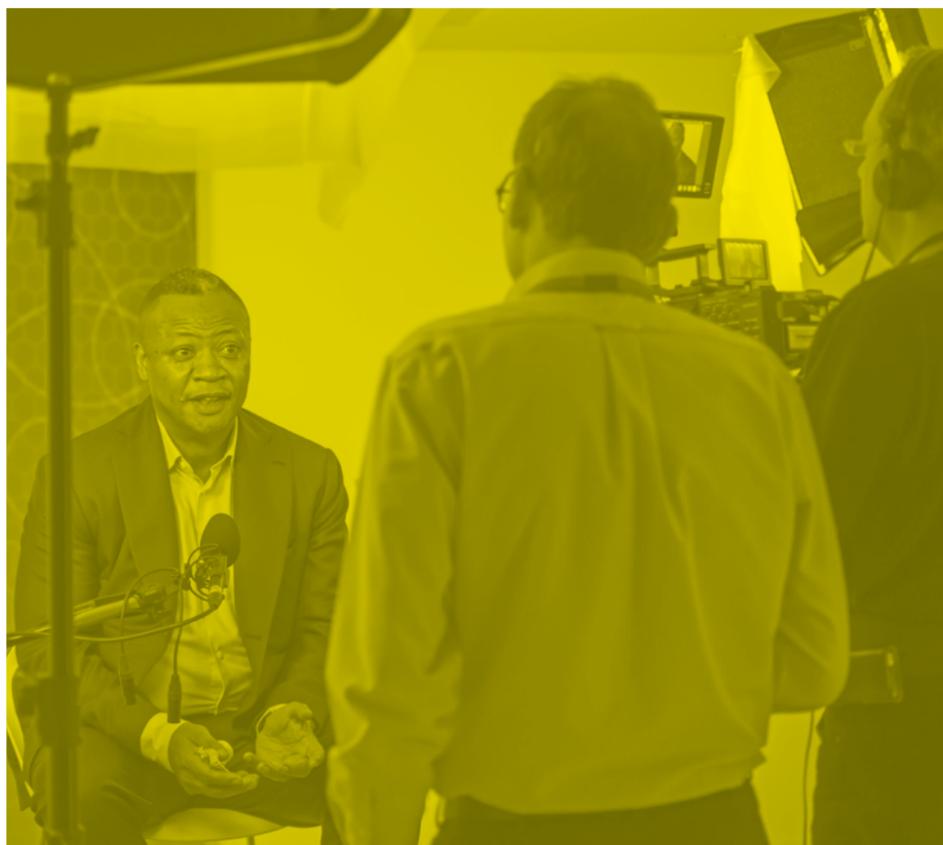
"Since then, we've become friends and the first thing we talk about when we meet is the coat. If we want to move the diversity and inclusion agenda forward, we need to be free to talk about things which are uncomfortable."

About six years ago, Carayol became the first black presenter of a BBC business programme when he hosted an episode of The Money Programme. He said it was a proud moment but cautioned: "I'm still waiting for the second black person to present a BBC



It's about being bold, and taking action. We can say we're going to do anything. Irrelevant. It's what we actually do that's important.

René Carayol



business programme. The first one is great, but what happens next? If the answer is nothing, then we've failed."

Diversity means different things in Britain and America, says Carayol. "In Europe, it means gender. But in the United States, it's about race. I recently went to Washington to do some work and visited Baltimore. When I was there, I felt black. It's really fascinating. I can walk around London and never, ever feel black."

Baltimore was the scene of riots and protests early in 2015, following the death of a 25-year-old black man, Freddie Gray, who died after being taken into custody by the police. Six officers have been charged. It is the latest in a series of recent incidents

where black people have died in controversial circumstances in the United States, bringing to the fore the issue of racism.

Curious, Carayol wanted to learn more about black America: "The largest killer of black women in America is HIV or AIDS. And this is in the wealthiest country on earth. In 1965, 25 per cent of black babies were born into single parent families – today it's 71 per cent. A third of black men under 30 have been to prison. This is a tough old place. It gave me a perspective on the challenges they face as a society. We have nothing like that in the UK. It made me ask: 'what do I stand for?'"

Having a mentor is vitally important, says Carayol: "When I joined the board at Pepsi,

I'd never been in a boardroom and I'd never been trained for it. I was counselled that I needed to find myself a mentor. I was lucky enough to bump into Donald who had been on the board of Tesco since 1964. For three fabulous years I met him once a month. He was amazing.

"It was only after he died that I realised just how different he was to me. He was Jewish, gay and didn't have children. I didn't know that. Here was this man, who didn't look like me, worship like me, love like me. But I realised it didn't matter. What mattered is that he cared, and he did it unconditionally."

Carayol notes that organisations are changing to ensure success: "Around 87 per cent feel they have a talent shortage. There was a time when they could choose the talent. However, the next generation is brave enough to ask what your values are and see if they match their own. They are prepared to take their skills somewhere else when they don't."



In 2013, Carayol went on a search for the ultimate in diversity and inclusion, which took him to India and a charity called Jaipur Foot. The organisation makes artificial limbs and has made 1.6 million, free of charge, since its inception. It's open 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week. Carayol says: "The emergency infrastructure in India is not good. Usually, the best the ambulance can do, when it arrives, is on-the-spot amputation.

"Jaipur Foot is open to everyone. It's incredible. When a patient arrives, within 24 hours they'll leave with an artificial limb. Everything is low-tech. But there is amazing collaboration. The founder and his top team take no money."

Carayol sums up with some key points: "Talk about diversity and inclusion openly. Recognise that you have to adapt and evolve and that yesterday's strategy is today's obsolescence. Finally, start looking in unorthodox places for new talent. The talent is there: you just can't see it." ■

The hidden self within

How would you feel if you found out you were unconsciously being racist or homophobic? Consultant **Dan Robertson** looks at how to overcome unconscious bias

Social psychologists often refer to our unconscious biases as our unintentional people preferences.

The key point here is that, unlike conscious forms of prejudice, all of us carry around with us a set of 'hidden' biases that unintentionally have an impact on our behaviour and our decision-making processes.

Our unconscious biases are formed in three key ways. The first is the attitudes you developed through your social and family environments as you are growing up (conversations you have at home, the kind of school you went to). The second is through personal experiences with people who are similar and people who are different. The third way in which biases develop is through exposure to differences through the media.

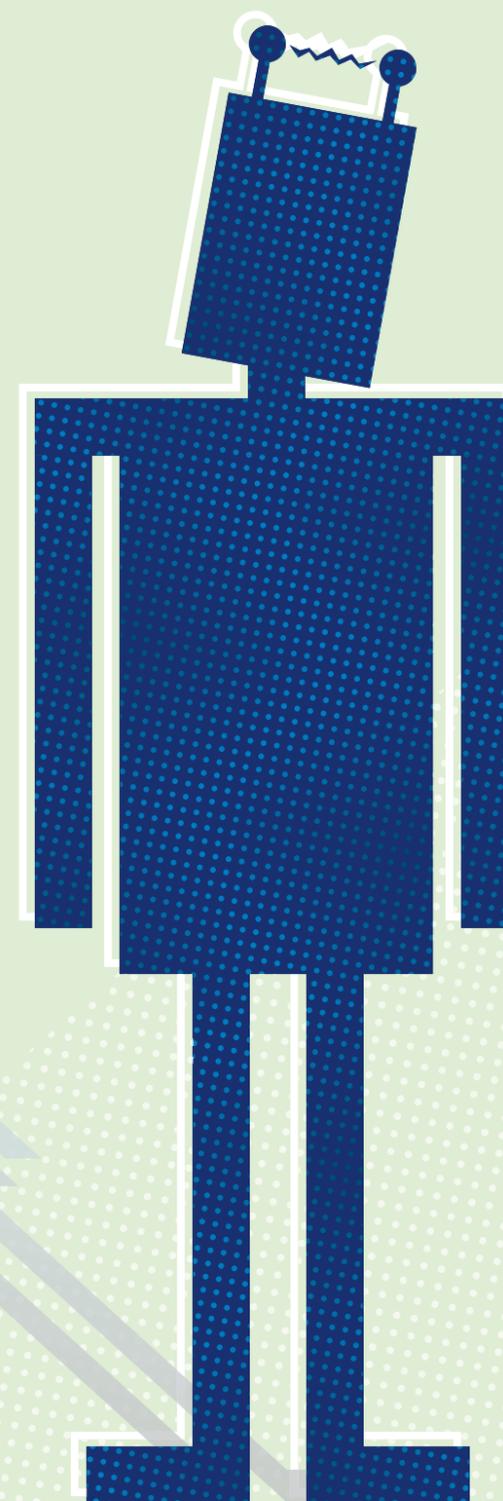
We are exposed to vast amounts of information every day. To help us to understand why we have biases, we must first consider how the human brain processes information. It has two types of thinking processes. The first is the conscious brain, which is designed

Dan Robertson
Diversity and Inclusion Director
Employers Network for Equality
and Inclusion (enei)



Dan Robertson is the enei's Diversity and Inclusion Director and his role is to push forward its work-streams, which include unconscious bias and inclusive leadership. He also manages the organisation's training and consultancy arm.

The enei is a network for public and private sector employers. It has about 180 members, including a range of global corporations such as Lloyds, BT and Sainsbury's. Its aim is to provide strategic advice on all areas of diversity and inclusion, rather than focusing on a particular strand, such as race or gender.



UNCONSCIOUS

CONSCIOUS

Scientists agree that your conscious brain is tiny when compared with your unconscious mind.

In the background it processes a huge amount of information. The unconscious mind has a significant impact on what we think and how we feel.

Its impact on our conscious decision making processes is often not recognised.



to do deliberative or reflective thinking. The psychologist Daniel Kahneman refers to this as 'system one' or slow thinking.

We also have our unconscious. This is referred to as 'system two' or fast thinking. It is estimated that this has around 200,000 times the processing capacity of your conscious brain. It's like comparing a massive NASA-like supercomputer to a regular computer that most office workers use.

Seeing is believing?

It's important to understand these differences, as most of the information we process is stored and processed in the unconscious. During information processing, rapid categorisation classifies people based on whether they're male or female, black or white, tall or short and a huge range of other social categories. This can be quite useful. For example, if we meet someone for the first time how they are dressed can help us determine how we should behave and interact with them. The negative side is when we start to make random assumptions about people based on this kind of information.

The human brain is also a vast pattern-matching machine. The social and work patterns we are exposed to daily become wired



within our unconscious brains. For example, I spend lots of time visiting large corporate offices in London and around the globe.

When I go into them, the security guard tends to be older, non-white and male. The receptionist tends to be younger and female. People at the top of an organisation tend to be male and white. The more I am exposed to these basic patterns the more they begin to affect my assumptions of the types of people who may be suitable for certain job roles. Other examples include women as nursery teachers and men as labourers.

Affinity bias

In 2009, the Department of Work and Pensions carried out a study into racial bias, using CVs. They sent out 2,961 applications to 987 advertised job vacancies. The positions were in seven British cities and covered nine different occupations.

For each job vacancy they sent three CVs, with essentially identical information. All showed the candidates had been born and educated in the UK. The only real difference was the person's name. A positive result was a call for an interview.

The survey showed that people with a white, western sounding name had to send out an average of nine CVs before getting an interview. However, people with traditional African or Asian sounding names had to send out an average of 16. That's a significant difference, just based on a person's name.

Other research also supports the conclusion that, globally, businesses are essentially

Unconscious biases can act like a pair of glasses, altering how we see the world.

When we realise that, we can take off the glasses and see things the way they really are.

hiring or rejecting partly based on name. Affinity or 'like me' bias is a big factor in organisational decision-making. People develop an unconscious affinity with others on points of commonality, such as your name, the university you attended, your accent, your work style or hobbies and interests.

Affinity biases impact talent processes in organisational decision-making. It affects recruitment, with managers more likely to hire people who look similar or with similar sounding names to them. Work allocation is affected, as managers are more likely to assign key client projects to individuals within their teams who they have an unconscious

The human being has two types of thinking: deliberate and reflective and fast and automatic.

affinity with. Performance is the other key area impacted. Managers are more likely to spend time informally discussing contributions to the team and will focus on development and future work plans. Where there is little affinity managers are more likely to question past performance. The conversation will be less friendly and even hostile at times.

Generally, it's easy for people to recognise that there could be unconscious biases. The tricky bit is getting them to recognise they actually have them. We all have a bias blind-spot, thus we need to work hard to overcome them. The good news is that human beings are not robots. We can learn to control our unconscious biases.

How to... tackle unconscious bias



- 1 If you are in a conference call or in a meeting, ensure you invite everyone to contribute to the discussion. Listen out for who is dominating the conversation.
- 2 Watch out for who attends team social events and look for individuals or groups of people who simply don't attend or make excuses. Ask yourself why this is happening.
- 3 Take a few risks by allocating a challenging piece of work to someone whose potential you haven't previously recognised.
- 4 Have a coffee with someone who is very different from you. For example, they could be a different age or gender or have a different background. Ask for their ideas or view on a subject without giving yours first. It builds affinity.
- 5 Attend an employee network and talk to someone who is different from you – it helps to reduce stereotyping.

At the organisational level we would recommend a number of things. The first is to create opportunities for team reflection, as this helps to challenge existing biases. We suggest introducing 'blind' decision-making. In recruitment, remove information such as names and universities from application processes.

Find some good role models in the business, for example – those working flexible hours. Use their stories to challenge traditional viewpoints. Talk to stakeholders and challenge recruitment agencies and head-hunters when they say: "the (diverse) talent is just not out there."

Listen to your heart?

We recommend developing sponsorship programmes and hold individuals to account on their inclusion targets. This helps to increase vigilance.

Implementing these actions begins to break down existing biases whilst creating new thinking processes, employee behaviour patterns and inclusive decision-making.

If organisations can align diversity and inclusion, they start to get business rewards. And, by definition, if you're becoming more inclusive, you're starting to control bias. And with that, you get real progress. ■

Should we listen to our initial judgement, or is it formed by the unconscious mind?



The Y factor

Education experts **Gill Clipson** and **Geoffrey Fowler** unlock the secrets of attracting more young people into careers in the construction industry

The construction industry needs to target young children, not just teenagers, to promote itself as an attractive career option, according to Gill Clipson, Deputy Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges. The association represents more than 320 further education and sixth form colleges in the UK.

“We did some research, which found that children as young as seven are starting to think about what they might want to do,” comments Clipson. “They need to have wide exposure to role models and different industries at quite a young age. Otherwise, they only get a narrow understanding of what their parents do, rather than understanding everything that is available.”

The government, working with the construction industry, has set up a range of initiatives to encourage young people to study science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects. These include the Your Life campaign, which was launched by the chancellor George Osborne in 2014 and is supported by Skanska.

“I think that there are many reasons why young people don’t want to study science, technology and maths subjects,” said Clipson. “I think the issue is deep-seated and, to some extent, cultural. If we take



Gill Clipson, Deputy Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges



maths, we seem to applaud not doing well at it rather than treating it as a great thing to be studying. A lot of work is taking place in the education system to address this issue, but it takes time.”

The joint government and industry strategy Construction 2025 says the sector will be transformed as a result of the rise of the digital economy. It says this will have profound implications, with technology, such as building information modelling, changing the make-up of the entire industry.

“The world is absolutely changing,” adds Clipson. “We need to recognise that some of the role models – in terms of careers – which young people see, such as teachers and their parents, don’t reflect today’s reality.”

Clipson says the education system needs to focus on more than just traditional skills: “We need to equip young people with employability skills: how to be resilient, a team player and



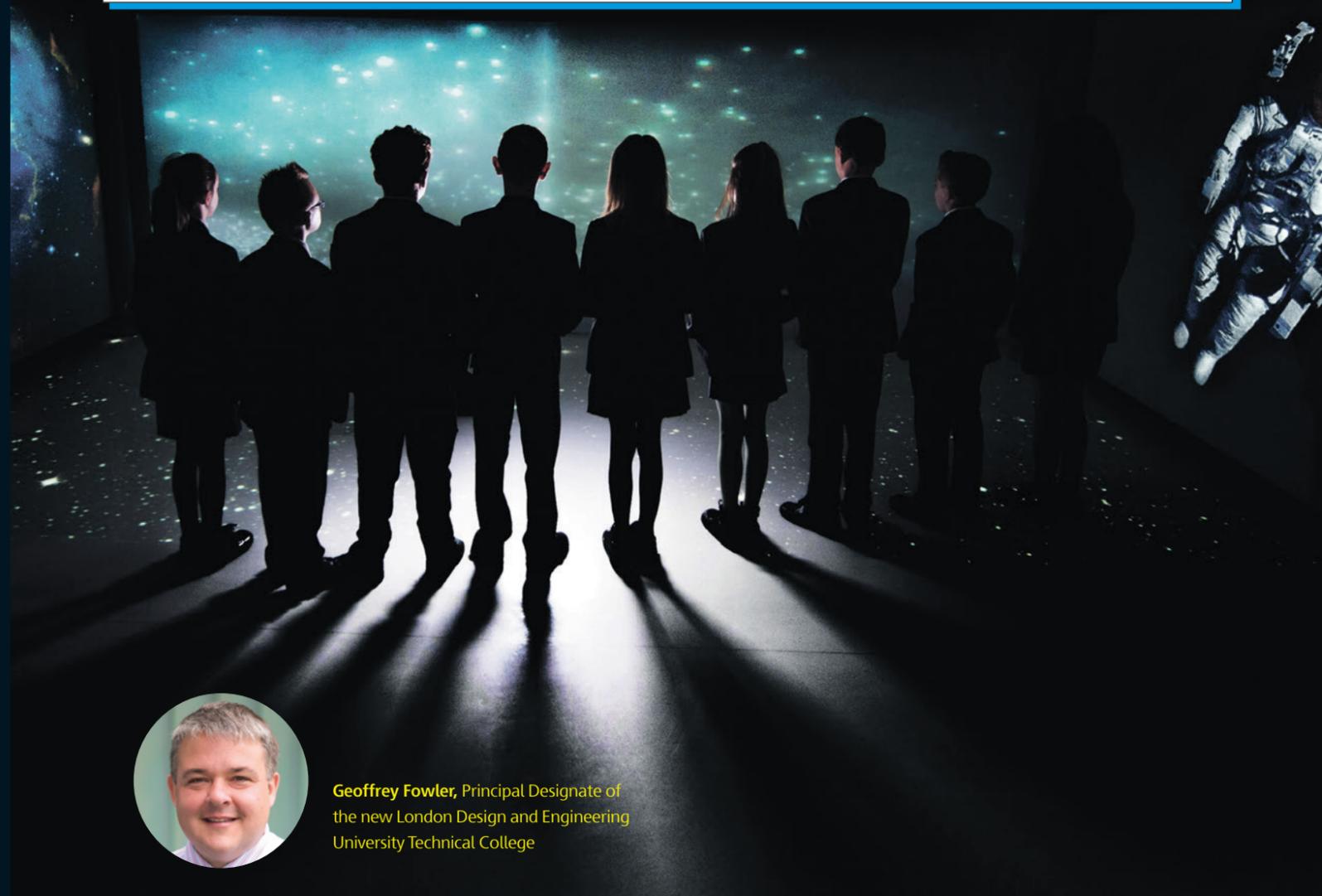
understand your strengths and weaknesses. These ‘softer skills’ are really important. We also need to recognise that young people need to be adaptable, because in today’s fast moving world, the job you do now might not be the one you do in three to five years’ time.”

Skanska has been working with the Association of Colleges, to engage with young people and demonstrate that construction offers a great career. “I think it’s vital that employers work with the education sector,” observes Clipson. “They also need to

have an open dialogue with young people, which will help break down myths about particular sectors: such as the construction industry.”

Clipson says that skills competitions, where young people are given a challenge and learn through the project, have an important role to play: “Employers can get involved in these by coaching young people. They give young people a chance to have a go at something and understand what an industry is all about.”

The education system is changing, developing new ways for young



Geoffrey Fowler, Principal Designate of the new London Design and Engineering University Technical College

people to learn a range of skills. Geoffrey Fowler is Principal Designate of the new London Design and Engineering University Technical College, set to open in September 2016. Skanska is supporting and working with the organisation. The college will be open to pupils aged between 14 and 19.

“For the students, it’s all about hands-on learning through doing,” comments Fowler. “They will complete different projects, which link in with the curriculum, helping pupils to be more engaged. However, students will still get

their GCSEs, A levels or BTECs.”

Each University Technical College will have strong industry links, both on a day-to-day basis and also in terms of governance.

“The school will have a business-like ethos,” adds Fowler: “The uniform is a business suit and pupils will use people’s first names, including teachers, just like the real world. The hours will be nine to five.

“We’re going to have industry standard specialist equipment. For instance, we’ll be investing

heavily in building information modelling (BIM).

“We’ve been inspired by Skanska’s approach to BIM. Our students will be able to design things in 3D, and then use virtual reality goggles to experience what they’ve designed.”

Skanska’s experience is that young people are enthusiastic about the construction industry when they find out about it first-hand. They start to recognise the amazing opportunities that the sector has to offer. By harnessing and capitalising on that enthusiasm we can bring a whole new generation of people into the sector. ■

IT'S A WOMAN'S WORLD

Siobhan McMahon, chair of the National Association of Women in Construction, says it's a fantastic industry to be in

Forget all the myths you've heard about construction. It is a great industry for women to be in, offering unrivalled scope for career progression. And, just as importantly, it's enjoyable and fulfilling. That's the view of Siobhan McMahon, chair of the UK and Ireland branch of the National Association of Women in Construction. One thing that strikes you is her sheer undiluted enthusiasm for the industry: she has it by the bucket load.

You can instantly see why McMahon is such a great role

model – her passionate approach is infectious. She has worked as an architect for 20 years, cutting her teeth at a local authority in Northern Ireland, before working on large-scale developments in architectural practices in Malaysia and Ireland. She then joined a contractor in Dublin, working on multi-million-pound developments, before moving to England, where she has now set up her own firm Emerald Architects.

“It's been great fun,” explains McMahon as she talks about her career. “I went into the industry knowing I was in a minority. I've made the most of being a woman in the industry. You can either enjoy it or carry a chip on your shoulder. I love being an architect and really enjoy the collaborative aspect: working with people in different disciplines and trades.”

The National Association of Women in Construction was originally established in Texas in



1955, before becoming a global organisation. McMahon became chair of the UK and Ireland branch in 2014, following in the footsteps of Katy Dowding, one of Skanska's managing directors. The networking group encourages women to join and be part of the construction industry, providing support and helping to increase understanding about the sector.

As we talk, it's obvious that McMahon is a real people person: "I needed to find a new avenue for networking. It seemed to tick all the boxes. You get a chance to mix with people at all levels throughout the industry – without talking about golf or football!"

McMahon's amazingly energetic attitude about the importance of industry awards and role models nearly bowls you over:

"The first ceremony I judged was the Women in Construction awards in Manchester. It was humbling to see all those talented people there who were all up for awards. It was inspirational." McMahon has judged the awards for three years in a row, she has also judged the Builder and Engineer awards.

"It's so important that these awards take place, because they showcase the industry in a true, positive light. You see people at all levels, from apprentices to people nominated for lifetime achievement awards. They show how people have carved out their own careers. That's the beauty of the industry: you start off by doing one thing and 20 years later you can be doing something completely different, but still within the sector."

"Role models are vital," emphasises McMahon. "We still have young people asking if there is hassle on site or whether it is hard being in a male industry. When you've got real-life people talking about their own positive personal experiences, they can see it's okay. Success stories will encourage the next generation to join the industry."

But McMahon told us there are some challenges that need to be tackled. She wants schools to be better informed about the industry: "I was in a meeting with some teachers. I gave a list of around 30 jobs and asked 'how many of these are in

construction?' The response was 'around 10 to 15', but actually all the jobs were within the industry.

"The association is launching the 'Ask a...' campaign in which we intend to prepare an A to Z of different construction careers. We are calling on everyone at all levels and disciplines to submit their personal profiles on our website to enable us to demonstrate the true diversity of real people in the industry.

"There are so many new kinds of job roles being created because of technical advances and the introduction of building information

modelling (BIM) which is transforming the industry. We are trying to produce a free online resource for schools and colleges, where the next generation can see real people and their stories. This means that young people can see what we actually do – not get a false idea from a textbook."

The promotion of science, technology, engineering and maths subjects in the education system is welcomed by McMahon, but she says more could be done: "The championing of these subjects has brought great insight into engineering and manufacturing, but has taken the focus away from construction, which is seen as a poor cousin. But the sector is just as big. If it could have the same

level of exposure and backing from the government, it would make a big difference to tackling the skills shortage this industry will face in the coming years."

We asked McMahon about the role of parents – could they do more? "The first question they often ask is: 'how much do you get paid?' Of course the salary is important, but it's not just about that – it's about encouraging the next generation to venture into an industry where you will have a fantastic career, with a huge range of choices, which could take you round the world."

One thing is clear: McMahon has loved every second of being in the industry, although she acknowledges that, just like any other profession, there are ups and downs. She is an inspiring example of what women can achieve. ■



Construction offers everyone unparalleled opportunities to create eye-catching landmarks such as these bridges over the River Tyne

Glad to be gay

Neil Bentley looks at how companies can stop losing out because they don't encourage people to be open about their sexuality



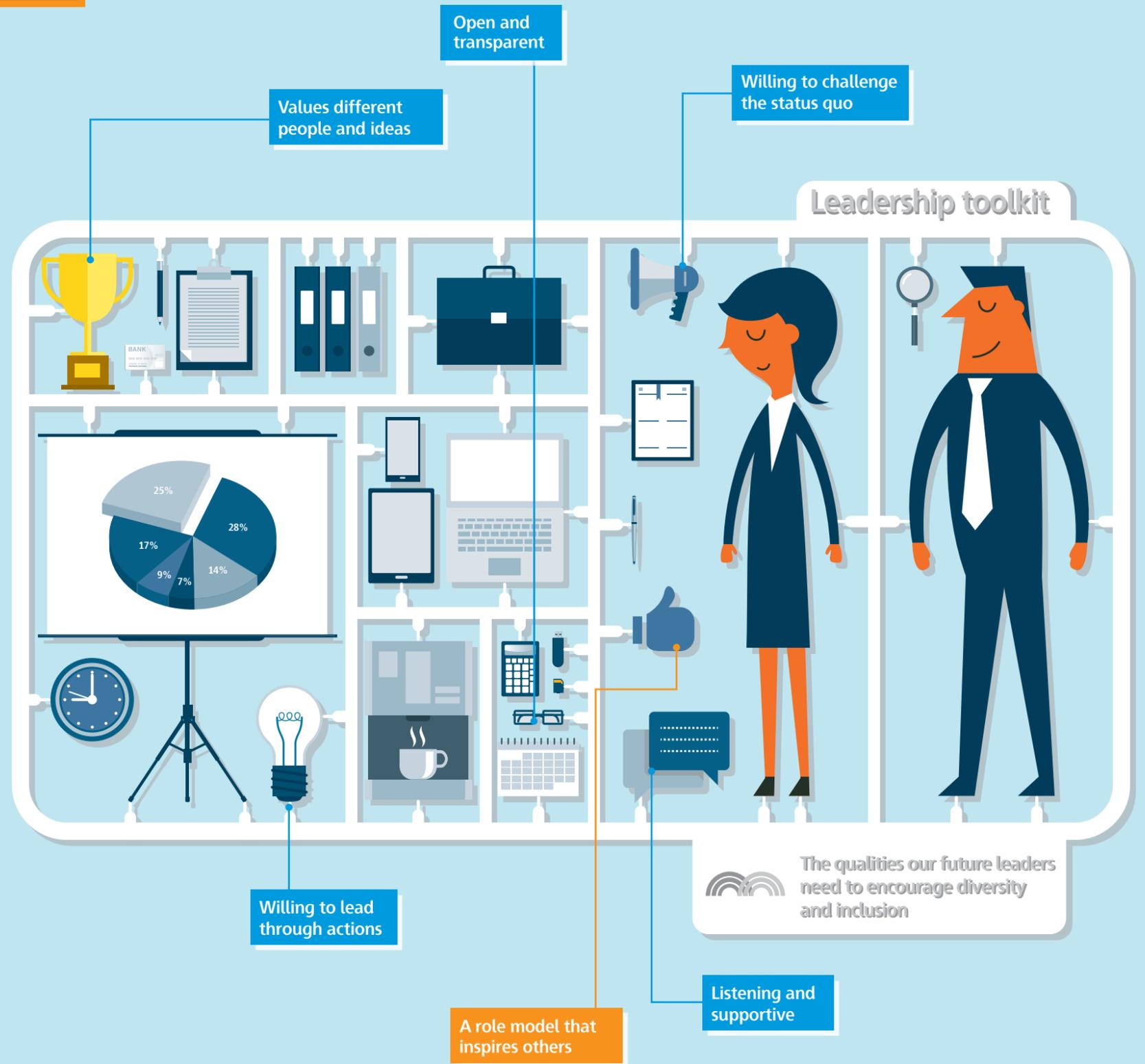
We caught up with Neil Bentley, one of the guest speakers at our diversity and inclusion event 'The changing face of construction', and asked him to expand on the issues he raised. We met at OUTstanding – the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT+) networking organisation – which Bentley has been heavily involved in.

"The issue of sexuality has been overlooked in the debate about diversity and inclusion," Bentley told *Upfront*. He was named as one of the world's 100 most influential LGBT+ people in the 2012 World Pride Power List. He's been closely involved with gay rights charity Stonewall. He is also a former Deputy Director General and Chief Operating Officer of the Confederation of British Industry.

We asked Bentley why sexuality was not at the top of the debate:

"There has been a big focus on gender, with a government and media agenda around getting more women into senior positions. I think there does need to be a lot of work to get more women into senior boardroom positions. It's a good thing that companies are focusing on this. But it has meant that other aspects of diversity, such as sexual orientation, disabilities and race haven't had the same type of focus."

Bentley cites research which shows that 62 per cent of graduates who are out and are comfortable with their sexual orientation at university don't discuss it when they start work. "People still aren't comfortable in coming out about their sexuality at work. That's why organisations like OUTstanding exist. There's a lot of angst about not being accepted together with the detrimental impact of being in a workplace where you can't be yourself."



It has been acknowledged time and time again that role models can have an enormously positive influence. Bentley is in no doubt about the importance of the issue: “Each year OUTstanding publishes a list for the *Financial Times* of the top 100 people who are out at work, which includes everything from chief executives to finance directors. It shows you can be gay and successful in business. It’s a really important message to the next generation of leaders, and others, who are thinking: ‘should I come out at work?’”

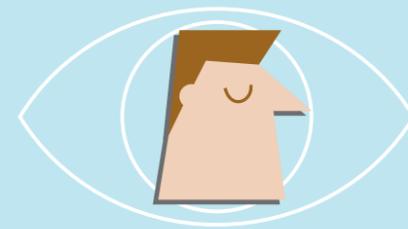
There are business benefits to an environment where people can be comfortable and open about their sexuality, according to Bentley, because their productivity rises by 30 per cent.

We then turned to the issue of how to bring about change and Bentley gave his views on how firms can create an environment where people can discuss these issues openly: “Senior people are a real catalyst for change. When someone stands up and says: ‘this is who I am and I’m supported by everyone else on the executive team – people in positions of power and influence’, it sends out such a positive signal. But the absence of this creates the reverse, and that can be quite corrosive for people’s confidence and ability to do the job properly.”

Shockingly, Bentley told *Upfront* that homophobia is not dead, but is alive and well: “People still experience it inside and outside the workplace. You still get hate crime taking place. There is still a lot of work to be done to change people’s attitudes. A lot is about education. I think we’ve come a long way, but we need to build on that and do more work with different communities.”

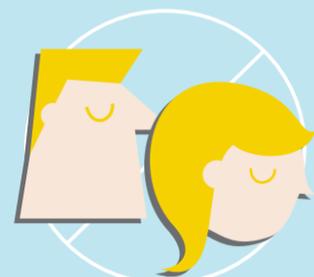
Stonewall’s 2013 report, *Gay in Britain*, contained the results of a survey of 2,092 lesbian, gay and bisexual adults from across England, Wales and Scotland. One in five people questioned said they have experienced verbal bullying at work because of their sexual orientation in the last five years. One in eight would not feel confident reporting homophobic bullying in their workplace. And just over a quarter were not open about their sexual orientation at work.

However, Bentley was keen to emphasise to us that, with the right support, things can be made



43%

of gay men have experienced homophobia at work



25%

say they are not open to colleagues about their sexual orientation



62%

generation Y LGBT graduates at university go back in the closet when they start their first job



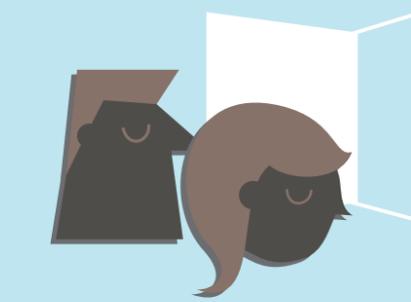
41%

employees do not feel comfortable coming out at work



30%

productivity rise in an environment where people can be comfortable and open about their sexuality



70%

of the people who haven't come out at work are more likely to leave within three years, if they can't be themselves

easier for gay people: “Coming out does not have to be terrifying. It’s just something some young people go through and some don’t. I think the big challenge now is the transgender issue. It’s becoming more of an issue, as transgender people are coming out about their experiences.”

“Lots of companies are already dealing with this. Credit Suisse has done lots of work to help transgender people feel comfortable and get the best out of them. It’s also about giving people the chance to learn about what it means to be transgender.”

António Simões, Chief Executive of HSBC European banking operations, is a great example of a person who says that coming out has helped their career. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Simões said being gay had helped him to be more authentic and develop greater empathy and emotional intelligence.

He told the newspaper that it was a key factor in his rise to become head of the bank. That’s a view that Bentley was keen to back up: “It’s because he’s adding value, he’s got a different perspective. The fact that he’s visible as a role model is also really important.”

The tycoon Richard Branson is also a good role model, adds Bentley, but in a different way. Branson has a track record of consistently supporting LGBT rights throughout the world.

Branson has been critical of Russia’s attitude and laws towards gay people and called for a liberalisation of the society. In 2013, he urged tourists to boycott Uganda because of the country’s new legislation, which discriminated against gay people.

We discussed with Bentley the importance of straight allies: “It can’t be underestimated. In a minority, you need people in the majority to speak up for you. Mentoring is also important because it builds confidence, develops skills and inspires fresh thinking. It also enables senior leaders to give back to, and develop, their talent pipeline. That’s why it’s an integral part of the OUTstanding members programme.”

The discussion ended on a high note. Bentley told us society is more permissive than it was when he came out in the eighties. He is confident that, if we all work together, a better society is achievable. ■

Sources (clockwise from top left): ‘Gay in the workplace’ survey by Gaydar, Centre for talent innovation, 2013, Neil Bentley, Human right campaign and Stonewall 2013

Vive la différence

Skanska's **Pia Höök** and **Paul Heather** highlight why diversity and inclusion are at the top of the agenda

“Wherever you go, the sector tends to have been dominated by white men: it’s a general trend.”

Pia Höök



Skanska is committed to being a global leader in diversity and inclusion.

“Diversity and inclusion are vitally important to Skanska. We’re a people company. It’s about making sure that we are an attractive employer and business partner,” says Pia Höök, Skanska’s Global Diversity Manager, based in Stockholm in Sweden. “We want the people who work for us to come from the biggest talent pool possible. An inclusive workplace also promotes creativity and innovation.”

The global perspective

“Being a multi-national company is a great strength when it comes to improving diversity and inclusion,” says Höök. “Diversity is about differences between people. Some of these differences are related to areas of historic inequalities in society such as gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Some are purely to do with the individual, related to everything that makes us unique.

“Inclusion is about how all of us are expected to treat people different to ourselves. In an inclusive culture we treat each other with respect, openness, and care. It is a learning culture that allows everyone to fully contribute.”

Höök adds there are similarities in the construction industry in different countries: “Wherever you go, it tends to have been dominated by white men: it’s a general trend. While there are always local variations to the challenges we face – for example, Poland has a very homogeneous society – there are lots of common themes.



Pia Höök says being a multi-national company strengthens diversity and inclusion

“One of the challenges is that the industry is very decentralised. Change is never easy, but it’s much easier to do if you have a centralised organisation. There is a lot that the sector could learn from other industries and companies such as IBM, IKEA, Sodexo and EY (Ernst and Young).

“We are seeing that more and more people want to work in a diverse environment, with people who are different from themselves.

For instance, in some traditionally male-dominated workplaces, we are seeing that younger men want to work in mixed environments, with men and women.”

Skanska has set out a global diversity and inclusion vision. Each of its operations, including Skanska UK, has carried out a detailed analysis of the local and regional challenges and produced an action plan to improve diversity and inclusion. Each business has

“Globally, 52 per cent of the population is female and 48 per cent is male. I think all industries should reflect this, so that they are seen as fair and inclusive.”

Paul Heather

appointed an advocate – someone at a senior strategic level – to push forward the agenda.

“I’ve seen some great initiatives throughout the company. Skanska Sweden and Skanska Poland have done a lot of work around recruitment and how to appeal to a wider group of people.

“In Poland, Skanska is the most popular employer among all women engineers. Skanska USA has successfully developed and launched ‘inclusive leadership conversations’ to increase managers’ awareness and commitment. This format is now spreading to other parts of the firm, for instance Skanska Finland.”

Höök has praise for Skanska UK: “The President and CEO, Mike Putnam, and his senior team, very strongly support the diversity and inclusion agenda. You need that management commitment in order to be successful. It’s about senior managers sending out a strong message that they walk the talk.”

“Over the last ten years, I think the

construction industry has changed for the better,” comments Höök. “But, we still have a long way to go. Change takes time: it’s worth it at the end of the day.”

The UK view

“I think we’ll get to a point where the construction workforce is split equally between men and women,” says Skanska UK’s diversity and inclusion advocate, Paul Heather. He is the managing director of the company’s London commercial property construction arm.

Gender is a key focus area for Heather: “My middle daughter plays football and I see first-hand how difficult it is for her to get on in a male-orientated environment. There is a perception that, if you’re a girl, you can’t play football. Some people have the view that if you’re female you can’t work on site in the construction industry. I absolutely disagree with this and I feel it’s really important to help change attitudes like this.

“Globally, 52 per cent of the population is female and 48 per

cent is male. I think all industries should reflect this, so that they are seen as fair and inclusive.”

Heather sees an important part of his role is keeping diversity and inclusion very high on the agenda: “We need to be a thought leader for the future success of the business. It’s important to encourage different ways of thinking. As an industry we need to get better at this.”

Skanska UK is doing a lot to promote diversity and inclusion. This includes ‘what do you think?’ dilemmas for employees, to encourage people to share their thoughts and recognise the benefits of a diverse and inclusive approach. Events such as ‘The changing face of construction’ also help to assert Skanska’s industry-leading role.

“Our mixed-mentoring scheme is another example of the great work we are doing,” comments Heather. “We pair up people who have different backgrounds, ethnicity and age. We’re also ensuring that our leadership training has a strong focus on diversity and inclusion.”

A diverse talent pool is vital, explains Heather: “We have to look outside of the sector, because there is such a skills shortage. As well as visiting schools and career fairs, we’re recruiting ex-military personnel and former offenders. New people joining the industry is a really positive step, as they will bring new thinking and different experiences.”

“This will only work if our supply chain does the same. We’re working with the Supply Chain Sustainability School, which provides online green training, to introduce diversity and inclusion modules. This will help us to encourage a broader range of people into our industry.”

Heather says: “We always need to keep an eye on other industries, to learn from them and ultimately try and do things better than they do. We can never afford to stand still and say ‘yes, we’ve got it right’ because the world is changing at such a great pace, and we need to keep up with it.” ■



Paul Heather says he foresees a time when the construction workforce will be equally composed of men and women

De-machoification

/di-ma-choi-fi-ca-tion/ ► noun

1. Reducing the sense of macho

“If the construction industry wants to attract women, there’s still probably a lot of de-machoification (and if that isn’t a word, it should be) that needs to be done, to attract women into the industry.” **Josephine Fairley**



Josephine Fairley

She is the co-founder of Green & Black’s Organic Chocolate and helped successfully grow the brand before its acquisition by Cadbury’s. She has opened an award-winning organic bakery and one-stop organic food shop, Judges Bakery, in Hastings. Fairley has a background in journalism. When she took over the helm of Look Now magazine, she was Britain’s youngest-ever magazine editor. She is also a former editor of Honey and is the best-selling co-author of the Beauty Bible book series, as well as The Story of Green & Black’s.



...there is a real desire for change in the building industry: to attract more women.

Josephine Fairley

When you think of the construction industry, what springs to mind? Men in hi-vis jackets with builder’s bums, making you sit in a traffic jam while they very s-l-o-w-l-y back a digger into the street? Dust, mud, deep puddles? Wolf-whistling? (More of which later).

The reality, today, is gradually changing – but if the construction industry wants to attract women, there’s still probably a lot of de-machoification (and if that isn’t a word, it should be) that needs to be done, to attract women into the industry.

Only 14.5 per cent of workers in the construction world are female – and only 2 per cent of manual workers are women, according to the construction training and registration body CITB. (That’s versus just 1 per cent a decade ago, which is a rise of 100 per cent – but from a desperately low base).

In 2015, the CITB conducted a study, which found that three

quarters of employers believe that sexism is the main reason why women are under-represented in the industry. While 78 per cent of respondents thought a lack of female role models in the industry was a reason for the gender imbalance.

If the construction world wants women on board (not to mention on boards), it probably needs a re-brand.

Ask many young women if they want to work in building, and they’ll say ‘no, thanks’. Ask them if they want ‘to build a better future’, and that surely pushes many people’s buttons, at a time when we’re looking for more ‘meaning’ in our careers (something numerous surveys have suggested young people value highly).

Because this isn’t just about erecting super-apartments for oligarchs; it’s about building hospitals, schools and the type of housing that will enable us to stay in our twilight-years-friendly homes for a lifetime.

14.5%

of workers in the construction world are female



2%

of manual workers are women, compared with just 1% a decade ago



3/4

of employers believe that sexism is the main reason why women are under-represented in the industry



78%

say a lack of female role models in the industry is a reason for the gender imbalance

But what I've just seen, in action, is that there is a real desire for change in the building industry: to attract more women.

Last year, I took part in a panel – 'The changing face of construction' – organised by Skanska (one of the biggest players in the building world).

It brought together a – yes – very diverse group, including Neil Bentley (former CEO of the CBI and one of the '100 most influential gay, bisexual or transgender people globally', in the 2012 World Pride Power List), Chris Moon MBE (who lost his lower arm and leg while clearing landmines in Africa), and Beth West, Commercial Director for HS2.

But what really heartened me was that on a chilly, rainy night when

they could have been at home with a hot toddy and a box set of Orange is the New Black, 250 professionals across the construction world turned out to debate the issue.

Because, the fact is, construction has a skills shortage. It isn't currently tapping into a skilled workforce of women, homosexuals, or disabled people – almost certainly because of that 'macho' image.

We talked about the need for flexibility. In common with many sectors, what puts women off is the 'jacket-on-the-back-of-the-chair' culture (in this case, presumably a hi-vis-on-the-back-of-the-crane), which demands ludicrously long hours and is inflexible about home working.

(No, obviously I realise you can't operate a cement mixer from home. But the majority of the workforce in construction is actually in sales, administration, procurement, legal, finance, logistics – all roles which can be performed remotely, and in a family-friendly way).

We talked about seeking to create a culture that projects itself as more welcoming to those of us without bulging biceps and the ability to carry a hod of bricks.

And a culture that doesn't accept sexism – that's where wolf-whistling came in. Because if construction really wants to attract women, a 'no wolf-whistling policy' has to be enforced.

This issue isn't going away: last year, 23-year-old Poppy Smart



complained of sexual harassment after being plagued by daily whistles from builders on her way to work in Worcester.

Although no arrests followed, but the police did take it seriously – and hopefully, knuckles were sharply, if metaphorically, rapped with a scaffolding pole.

If you Google 'young women builders', articles about wolf-whistling are still the top results. It's this imbalance we so desperately need to change. And it can be done.

Beth West is a shining example of how women can flourish in the building world, if given the opportunity (and she does indeed juggle this successfully with motherhood) – but there surely needs to be more of us.

Similarly, there needs to be more disabled people. According to Chris Moon, they just don't feel it's for them (flexible working is not just an issue for women). Neither does the LGBT+ community, agreed Neil Bentley.

The government really needs to play a role, here. And there are some positive signs.

A new scheme called Building Girls Up, run in partnership with the Government's education programme Inspiring the Future, will be coordinating workshops with 140,000 young women between the ages of 16 and 18, to encourage them to consider construction as a career.

Those who are keen will be introduced to industry role models,

potential employers and receive support from schemes such as the Prince's Trust.

They are tackling the idea that women aren't physically strong enough, or good enough – ingrained early in our lives – to work in building.

If it's a hit, it'll be rolled out nationwide.

What's more, major projects such as London's Crossrail network are making an effort to hire equally – almost a third of its jobs are filled by women.

Perhaps it really ought to start at playschool level, making girls understand almost from the cradle that the construction world is for girls, too.

(A 'Beth the Builder' doll, anyone? Though I rather dread what Mattel would do with a 'Construction Barbie', so let's pass on that one).

But what I saw and heard was an audience gathered from a deeply traditional industry, open and willing to change – including several extremely high-level executives, who can implement more women/gay/disabled-friendly policies, which flow downwards and outwards from there, becoming part of their corporations' culture.

And I, for one, would feel just slightly less annoyed at being held up for a reversing bulldozer by someone in a fluoro-jerkin carrying a sign that said 'People at Work' rather than 'Men at Work'.

Wouldn't you? ■

First published in *The Daily Telegraph* in 2015

In our sites

Targeting the military: from the heart of the battlefield to the centre of the construction industry

A recent BBC show has featured Skanska's recruitment programme for ex-military personnel.

The initiative, which began in 2014, caught the eye of documentary makers following the fortunes of a number of people who were struggling to find work on Civvy Street.

Skanska's Executive Vice President Harvey Francis said: "Recruiting people who've been in the military gives the construction industry the opportunity to access a relatively untapped talent-pool. People coming out of the services have a range of very good skills.

"They're used to working in a disciplined way, which is crucial in a project-based business. We've also had a lot of success with placing



Harvey Francis, Executive Vice President at Skanska, with responsibility for human resources

ex-military personnel in health and safety roles."

The company is working with the Career Transition Partnership, which is backed by the Ministry of Defence and gives help and advice for people leaving the armed forces. In the 2014/15 financial year, leavers numbered nearly 19,000.

The latest statistics from Career Transition Partnership, show that after six months 9 per cent of those leaving the services remain unemployed.

"One of the most important things we learned was how to **'decode'** military CVs," explains Francis. "In some cases, they are just a list of the training courses undertaken. They don't give you a sense of what has been achieved or the person's leadership qualities.

"In the commercial world, people send out CVs and change jobs, but we understand that's not how it works in the military. So, we have been helping people understand how to write a good CV."

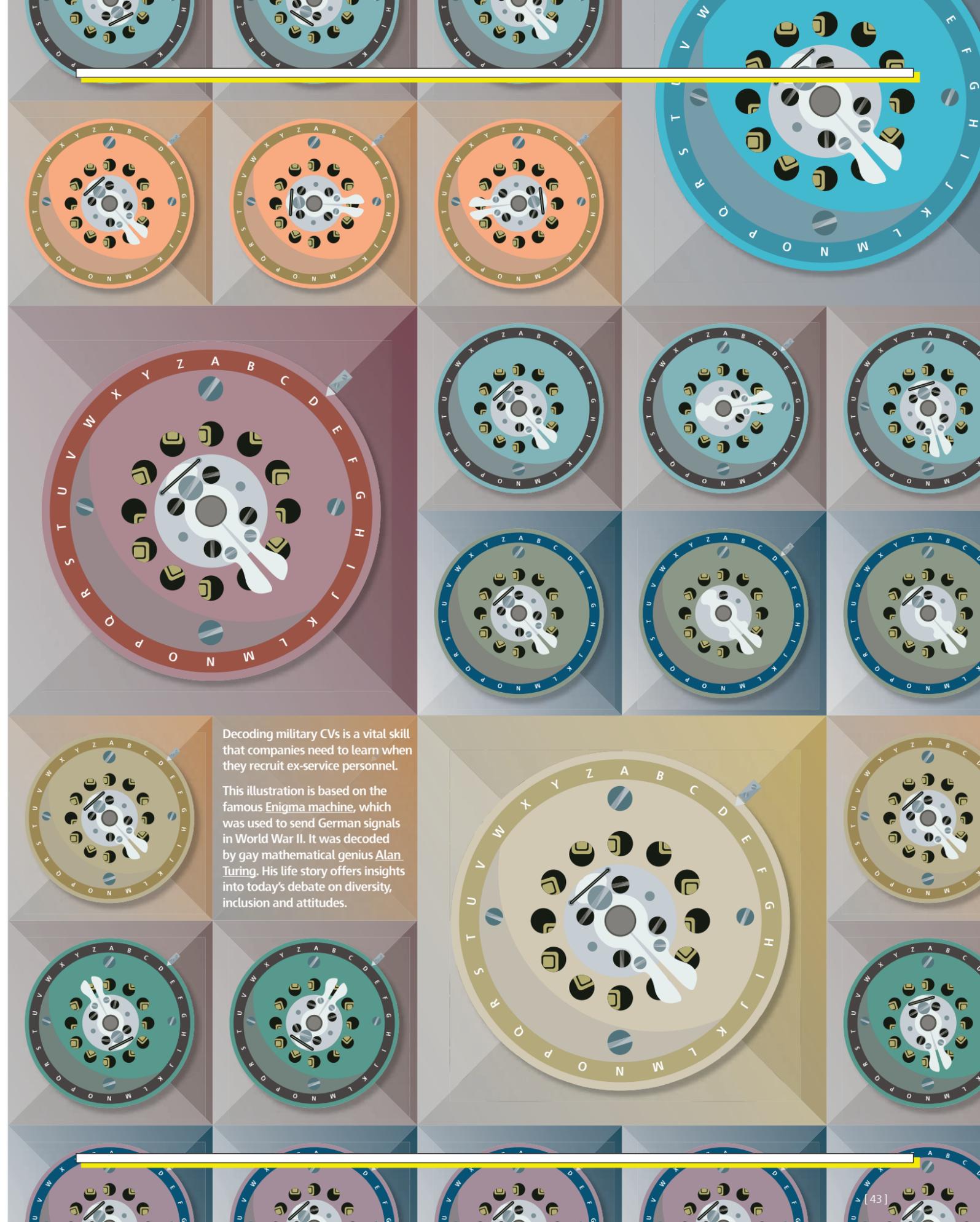
Adjustments are needed on the part of veterans as well. "The change can come as a big shock to people. In the military, everything is quite regulated and regimented," said Francis. "But in civilian life, it's different.

"We have developed a strong support network," he adds. "We tap into our existing ex-military employees, who act as mentors and coaches. They are able to share their experiences of what it was like to come out of the military. It's working well!"

Francis believes there is more that the construction industry, as a whole, can do to engage with ex-services people. This will help address the industry's well documented skills shortage at a time of growth. He suggests that the sector will have to overcome some perceptions, such as that skills gained in the military can't be applied to the construction industry: but he thinks it's a battle that's worth fighting. ■

Decoding military CVs is a vital skill that companies need to learn when they recruit ex-service personnel.

This illustration is based on the famous Enigma machine, which was used to send German signals in World War II. It was decoded by gay mathematical genius Alan Turing. His life story offers insights into today's debate on diversity, inclusion and attitudes.



A unique personal journey

In a remarkable story **Chris Moon MBE** explains how life-changing events can strengthen – not weaken – a person

Chris Moon's personal journey is one that, at first sight, seems to have little in common with an ordinary person. He is a former soldier and landmine clearance expert. He has survived being kidnapped. He lost an arm and a leg in an explosion. But the truth is, he's gone through as much as any disabled person has, in terms of facing challenges and prejudice. There is a lesson for us all in how he dealt with these experiences.

"I was working in Cambodia during the civil war in 1993," says Moon. "We were clearing landmines so that people could return to their villages. We were working for the United Nations."

On the second day, while returning from the minefield, Moon and his team were ambushed by around 30 Khmer Rouge guerrillas. "They were fearsome. They were the first really well trained, aggressive soldiers that I had encountered in Cambodia. The ambush was well planned and executed. I was taken into the jungle with two of my Cambodian colleagues.

"As far as I could see, the Khmer Rouge prisoner-handling system consisted of three things: interrogation, torture and death. So, it wasn't looking good."

However, Moon made an important personal decision that made a big difference: "I decided, no matter what happened, that I would never assume the role of the victim. There were about seven times, during the three days when we were held, when we could have been executed. Our captors were talking about it, so it was a real possibility. On each occasion, it was possible to change how they felt."

Moon managed to persuade a Khmer Rouge commander that he was not a foreign military advisor, but was on a humanitarian mission, clearing landmines.

A new perspective

"There's a direct lesson for diversity and inclusion from my experiences with the Khmer Rouge," says Moon. "Because it was a principle that came back to me when I became disabled: that I won't be a victim.

"I think it also teaches you something about responsibility: that no-one can really be responsible for us and we aren't always going to be treated the way we want to be. I've learned from that experience the importance of being personally resilient, or asking for help when you need it and of not giving up."



Chris Moon survived being kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge



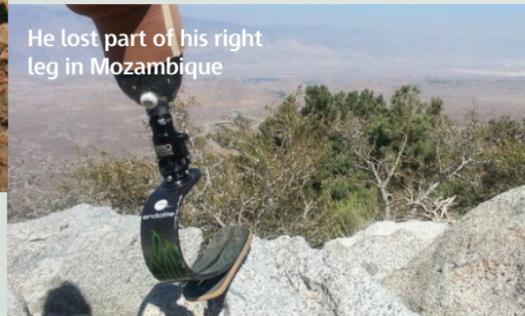
Chris Moon in Cambodia



Moon running an ultra-marathon



Destroying the debris of war



He lost part of his right leg in Mozambique

Despite his experiences in Cambodia, Moon was not deterred from returning to clearing landmines: “I loved what I was doing. I was very passionate about preventing people from being taken apart by landmines. You can’t just give up at the first hurdle. So, you dust yourself off, learn what you can learn and go back with renewed vigour.”

Incident in Mozambique

It was just two years after being kidnapped, that Moon was blown-up in a landmine explosion in Mozambique. “I was in a cleared lane in a minefield, doing an investigation, when something felt wrong. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up and I heard the loudest bang I had ever heard. I thought that maybe a mortar had gone off.

“I could smell blasted flesh,” continues Moon. “I said to myself: ‘look, you’ve got to be realistic and see what your injuries are’. I forced myself to sit up and I saw my lower right leg was completely blown off. My right hand was also badly damaged. In that moment, I knew I would be lucky to survive there, because we were such a long way from a hospital.

“Quite quickly the body produces endorphins, so you don’t feel any pain or any different to normal. Then, it just starts to hurt. It gets worse and worse until you wish you were dead. However, I couldn’t die because I was focused on all the reasons why I had to live: my family and my friends. My work also gave me another reason to survive.”

It took 16 hours to get Moon to a hospital because the area was so remote. He lost part of a leg and one of his hands in the explosion. It was a huge change which he says needed a lot of planning and focus. “As soon as they stopped injecting me with morphine, I refused painkillers. I did it, because I knew I’d have to get used to the pain, as you get phantom pain. It needed continual effort not to feel sorry for yourself. Above all, it required a lot of discipline and you had to teach yourself to do things again.”

Moon says that people were not always understanding of his disability: “Some people did treat me differently. Some people had a real problem with the fact that I had lost my hand. Others had a problem with disability in general. Fortunately, over 20 years, it’s got a lot better. Attitudes have really improved.

“Ultimately, for me, it was helpful to say: ‘I’m the only person that can deal with this. I’m going to get my head around it and move on. I know some people will be difficult, but that’s their problem.’”



Enhancing the workforce

Moon passionately believes that disabled people bring a lot to employers: “It’s very easy to assume that people can’t do things, but at the same time we have to accept that there are some quite serious limits: there’s no point in me, as a one-handed man, wanting to become a concert pianist. I think we have to be realistic on all sides.

“The most successful employment programmes for disabled people are those that don’t look at the disability: they look at what the individual can do. Then you make the environment fit the person.

“I think the key to success is dialogue, listening and thinking about how we can educate people to overcome their limits. We also need to educate organisations, such as large companies, that there is value in employing people with disabilities. For example, retention rates are often much better.

“They may have better problem solving skills because they have to solve so many problems in their lives. I think inclusion is really important.”

Improving diversity and inclusion at work is a complex issue, says Moon. He believes that there is not a simple solution, but that issues such as flexibility – for example, allowing people to go to hospital to attend appointments – are crucial.

“I think the question at the starting point should be ‘who is the right person for this job?’ I think it’s wrong to employ someone just because they are disabled, and I don’t think many people with a disability would want that. It’s about recognising that different people can contribute different things. I might not be a great one-handed brick layer but you might have a congenital amputee who can do amazing things with bricks.

“I think we need to understand where people can add value. I think some companies do see the benefit of employing people with disabilities. But I do think there is unconscious bias. People think – I couldn’t do that with one hand, so can they? People with health problems are seen as a big risk. I think things are better than they were but there’s a long way to go.”



I decided, no matter what happened, that I would never assume the role of the victim.

Chris Moon

Towards a more inclusive society

“Inclusion means a society where everybody is included. That means things such as ramps for wheelchairs, if people need them. It includes traffic light systems that let blind people cross the road. I spoke to a friend of mine who’s been blind for a number of years, and he said: ‘The one thing I want is to be able to go where I want.’

“If you look at house design, let’s make all of our taps with levers so anyone can turn them on. They are much easier to use, than traditional turn-based taps. Why don’t all new homes have a wet room, catering for people who can’t use a bath? All buildings should have lifts. We should be asking: ‘what can we do to make society more inclusive.’ And there are so many things.”

Attitudes must change

“I think society has a lousy attitude towards mental illness,” comments Moon, addressing another significant health issue, which affects many people during their working lives. He adds: “I think there’s a huge amount we can do in terms of education, encouraging people to ask for help and talk about their problems. We need to change our attitudes, to understand people better so we can help them. And we constantly need to improve our professional intervention, helping people to get better. But, at the same time, the most effective way to get a healthy society is by getting people to take ownership for their health.

“I think a lot of prejudice can be unconscious. But, I also think there is conscious prejudice. I think it’s very important that organisations stigmatise conscious prejudice. They should say, if you walk by something that you feel is wrong and don’t deal with it and speak up – you are condoning it.

I think we also need to concentrate on dealing with people fairly and with respect.”

Moon says that he has had many conversations with a range of disabled people: “I know some who feel they are treated in an appalling way, by society and the state. They feel ignored and ostracised. But I also know people who, at the same time, say that the system is very fair and supports them really well. There’s another group who think they’ve just got to get on with it and get working, because no-one’s going to give me a chance. I think there are many different views. If we’re going to talk about equality and diversity, we’ve also got to include the whole issue of the unsung heroes who care for relatives at home.”

Encouraging diversity and inclusion

The Paralympics in London have been a game-changer. Moon says they have had a real impact on attitudes: “The general public began to realise that disabled people could do amazing things.”

“Change in any organisation is really led by the leaders. If the leaders take diversity and inclusion seriously, in my experience, then it will be taken seriously by everyone in the organisation.

“The solution is to create an environment of trust, where people can be comfortable about talking about things – even things which have a stigma. The best thing we can do is create an environment where we help people to find their own solutions. If we can do that, then we’ll go a long way to changing the whole of society.” ■

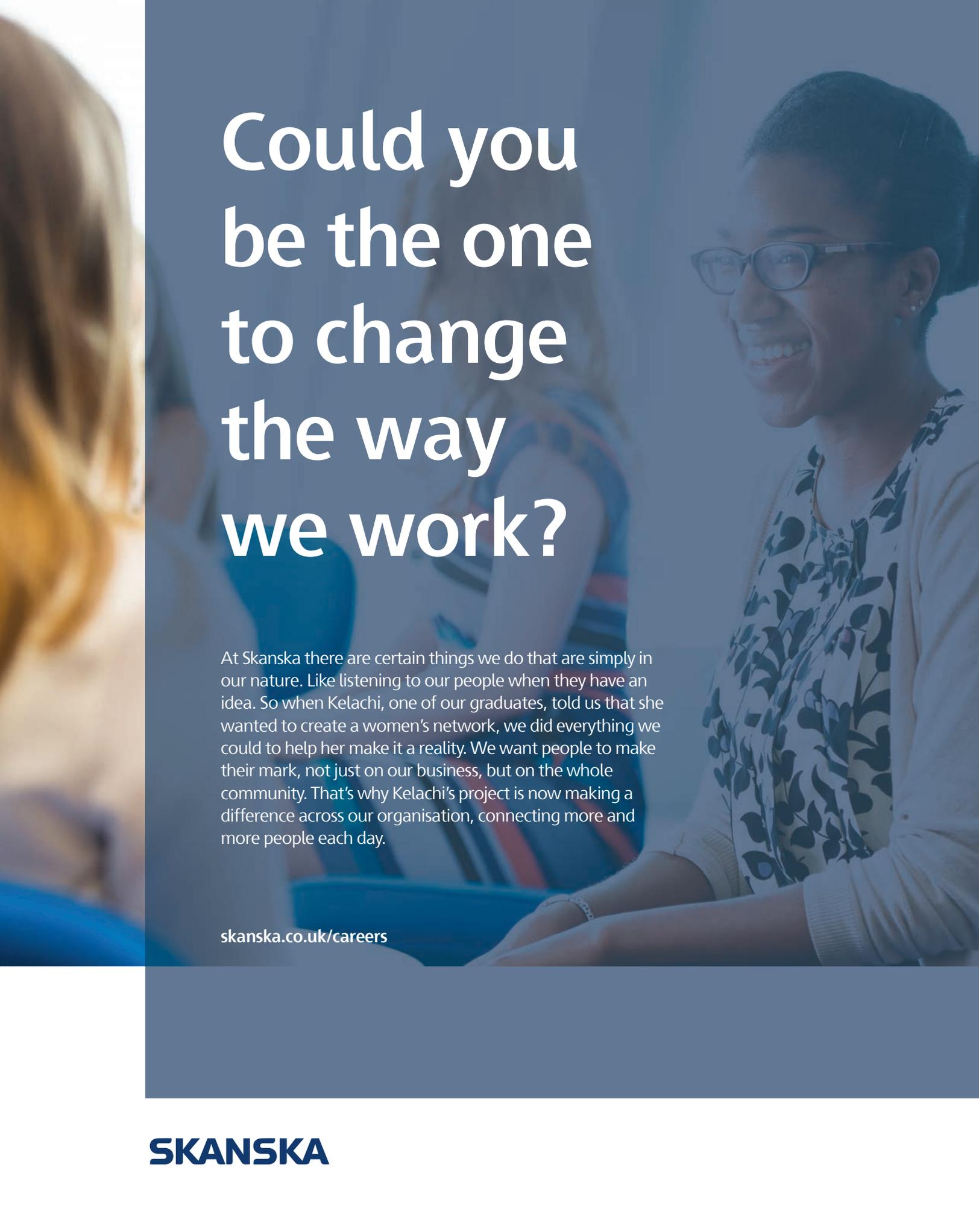
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What's next...?

The next edition of *Upfront* will focus on social responsibility and the vital role the construction industry plays in making a positive contribution to society.

A woman with glasses and a floral patterned top is smiling and looking towards the left. In the background, another woman is partially visible, also smiling. The scene appears to be a professional meeting or a collaborative work environment.

Could you be the one to change the way we work?

At Skanska there are certain things we do that are simply in our nature. Like listening to our people when they have an idea. So when Kelachi, one of our graduates, told us that she wanted to create a women's network, we did everything we could to help her make it a reality. We want people to make their mark, not just on our business, but on the whole community. That's why Kelachi's project is now making a difference across our organisation, connecting more and more people each day.

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