

DEMOS

THE SCIENCE OF POWER IN THE BODY

HOW POWER AFFECTS
WELLBEING AND WHAT
THAT MEANS FOR POLICY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This provocation paper is personal: rooted in my lived-experience as a Black, neurodiverse leader with multiple mental health diagnoses. But it is based on my explorations into the world of science as a cultural thinker. In 2018 I created a research project, the Neurology of Power™, to learn what science can teach us about the effect of power on the human experience. I have found that this research has articulated and given legitimacy to things that I have been experiencing my whole life.

As a Research Fellow at Demos, I have developed these ideas further. I have explored the links between the ways that power plays out in the body and brain, and what that might mean for public policy creation: how it is made, who it is for and what it is aiming to achieve. Now, in this paper, supported by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing (whose work aims to accelerate research and democratise access to wellbeing evidence), I am setting out some of these thoughts, with a particular focus on the wellbeing agenda.

This paper argues that change is needed. It is a direct call to policymakers and leaders¹ to think and behave differently about the role of power in their individual and organisational systems and the consequences of their decisions on power in society.

If an equitable lens is applied to every policy as it is made, then these micro-changes will make up more than the sum of their parts: they will fundamentally change our society and the way that power is used within it.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We must change the way that we make policy: prioritising listening to, understanding and collaborating with the communities who will be

most affected by the strategy we are making. I believe that for this to be truly successful, it has to be led and shaped by marginalised individuals.² We need to invert existing power structures.

2. How we work is as important as what we achieve: society, organisations and systems must be designed around power-sharing and equitable practice. This includes investment into access at all levels and interrogating the decisions we make at an operational level. Everyone's wellbeing should be considered.
3. Better education and training: all leaders concerned with public policy should understand their relationship to power and how it plays out, both personally and within their organisation.

1 As defined by an individual who has commanding authority or influence within a political and/or corporate environment.

2 As defined by, but not limited to, individuals that sit within groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and cultural dimensions. ([National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health](#))

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about power: the experience of having it, not having it and how the two experiences reinforce one another in a perpetual loop of harm. It is written from a combination of my lived experience and years researching the latest evidence on the neuroscience of power: what power is, what it does to the brain, and how that affects our behaviour. An important point to note before reading this paper: I am not a scientist; I am a cultural thinker (a term I coined to cover my work across research, strategy and conversation). A core part of my working practice is inclusiveness and I have written this paper to be accessible and informative to people who are both new and experienced to the topics covered in this piece: namely neuroscience, power, wellbeing and policy making.

My research has helped me understand and catalogue this complex set of questions, but throughout it I have been aware of one crucial dynamic. Even though my studies were confirming what I'd lived, they were also confirming that I needed to reach into the authority of science-led research to have any chance of being heard by an audience wider than myself and my close community. My lived experience and my personal testimony were not going to be sufficient, precisely because in many situations, I don't have power. I am a Black woman in her fifties, with a history of childhood trauma, dyslexia, dissociative disorder and PTSD. People like me aren't often heard.

The dynamics of power that I explore in my work are played out in my efforts to talk about it. I'm quite often seen as "that" aggressive and angry Black woman and it doesn't matter how I frame my story: my evidence about power is uncomfortable and often people assume the problem is me, not the evidence. I've spoken on panels, presented my arguments and had it disputed in public by senior academics who then apologised privately afterwards, once they'd checked my references.

But I'm not angry nor even particularly ambitious. I am hungry for change and frustrated by my own

lack of agency in the world. My research teaches me that these are self-reinforcing dynamics, as those who have power are driven both consciously and unconsciously to protect it. My goal is to help change this pattern, by helping people learn enough about power to create new systems for its distribution, ones that are accessible for everyone.

I have always felt that lasting wellbeing without power is almost impossible. The ability to shape your own life is core to the purpose and happiness we all crave. Those with power undermine those without it, keeping them stuck in a system that feels rigged against them, destroying hope, confidence and ambition.³ I believe that, in the end, even those with power will benefit from changing power systems. A happier society will be a stronger one for all of us. My hope is that, once those who hold power start to understand this, we will start to see real change.

Policymakers and leaders shape the lives of others through their work: through policy, projects or interventions. This paper argues that these individuals need to think differently both about how power shapes and informs their systems, approaches and processes. The research suggests that equitable power distribution will lead to happier, healthier, more functional societies.

But first, we need to define power. Many scholars start with the classic definition from German sociologist Max Weber, who wrote in 1922 that power is "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests."⁴ In other words: power is the ability to influence the emotions and actions of others with or without their consent

In this paper I am going to do the following: explore what we do and don't know about power and its place in human emotions, particularly empathy; examine the links between how the brain works, power and wellbeing; and finally, bring all the ideas together to propose why and how they link to

³ Dr Hannah Critchlow, *Joined-Up Thinking*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2022

⁴ Weber, 1922

policymaking.

Through this paper, I will reference the work of three leading neuroscientists: Dr Hannah Critchlow, Professor Lisa Feldman Barratt and Professor Sukhvinder Obhi.

SECTION 1

THE SCIENCE OF THE BRAIN

Power is often thought of as an external set of forces, operating between people, but this interpretation misses the crucial evidence about the way power affects us internally. I wanted to know what neuroscientists could tell us about how power affects the brain, and therefore the body, and then apply those insights to the field of cultural, economic and political discourse.

Over the course of my work on the Neurology of Power™, I've hosted public dialogues and conversations with leading thinkers to bring evidence and ideas to a wider audience. In this section, I set out some of the key insights from this series through extracts from a conversation I had just over a year ago with Professor Obhi, a professor of social neuroscience at McMaster University in Canada.^{5, 6} His work focuses on our social interactions by looking at our behaviours as well as our neural processes.

Professor Obhi and his colleagues suggest there is a "brain-based explanation of how differences in power and status can affect the ways in which we think, behave, and feel in relation to other people".⁷ In the extracts below, we explore the three findings I believe are most relevant to political leaders who want to understand power. They are:

- The way power can reduce empathy and social awareness.
- The way powerlessness can affect decision-making and risk perceptions.
- The way the brain learns from past experiences and uses them to shape future actions, including the concept of neuroplasticity.

Of course, this remains an active field of study in which the evidence is always evolving. As Professor Obhi told me, "science doesn't necessarily give you facts: science gives you evidence". What we have are theories that are more or less well supported by scientific evidence". Nevertheless, the current theories have wide implications for all those in power.

SA (Suzanne Alleyne): You're a professor of social neuroscience. What is that and how did you get into it?

SO (Prof. Sukhvinder Obhi): Neuroscience is the scientific study of the brain, trying to understand how the brain works. Social neuroscience is more about the scientific understanding of how the brain enables social behaviour. We consider states of power, if you're feeling very powerful or powerless ... what this might change in the brain. The ultimate thing to understand is the brain-based explanation of how differences in power and status can affect the ways in which we think, behave, and feel in relation to other people. The following is an extract from our conversation:

SA: What have we found out about power so far?

SO: When you feel powerful, you're much more likely to approach situations and opportunities for rewards.

Power can energise and activate the self, which means you are more likely to start going after your goals and pursuing them single-mindedly, sometimes regardless of consequences.

There is also concrete evidence that powerful

⁵ This is an edited version of the conversation. The full interview is available here: <https://neurologyofpower.com>

⁶ Professor Obhi is the Director and Principal Investigator of the Social Brain Body and Action Lab. See <https://www.obhilab.com/people>
⁷ <https://neurologyofpower.com/2021/09/27/a-conversation-with-professor-sukhvinder-obhi/>

people can better deal with distractions in their environment and continue to pursue their goals.

There is also support for the idea that powerful people are more likely to ignore social norms and are sometimes more prone to cognitive shortcuts like stereotyping, for example.

In contrast, people with low power are more likely to become distracted and be more tentative about translating perception into action. [They] are more likely to be tuned to potential threats in their environments.

Professor Obhi then revealed that sometimes powerful people can be more likely to lack empathy. In his words:

SO: My colleague Dr. Keltner and his lab at Berkeley explicitly looked at people talking about how empathetic they feel as a function of power. They find high power people are less empathetic... and what we call social attunement. They're sort of converging lines of evidence. If it's true that power reduces how much we mirror others and how much empathy we feel for them, you can imagine how that could affect outcomes.

We then discussed the possibilities that reduced empathy can have important implications for decision makers:

SO: If you're in a position to be able to allocate resources to help people, but you're not feeling empathy for them, you may be less attuned to their needs. Being very socially distant means you may not take on their perspective, or understand what they're going through.

We then spoke about neuroplasticity and how that can reinforce patterns for people in low and high power.

SO: Neuroplasticity refers to the capacity that the brain has for learning. If you're in a reward-rich environment, that will lead to a certain type of learning, it will encourage the behaviours that you're doing to get the rewards. If you're in an environment that has much more threat and much more danger, and you're constantly vigilant towards that, then different behaviours get reinforced. The reward landscape can have a fundamental affect on people.

SA: How has researching and writing about power changed you?

SO: I think it's given me a heightened awareness of the disparities in power across situations, paying attention to peoples' behaviour. For example, powerful people tend to disengage

during conversation. If a powerful person is speaking, they will look at you and make eye contact when they're talking, but when you talk back to them, they might avert their gaze, or might check their text messages. Next time you're in a meeting, just observe who it is that does the interrupting; you'll find it's typically the powerful person in the room that interrupts more. When you read about and research those things, it opens your eyes a bit. Fundamentally, what we're saying is that the degree of power you have changes the way that you see the world and the way you experience the world.

It's this thought - the way power affects the way you experience the world - that drives my programme of work. There are three key insights I take from this:

- First, those who have power tend to be more decisive but less empathetic to others.
- Second, those without power may be more likely to be empathetic - they need to be able to understand others to identify threats - and this can also make them tentative.
- And third, because the brain makes predictions based on past experiences, both patterns are self-reinforcing. Often powerful people learn to behave as if they have power. Powerless people learn to behave as if they have none.

SECTION 2

HOW POWER AFFECTS WELLBEING

A second influence on my understanding of this landscape has been the work of Professor Lisa Feldman Barrett from Northeastern University.⁸ Her research on how the brain regulates the body and emotions is highly influential.⁹

While working on the Neurology of Power™, I realised learning about power and the brain gave me knowledge, but as a lay person I was missing some necessary context on current research about how our brain works. Professor Feldman Barrett has a remarkable skill in making complex but foundational thinking about this easy to understand. I'm going to focus on two areas of her work, allostasis (body budgeting) and predictive thinking, that will create context and link how power affects wellbeing.

I had the joy of talking to Professor Feldman Barrett for a public talk I co-curated at Barbican.¹⁰ She explained that a really important part of human nature is that we are social animals:

"We are constantly influencing each other. We influence each other's actions, but we also influence each other's physical health. Our nervous systems often synchronise with each other. And so, to me, as a neuroscientist, understanding something about how your brain works in conjunction with other brains is really an opportunity to think about your influence on other people and their influence on you".

Professor Feldman Barrett talks about allostasis, the predictive regulation of the body, using the metaphor "body budgeting". The brain has to budget multiple resources, including glucose, salt, oxygen and water. It regulates how we intake and spend those resources to keep your body budget in balance, much like we might a weekly food shop.

Crucially, Professor Feldman Barrett explains that, "we don't just take deposits and withdrawals into our own budgets, figuratively speaking, we also make deposits and withdrawals into other people's body budgets, meaning we are the caretakers of each other's nervous systems as much as we are the caretakers of our children's and our own."

She says, "there's a reason why people who are lonely or who are socially isolated, live a shorter time than people who are socially connected on average, there's very good evidence to suggest that this is true. And the reason why is [that] we didn't evolve to only manage our own body budgets, and this is really important, because it means that you have an influence not just on the emotional feelings of other people, you can have an impact really on their physical wellbeing as well. And they can impact yours."

Not limited to physical actions, words are processed by the same parts of our brain that guide our heart rates, adjust our glucose levels and influence the flow of chemicals supporting our immune system. The flip side of this is that, when chronic, social

8 Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Northeastern University and the Chief Science Officer for the Centre for Law, Brain and Behaviour at the Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital. See: <https://lisafeldmanbarrett.com/about/>

9 <https://www.affective-science.org/lisa-feldman-barrett.shtml>

10 <https://allaboutpower.org/2022/10/13/a-year-since-can-we-talk-about-power/>

stresses - angry words, financial worries, loneliness - deplete our body budgets and can worsen illness. Our position as a social species means that our physical health is partly contingent on the quality of social lives.¹¹ It is another important way that power plays out in our bodies.

Alongside body budgeting, neuroscience shows us that our brains are predictive machines. This is fascinating to me because like many of us I assumed that I was reacting to everything in the here and now. Professor Feldman Barrett explains the way our brains predict really well:

“The way we experience ourselves in the world is that, you know, we see something or hear something, and we react to it, and we do something. But that’s actually not the way the brain works [...] the brain is always predicting, it’s using past experience, conjuring, reassembling past experiences in the wiring of the neurons, the way they communicate with each other to predict what’s going to happen in a moment from now.... [it’s] predicting because that prediction reduces uncertainty, which is metabolically efficient. ...

“Like you hear a loud bang, what is that loud bang, well, could be thunder. It could be a door slamming. In the United States. It could be a gunshot. Could be many things and that’s a lot of uncertainty and your brain would have to prepare a lot of different motor plans, to try to be prepared for all of them, which would be very, very, very expensive. So instead, the brain anticipates based on whatever’s happening right now, the brain is anticipating what’s going to happen next. And that’s not an abstract thing, that’s your brain is changing the firing of its own neurons to prepare you to act and to prepare you to hear and see and smell and feel specific things based on what you’ve experienced in the past. And that reduces the uncertainty and therefore it makes the whole thing really much less expensive. So metabolically speaking, if your brain is predicting well, sensory data that you get from the world and your body just confirms those predictions. So predicting, and confirming or predicting, and correcting is just cheaper metabolically than acting.”

In her book *Joined-Up Thinking*, Dr Hannah Critchlow weaves a narrative using these ideas. The premise of *Joined-Up Thinking* is that given the multiple global challenges facing humanity (which I would argue impacts all policymaking) we need to create the best conditions possible for

decision making. She suggests that much of what has been achieved by humans has been done by groups working together. Scientific evidence explains that big evolutionary movements happen when we are able to work in a way that prioritises collaborating over competing as individuals.¹² This idea of collective intelligence can create positive collaboration, but used negatively can also result in groups purposefully or inadvertently manipulating other groups, affecting their safety and wellbeing.

The key points from *Joined-Up Thinking* that relate to this paper concern diverse teams and understanding intelligence.

DIVERSE TEAMS

As is widely acknowledged, diverse groups can outperform non-diverse groups. Academic studies show that the way for groups to function and flourish is for them to be made up of “people with different experiences, who are confident in their abilities, have fairly equal levels of cognitive competence and the ability to communicate freely.” She is very clear that a lack of different viewpoints results in poorer decisions and biases being amplified.¹³

I often hear the argument that diverse teams are hard to manage or veer off in different directions. However, Dr Critchlow counters this by explaining that diversity on its own doesn’t work, empathy is also required.

Like Professor Obhi and Professor Feldman Barrett, Dr Critchlow links the way that we connect to each other to predictive behaviours. She cites research that shows that we use this to form friendships and that predictive thinking helps in ‘deciding’ who to pay attention to. Her thoughts on intelligence and astute thinking feel highly relevant: she explains that education does not always result in ‘astute thinking’ and that intelligent and educated people are less likely to learn from their mistakes or take advice from others.

She also invites us to broaden our thinking around what intelligence is, in order to consider it as “an evolved strategy that tends towards the success of the species as well as the individual”. Dr Critchlow references research that shows that over-reliance on individual ability is inefficient. For example, Professor Dacher Keltner explores power and impulsivity, showing that “power dampens down our brains’ ability to process and integrate the full repertoire of information from the world around us, including the

11 Ibid.

12 Dr Hannah Critchlow, Hodder & Stoughton, 2022

13 Ibid

perspectives and feelings of other people".¹⁴ Part of Dr Critchlow's epilogue concludes that "the skills that we already need and that future generations will increasingly depend on, revolve around our flexibility of mind, our capacity to take on board new information, and different points of view and our ability to collaborate."¹⁵

By drawing together the work of these three neuroscientists, we see that power can affect empathy. In turn, this can negatively impact the ability of those in power to know, much less consider, all the facts necessary to make decisions. Layered into this, we know that in order to manage our own body budgets we predict, which shapes (often unhelpful or inaccurate) biases.

Simply put: those with power have a different frame of reference to those without it.¹⁶

14 ibid

15 ibid

16 <https://ideas.ted.com/peoples-words-and-actions-can-actually-shape-your-brain-a-neuroscientist-explains-how/>

SECTION 3

POWER AND SOCIETY

I started asking these questions about power at a time in my life when I felt powerless. I found the sociological explanations, such as Max Weber's in the introduction, useful. But as I was going through my own period of powerlessness, what struck me was how physical an experience it was. Stress manifests in physical tension and trains our bodies to be on alert for it, reinforcing the feeling of stress and the experience of it.¹⁷ Anyone who's ever taken a few deep breaths, forced themselves to lower their shoulders, or closed their eyes to regain their composure is aware that the brain and the body are in a constant feedback loop. We feel our thoughts and we think our feelings.

Turning back to the science discussed above, I think it is evidently the case that power is important for wellbeing, particularly in terms of the way it affects your ability to accomplish what you set out to do - and the satisfaction that comes from that. High power permits you to move forward; low power subjects you to the daily, perpetual frustrations of moving nowhere despite your best efforts. And, as Feldman has shown, constant attacks on your "body budget" deplete your wellbeing.

I want people to understand that power shapes your life 24 hours a day, whether you have it or not, and whether you want it or not. In the context of this paper my argument is that power has an impact directly on the wellbeing of society and impacts how policy is made.

I often think about the famous quote by author Toni Morrison on the nature of racism.

"The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again,

your reason for being."

In a way, the dynamics of power are playing a similar trick on us. Those of us without power find intrusive thoughts crowding into our brains. What is everyone thinking of me? Where are the threats in this room? What could go wrong? These thoughts keep us from doing our work. They keep us from challenging power; they keep us in submission. Simply having to think about the expectations that other people have is a threat that is cognitively demanding. It can sap resources that you would otherwise have to devote to your work - because in the back of your mind is always the threat, that you're not going to be seen as capable, competent, likeable.

By contrast those with power can devote their whole mind to the task in hand. It is a fundamentally different experience.

This is happening on a societal level. These findings about power and the brain can be applied to many social contexts: but in my work I am interested in seeing how they affect professional relationships and leadership: for this paper I'm interested in what it means for public policy-making. Here, these findings have contributed to the creations of systems which uphold and serve those in power. They affect the ways that money is spent, and that public policy is historically made: from the top-down, as well as informing the content and structure of the policies themselves.

Earlier we established that often those with power may have less empathy, so in this context policy makers may have insufficient understanding of the landscape and issues at play in society. One of the ways of mitigating this challenge is by ensuring that policies are made including those they impact in

17 Bessel van der Kolk, Penguin, 2015

the decision making process. Done well, this can create efficient policy making, but when this doesn't happen those impacted are negatively impacted.

SECTION 4

WHAT THE SCIENCE OF POWER IN THE BRAIN MEANS FOR POLICY-MAKING

If we are to change this system, we need to explain to those in power why that change will benefit them, specifically and personally. We cannot rely on an appeal to the wider social interest: we need to make a case that even the powerful will be better off if they share power.

Dr Critchlow's research frames an argument for the collective benefit of a more equal society: diverse teams can perform better in helping to solve the myriad of complex issues facing society and build the policy solutions we need. Catalogued extensively in Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*,¹⁸ there is a wide range of evidence that more equal societies perform better on a number of scales: they are happier and healthier, with lower crime. Power and agency are so clearly linked to wellbeing, and through it to so many other outcomes. A society with more equal power will benefit us all, even those at the top who have to share a little of theirs. Better wellbeing reduces demands on the state, and keeps taxes lower.

Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to change neural pathways or more simply grow and develop, the more we challenge our brain and expand our thinking the better we become at it. Or if we think about it in terms of predictive behaviour, we have to create different experiences for our brains to refer to when they predict. I think it's possible that people who hold power will become more emotionally resilient to change if they understand it differently.

If you have been marginalised your whole life, you are more likely to be able to deal with the rules and systems of society changing: you have had daily lived-experience of resilience and flexibility, and in dealing with a world that is not designed for you. If you have been privileged and held power it will have shaped your understanding of the landscape and will have serviced your way of life. In this time of change and trauma, where society and its rules are shifting daily, many leaders are finding themselves adrift and are looking to learn how to effectively weather these storms. The support and expertise can be found in those who have been practising these skills all their lives; these are the individuals that need to be valued and learned from.

Finally, there comes a point where the lack of empathy actually harms your status and standing in the eyes of others, including your peers. We saw that with lockdown restrictions and the flouting of those rules by the political elite. For me, it seemed they were confused about the law and their relationship to it. It's as if they were saying: I passed this law, so I'm the one who can interpret it - it's my law. The inability to see outside yourself - to experience what others might perceive - is a symptom of excessive power.

Armed with these arguments, I think we can make a strong case to those with power that they as well as we will benefit from a new model of leadership. What should that look like?

18 Malcolm Gladwell, Little Brown, 2000

SECTION 5

A NEW MODEL FOR POLICY-MAKING

I want to turn back to the words of Professor Obhi, who said towards the end of our conversation:

“Power, unfortunately, is one of these things that can be weaponised – maybe unintentionally, sometimes maybe unwittingly. It can result in negative patterns of behaviour that hurt people and harm people, sometimes including the powerholder themselves. So, given this, the question for leaders is: why don’t we have more education around how to handle power and ultimately use it for good? And what power might do, or may be doing, that is bad? Why have we neglected that education? We need to have more education about how to handle power and use it for good.”

In this final section of my paper I want to make the case for normalising that kind of education. As I said above, my job is to get people to understand that power shapes your life 24 hours a day, whether you have it or not, and whether you want it or not. If we can embed a healthy understanding of the impacts of power we can start to alter them.

We need, in this, to create a different story about what leadership is. There are too many places where it is considered a badge of honour to have little empathy and compassion: to be able to drive forward a decision regardless of the implications. In the policy-making world an extreme case of this would be the now documented “culture of disbelief”¹⁹ embedded in the home office’s asylum decision making.²⁰

We need people to use their power differently: we need a less egocentric, more collaborative, more consensual model of leadership. We need leaders who say: “Yes, the system is rigged. And guess what,

I’m not going to continue rigging it now that I’m in power, I’m going to level the playing field.”

Demos has made the case for more ‘humble policy-making’, that the starting point for new policies should be to listen to the people who will be most directly affected and lean into their experiences. It advocates prioritising listening, rather than telling; understanding rather than inventing; collaborating, rather than enforcing. Not only does Demos think this will make for better policy, but it will build legitimacy along the way, solving problems before they arise, and creating more early help rather than emergency interventions.

I believe that for policy to be truly successful, it has to be led and shaped by marginalised individuals who are an equal part of the decision making process. We also have to find a way to change the systems and language of power and policy so that they are accessible and transparent, and build our collective capacity to engage with them.

Public policy making and local and national governing are powerful tools for social change, but for many marginalised communities and individuals they can feel slow, and sometimes the dial moves backwards and away from any real progress or improvement. For us to create the true conditions for radical change, we each have to focus on how we work, as well as on what we want to do and achieve. Organisations and systems must be designed around power-sharing and equitable practice.

I believe you should lead by example. I have been working to build a company, Alleyne&, and at every stage in the process we have been using the lens of power to make decisions about how we operate. Every aspect of our work; from rethinking access

19 <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/wp102-culture-of-disbelief-2014.pdf>

20 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34770135>

budgets, to considering ownership of ideas, drafting contracts, creating partnerships and setting pay has been impacted by questions of power, wellbeing and equity. We have built in time to listen to one another, to collaborate and to adapt to each other's needs. This is difficult, painstaking, and has required considerable resources but we truly believe that we can already see the impact on our creative and strategic product going forward, and that this is the only way of modelling this new leadership paradigm.

In my vision for the future, these are the questions that every organisation and policy maker should be asking.

If an equitable lens is used to scrutinise every decision in the way a company is run, or a policy is made, then these micro-changes will make up more than the sum of their parts: they will fundamentally change our society.

WITH THANKS

My access requirements and process of working means that I am grateful to Polly Mackenzie, previous Chief Executive at Demos, Polly Curtis, current Chief Executive at Demos and Elizabeth Crump for the ways in which they worked with me to develop, structure and express this think piece. Thank you to Nancy Hey, Founder What Works Wellbeing Centre for all her support and funding for this project. It forms part of their programme of work exploring the links between wellbeing and forms of power, such as agency and self-determination.

AUTHOR NOTES

As part of my process to share please note that the work of the three neuroscientists work quoted can be read in non academic journals as well as academic journals. For those wanting to read further outside of academia I would suggest the following:

- Professor Sukhvinder Obhi: A conversation with Professor Sukhvinder Obhi, available online at <https://neurologyofpower.com/2021/09/27/a-conversation-with-professor-sukhvinder-obhi/>
- Professor Lisa Feldman-Barret. As a starting point her book Seven and a half lessons about the brain is a very accessible read, but there are also countless free to watch videos or podcasts to listen to online.
- Dr Hannah Critchlow's work can also be found in free to access talks and interviews on the internet, the work quoted here is from her book *Joined-Up Thinking*.

ABOUT SUZANNE ALLEYNE



Suzanne Alleyne is a cultural thinker and Demos Research Fellow. She is the head of an eponymous business consultancy which combines commissioned partnerships in the cultural, corporate and third sectors with a research incubator. Her current work focuses on leadership, power, difference, and society. She is an inaugural Arts Council England Changemaker, a Fellow of the RSA, a 2020 Churchill Fellow and a 2022 Acumen Fellow. She was the inaugural Co-Chair of What Next? Is an Achates Brand ambassador, holds an MA in Arts & Cultural Management from King's College, London, where she is currently a guest lecturer.

Previous to her work in the arts, Suzanne spent 25 years working across the commercial sector supporting and consulting for high profile international organisations and individuals. These include Barclaycard, Channel 4, Swatch, and Swiss Ski.

Suzanne's current key project is about the "Neurology of Power™". This interdisciplinary practical science and lived experience research aims to examine inequality and power in the context of culture, arts, and leadership. She is investigating where and how power resides in the brain, using the lens of neuroscience, social science, academic thinking and cultural practice.

As part of Alleyne's work, we are rethinking the way we structure and fund access for senior leadership: developing collaborations with other senior leaders across the cultural and corporate sectors, so that neurodiversity is recognised, celebrated and the individual strengths of all parties are used to deliver something new. We have used this strategy to write this paper.

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