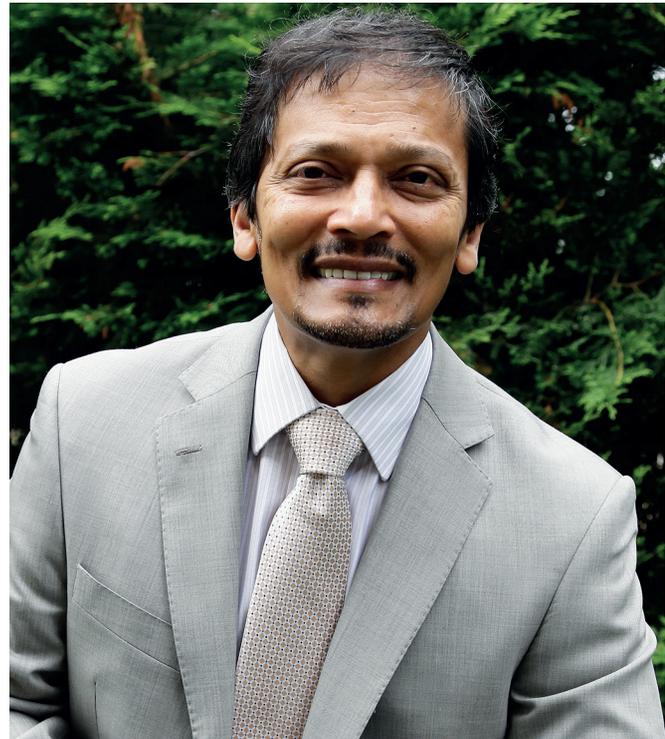


## My housing career: Chan Abraham

Luminus legend Dr Chan Abraham recalls breaking down prejudice and warns of being 'calcified in negativity'. The inspirational chief executive lives by the Luminus maxim: 'Something good is going to happen to me today.'



### Good times...

**I** have had many good times in a career that has taken me on a journey over 39 years from London to Hampshire, Essex and Cambridgeshire in many different organisations before setting up Luminus in 1999.

In 1974, as a Greater London Council housing clerk in a slum clearance area, I quickly learned to appreciate the impact of poverty and unsatisfactory housing. It began my awareness of why I needed to identify with and understand others.

I was really happy as a housing officer in Ealing in the early 1980s, visiting people in their homes, trying to help them solve problems and helping tenants groups to get active. I managed one of the biggest London estates but, when the 1981 'riots' broke, despite severe problems between police and the community, not a single petrol bomb was thrown. It was gratifying to see how much people had come to value what we had been building together.

I am always happiest when faced with new challenges as in Kensington & Chelsea in 1984 where I was asked to find solutions to growing community problems. I wanted to help staff from the council, police and other agencies, from top management down, to understand how best to communicate across cultures. Regrettably, US-style 'race awareness' training was ingrained with unhelpful political correctness. So I created a bespoke, cross-cultural communications programme that really worked. I also learned a great deal about people's feelings, prejudices and ways of thinking and learning.

Since 2000 the highlight has been the sheer joy of seeing customers and employees who tell us they really love the way their lives have changed since becoming part of the Luminus story. Like them I am daily inspired to voice the Luminus maxim, 'Something good is going to happen to me today'.

### Bad times...

**M**y general outlook is one of optimism. My glass is 'half full' rather than 'half empty'. Life's challenges are there to be faced and overcome but I have encountered some problems.

Two of the biggest of these are intolerance and opposition to change, which I first seriously encountered in 1984. While some people really welcomed my 'cross cultural' training, others didn't. However, they chose to secretly express their misgivings (prejudices, really) rather than talk with me openly. I have seen that approach continue over the years.

Pioneering ideas and not going with the herd are part of how I am wired – and we get results. But that doesn't sit well with everyone. Prior to establishing Luminus I repeatedly saw how organisation cultures become calcified in negativity. Now when I train leaders I explain that only decisive, visionary leadership based on sound ethics can bring much-needed change.

An example of intolerance that saddened me was a couple of years ago when a long-standing housing officer was demoted because of his privately-expressed Christian views about sexual ethics. Worryingly, the past few years have seen growing hostility towards faith communities and the rise of 'Christianophobia' is chilling. It appears that the intolerance I saw in the 1980s towards exploring issues around race is now being expressed with increasing menace towards those who hold on to traditional faith views.

Throughout my 'bad times' I have kept the door open to dialogue and exchange of views. In a pluralistic society we need to protect our basic freedoms of free thought and its expression in the public space. I give all Luminus employees opportunity to express their views and to help shape our business. I hope others in the UK will follow our approach and that we will see less of the 'bad times' of intolerance. ■