

Business as

UNUSUAL



THE ALIVE GUIDE TO THE NEW ABNORMAL

"We talk about going back to normal. There is no going back to normal. We're going back to abnormal."

Simon Sinek

WHO'S READY FOR THE NEW ABNORMAL?



You may argue abnormal
arrived some time ago.

Comms plans scratched and new ones hastily rewritten, alternative channels installed at a previously unheard-of speed, messaging changed on an hourly basis, audience habits and circumstances turned upside-down.

And it's all been achieved with adaptability, agility and ingenuity - take a bow!

We're here to **help support** through the next phase of this eruption of unreality - the ongoing challenges, as well as the around-the-corner and the still-to-come.

So, based on the experiences shared with us in our recent survey, **we've rounded up the best advice, guidance and tips** out there and mixed them with a **little Alive magic**.



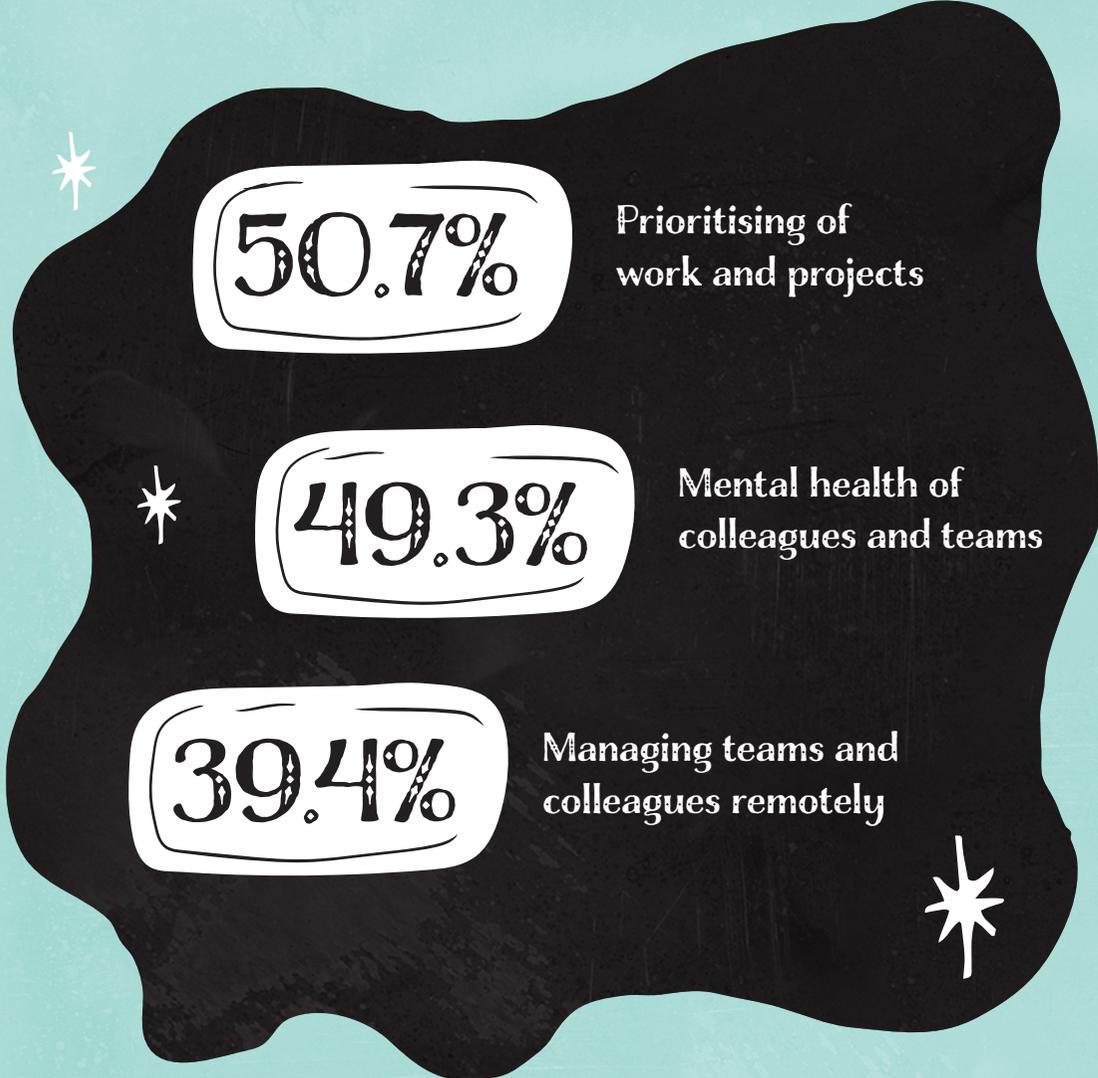
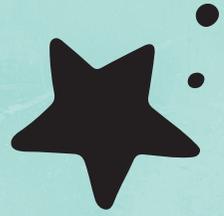
RESULTS SUMMARY

We asked what's on the minds of comms pros and their visions for the future..



1.

What are currently the biggest work-related challenges you are dealing with?



Being able to prioritise work and projects was a headache for **almost half** the respondents, as was the concern over the mental health of colleagues and teams.



are also finding the challenge of managing teams and colleagues remotely a tough one to tackle.



2. What do you foresee as being the biggest challenges for your organisation and teams as changes allow people back to their workplaces?



In terms of the challenges as people are allowed back to their workplace, three concerns were on the minds of **almost half** of you – adapting to new ways of working, colleagues still dealing with pressures at home, and reassuring people over the new health and safety concerns in the workplace.

However, it was interesting to note that several other concerns were on the minds of **more than a third of you**, including possible restructures or reorganisations, the implementation of, and compliance with, new policies and changes in working patterns.

It suggests uncertainty is understandably rife as people return to the workplace.



47.9%

Adapting to new ways of working

47.9%

Colleagues still dealing with home or family pressures

46.5%

Reassurance on health and safety matters



3. What do you foresee as being the biggest longer-term changes to your organisation from the coronavirus pandemic?

73.6%

Bigger shift to home working

65.3%

Less travel and face-to-face meetings

56.9%

A more digitally-enabled organisation

When it came to longer-term changes the pandemic could bring, **nearly three-quarters** of you predicted a bigger move to home working, with almost two-thirds also believing face-to-face meetings and travel would be reduced.

In line with these shifts, **more than half** of you also saw your organisations becoming more digitally-enabled.

Encouragingly, **nearly half of you** also felt an increased appreciation for communications would come from the pandemic response, while greater focus on wellbeing and work-life balance was also predicted by more than a third of those who took part.

Get your hands on the full survey results here!

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO SEE?



TRANSLATING THE NEW ABNORMAL



MINDS OVER MATTERS



REMOTELY INTERESTING



THE COMMS RENAISSANCE



A WORKPLACE FOR EVERYONE





TRANSLATING THE NEW ABNORMAL

Nearly half of you said adapting to new ways of working and reassuring colleagues would be your biggest challenges ahead.

As internal communicators, we face a monumental challenge at a time when we're busier than ever – fulfilling our roles to the best of our ability and learning new ways of working when the future is unknown.

But with this uncertainty comes great opportunities. Why? Because we know the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer showed that employers are the most trusted institution and at times like these, **employees crave information: 63%** want to be informed at least daily, and **20%** even want notifications several times a day.

Continuing effective two-way communication will be a case of calm and strategic planning combined with a united and empathetic

approach. And isn't that what we've always done in one way or another? Finding familiarity in all the furore will help. Let's remember and lean on the fundamental skills we already employ:

The role of
STORYTELLER

The role of
TRUSTED ADVISER

The role of
STRATEGIST

The role of

STRATEGIST

Whilst the content of the strategies and plans we write over the coming months will need to be adapted, we understand the fundamental importance of objective setting, the value of knowing our audiences and the need for a clear picture of the channels we use. These elements will remain crucial to the work we do, don't lose sight of them.

The role of

TRUSTED ADVISER

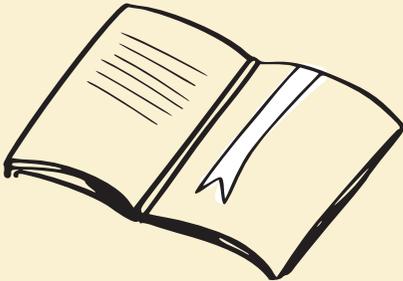
Your leaders are human beings too! They have families to care for, health issues to consider, financial worries to manage, just like the rest of us. Listen to their concerns, know what they need, continue to be that expert adviser, that shoulder to lean on, that trusted and knowledgeable voice.

The role of

STORYTELLER

We know that the best way to learn and adapt is by hearing from what others are doing. And part of our role has always been to collect and replay those priceless stories. Now, more than ever, we can help to provide a degree of reassurance by sharing the journeys and those of our colleagues through experienced storytelling.

ESSENTIAL READING:



Friday

Empowering Your Employees Through The Next Normal

Institute of Internal Communications

The brave face of internal comms

Janet Hitchen and Mike Klein on IC Beyond

A Call for Courage and Ambition

Comms Rebel

The Rest, Recover and Revive planning guide (£)

TOP TIPS

"My advice is to analyse the way internal communication is happening in your workplace. The channels you rely on may now be paused or replaced entirely by something else. For example, your face-to-face Town Hall is probably virtual, what impact does this have on the cadence of your internal communication? Are there any groups who need special attention? Now is also the time to reflect and capture an accurate picture of how internal comms is organised, managed and planned in your organisation. If you have an IC strategy or channels matrix, read through them and make any necessary adjustments. You may need a temporary strategy in place to see you through. The future is uncertain, so I would plan 3-6 months at a time."

RACHEL MILLER
ALL THINGS IC



"Existing projects and programmes will all be affected by Covid-19 but many of them will still need to go ahead despite the pandemic. You may need to adjust your narrative and create additional communication opportunities to help people understand why it's not on pause - in many ways Covid-19 provides the perfect example of how we can't predict the future and continuing with certain strategic pieces of work will ensure your organisation is in the best position to respond to what may come its way. That's a powerful argument for change and we are living with the reality of that right now."

HELEN DEVERELL
INTERNAL COMMS CONSULTANT



"It's easy to get caught up and not take the time to plan, but I encourage you to do so. It helps you say no and saves you time in explaining why you are making certain decisions about your channels. Be sure to capture what you want to start, stop and continue in your workplace. Having clarity around the way you communicate is smart, at times like these, it's vital."

RACHEL MILLER
ALL THINGS IC



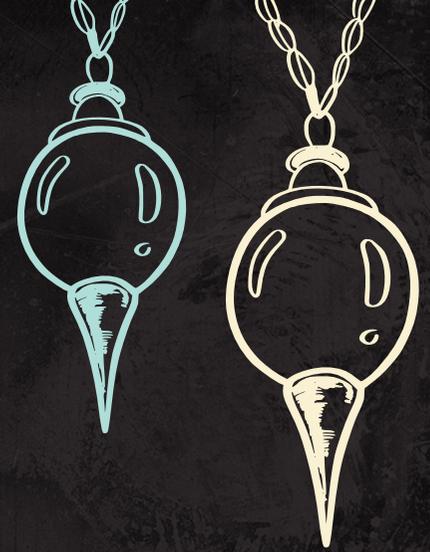
"For your people to feel engaged and connected as we move through the next stages of abnormal, they need to feel valued, confident and safe to speak openly. They need to feel like they belong and their opinions are respected. Positively and regularly welcoming their thoughts and ideas will make a difference. Whether it's asking employees to share their ideas on how to support the direct response to COVID-19, or share learnings that can be applied when furloughed staff return to work, the possibilities to listen to, engage, and support employees during this period are manifold. These can range from ideas on how to address hygiene safety, to cutting costs and generating new revenue streams, to maintaining the sustainability gains during lockdown."

GEORGE BRITTON
EMPLOYEE IDEAS PLATFORM,
SIDEWAYS6





MINDS OVER MATTERS



Over half of you said your teams and colleagues' mental health was currently your biggest priority and a third feel it will be an ongoing challenge as people return to workplaces.

As we continue to face uncertainty around care, health and financial concerns, it's no surprise that employees are feeling anxious or worried, not just for themselves and their families, but also for each other. And we know the situation is set to continue which only adds to the insecurity and unease.

The subject of **mental health** is a complex and sensitive one at the best of times so we're lucky to have experts in our comms

community who regularly share their insight and expertise, keeping the conversation going, particularly during these extraordinary times.

Jo Hooper, workplace mental health specialist and founder of Mad and Sad Club, advocates the idea of **mentally thriving**, not surviving, and says internal communicators can lead the charge in influencing the organisation to take action.



Some of her advice includes creating and sharing tools and content that will help others feel more informed and less isolated:

- * **Feature the facts** - information on the most common symptoms of work-related mental health issues – stress, anxiety and depression
- * **A worry amnesty** – use a tool like sli.do to allow staff to anonymously submit their biggest concerns and share them on your key channels. Don't forget to share how you will tackle them - this is arguably the most important bit
- * **A downloadable one-page guide** - set out the help available in your organisation and how to use it
- * **Targeted comms for managers and team leaders** - help support them to have conversations with people they are worried about
- * **Case studies** – share the mental health journeys of peoples' peers
- * **Wisdom from within** - a fully supported campaign that encourages grass roots engagement – if staff want to self-organise and support one another this can be a powerful movement
- * **Mindful Mondays** – share a tip for calmness or contentment from a staff member each Monday. This could include advice on self-care, keeping the kids busy or working from home tips



ESSENTIAL READING:



Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

Returning to the workplace guide

Every Mind Matters

Seven simple tips to tackle working from home

Mental Health Foundation

Kindness Matters

Maudsley Charity

Families Under Pressure

Institute of Occupational Safety and Health

Managing mental wellbeing when returning to work (webinar)

TOP TIPS

"We had a mental health crisis in the communications industry before COVID-19 so we can only guess at this stage that the problem will have grown and extended. So many comms pros have spoken out honestly and bravely on the subject in recent years so it's no longer taboo. As an industry we need to speak with one voice on the issue and challenge any poor behaviours. Events and movements like Comms Unplugged have championed better understanding, priority and support for our mental health. This has helped hugely but the people I worry about now are the people who maybe don't fully recognise any potential warning signs of their own and the longer the crisis goes on the higher the risk of problems taking a hold. We all have mental health and we can all experience problems. It's not a sign of weakness it's a sign of strength to speak out and seek help."

DARREN CAVENY
COMMS2POINTO



"If I could give you one piece of advice, it's this: don't take the fruit and pilates approach and think you're doing your bit. You are not. We all need to take as strategic an approach to our people's mental health as we do to the financial health of our organisations. Start with the foundations, and dig deep. How will you support people who need it? Will you pay them over and above statutory sick pay if they need to take time off for their mind? Will you allow them discretionary paid time off, or do you need them to get a doctor's note? Will you allow for short- or long-term role changes? Additional 1-2-1 support? Will you offer healthcare? An EAP programme? How do you promote those? How will you train your managers and HR professionals to be the first line of support? These - and others - are the difficult questions I implore you to ask in your organisation."

JO HOOPER
FOUNDER OF THE MAD AND
SAD CLUB AND HOST OF A
PLACE TO THRIVE PODCAST



"Be kind to yourself and ask for help if you need it. Take the time to invest in your own mental health and wellbeing. It's ok to pause and come back when you're ready. The pandemic has led to our days being extended and blurring into each other, with weekends and Bank Holidays passing by without feeling any different to other days. This can't continue for ever, do take your annual leave and put your out of office on when you need to."

RACHEL MILLER
ALL THINGS IC





REMOTELY INTERESTING



Almost three-quarters of you predict you will see a shift to more home working in your organisations.



Now, more than ever, work really is something you do, rather than somewhere you go.

And while there has been a welcome, widespread appreciation for the **'we're not working from home, we're at home during a crisis, trying to work'** mantra, remote working has now become a way of life.

New tools, new mindsets, new challenges.

Not everyone has been keen on the 'always available' trap that remote workers can fall into.

Protecting or reassuring people around that will be **crucial** if, as our survey suggests, the vast majority of organisations do move towards a more flexible working and online meeting model.

Zoom's daily active users soared from 10m to 300m in a matter of weeks, while Microsoft's Teams app saw a 70% jump in a month.



But this greater flexibility in work patterns has long been yearned for by many staff and, on the whole, it has been shown that it can work.

And the traditional blockers – lack of IT kit, no remote working apps or connectivity, lack of trust – have largely been solved pretty much overnight. **Amazing what can be done when the need arises, huh?**

A more dispersed workforce will present new comms approaches too. A survey last year showed **more than a quarter** of remote workers received too little

information about their organisation. And **only a third** believe their manager was an accurate source of information.

Management of remote workers longer-term is also a potentially new challenge as we start to understand the art of interpreting tone and inference that can be clumsily communicated over video or email.

Predicting the death of the office may be slightly premature, but the emergence of a more agile, connected workforce seems a safer bet.

ESSENTIAL READING:



Janet Mesh on Trello

How To Set Strong Work-Life Boundaries As A Remote Worker

HR Zone

How To Establish An Inclusive Culture While Remote Working

Redefining Communications

What remote workers want from internal communications

Deborah Grayson Riegel on Inc.com

How to Show Warmth When You're Working Virtually

TOP TIPS

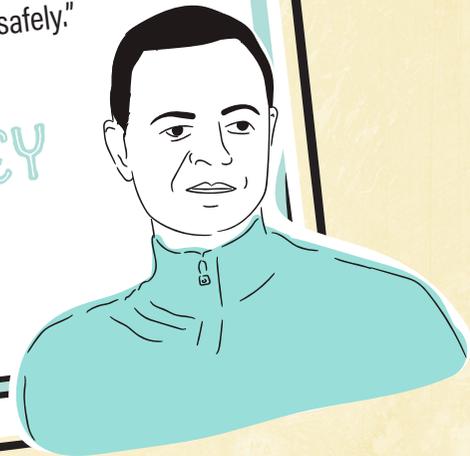
"It seems like everybody has begun to adapt to their new lives at home, from our kids having digital birthday parties to universities adapting to remote learning. Your front-line workers will have ideas to help everyone make the most out of the opportunities and overcome the hurdles. What challenges have remote working brought about and how have you overcome them? How should we adapt our remote working policy to best support you? What are the key elements that we should include/change?"

GEORGE BRITTON
EMPLOYEE IDEAS
PLATFORM, SIDEWAYS6.



"Homeworking takes discipline and a simple approach to your to-do lists. But it's also important to understand when you are at your creative best. It's different for all of us. I'm not at my creative best first thing - I need a coffee to come around. So first thing I tend to do my admin chores. My best thinking and ideas come later in the day so I set this aside for my creative thinking. I think organisations should put in place 2020 post-COVID learnt homeworking policies to safeguard those of us that can stray outside of core hours. It's so easy to work beyond what we are meant to and that is fine short term, but long term it can have an impact on your personal life and not in a good way. Let's safeguard each other to ensure we deliver but deliver safely."

DARREN CAVENEY
COMMS2POINTO





THE COMMS RENAISSANCE



Almost half of you said you thought there would be a greater appreciation for comms within your organisations.

At the start of 2020, a conversation was simmering away within the comms community over requests for 'comms magic' and applying 'comms fairy dust' to projects.

The beef was this belied the importance of comms and its strategic place in organisations.

Fast forward a few months and that conversation has gone pretty **quiet**.

Not that magic has not been delivered by the top hat-full but there won't be

many places that now see quality comms as a nice-to-have or an annoying irrelevance.

Within so many organisations, the coronavirus response has = comms.

Trust in comms has rocketed.

With messages and advice changing so quickly, arcane and frustrating approval processes have been ditched and comms handed the responsibility.



Senior leaders and managers have begun to see that when able to focus on a strategic priority and not drowned in 'ASAP' requests, **comms will deliver all day long.**

Encouragingly, staff comms – particularly around wellbeing and mental health - has become **central** to every organisation. The rise and rise of internal comms should be one of the pandemic's more pleasing long-term effects.

The pandemic may have been about crisis comms in the main, but teams have also shown admirable creativity and foresight in planning campaigns to celebrate staff, communities and volunteers, as well as looking further down the track.

What happens next could be a defining moment for comms and their place in organisational culture.

The signs are good. We're already hearing from emboldened comms teams who, rather than being sapped by the last few months, have seen it **re-energise** them and are preparing to seize the moment in establishing a new comms order.

People and culture have never been more **important** and it's comms that will curate this new abnormal.



So, pack the magic wands away for now and bring on the comms renaissance.

ESSENTIAL READING:



Ben Capper on comms2point0

When this is over: the comms community's 10 hopes for the post-COVID world

Stephen Waddington on Wadds.Inc

The talent crisis to come: flexibility and inequality

Edelman Trust Barometer COVID special

The most credible source of information is employer communications

TOP TIPS

"It is great to hear comms teams becoming more valued. You have absolutely earned that appreciation through their skills, counsel and hard work. The trick now is keeping that recognition going. Now is the time to grab that opportunity by forcing good comms practice during the next stages of the crisis - we need strategic, insight-led, smart, creative and evaluated comms which is reported back to all senior people regularly. Let's not let things go back to how they were. I'm convinced that part of the reason for this increased appreciation is that comms teams haven't been spread too thin and asked to concentrate on non-priority work as much during COVID. So let's drive home this advantage which has been so hard earned and ensure that we don't allow non-priority work demands to seep back in when we reach the recovery stage."



DARREN CAENEY
COMMS2POINTO

"Internal communicators have a real moment to be heard - the results of poor communication are hitting the headlines every day and now more than ever, leadership will be looking to us for guidance and insight - now is the time for us to step forward, be bold and to challenge. It's also more important than ever that we are informed, proactive and can prioritise where we add the most value. There's plenty we could do right now, but a strategic internal communicator knows what they need to do."

HELEN DEVERELL
INTERNAL COMMS CONSULTANT



"It's exciting that more internal communication professionals have gained access to leaders and virtual boardroom tables during the pandemic, but are practitioners using this opportunity? I hear of many communication professionals working around the clock delivering stuff versus strategy. The question to ask is: did you contribute to the noise or the strategy? We know that many have been doing their best under difficult and unplanned circumstances, but the real opportunity to drive appreciation is in the debrief. Use it to demonstrate your role and what you delivered, to evaluate what worked and what didn't when it comes to people, processes and platforms. Make sure you make clear recommendations that encourage investments so that the next time the organisation finds itself in a crisis, you don't have to be invited to support, because you are already there."

PRIYA BATES
COMMUNICATIONS AND
ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE
STRATEGIST





A WORKPLACE FOR EVERYONE

Conversations around inclusion and diversity (I&D) might have seemed less important given the global focus on health.



Indeed, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) recently found that **just 5%** of UK employers had I&D in their top three HR priorities a month into the lockdown, compared to **14% before**.

Yet the response to the crisis has actually fostered a **far higher** level of care and understanding in organisations. Almost by accident, inclusion has become central to the way we work and live.

The CIPD found **two-thirds** of employers said they had explicitly considered the needs and concerns of different groups during the crisis. Wellbeing and mental health have become top priorities. It's I&D as mainstream and business as usual (BAU)

rather than an afterthought or function.

As other events around the world sharpen the focus on the diversity conversation further, it has become clear that **I&D** will need to **remain at the heart** of organisational culture.

Inclusive and flexible managers will be critical and make a difference to their people as lockdowns are eased. Encouragingly, the CIPD found that **nearly half** of employers have stepped up support for managers in this area.



"I've often said that strong internal communication in organisations is not about managing campaigns, but managing conversations. Never has the conversation been more important than the one we're having globally about systemic bias and the impact of privilege. The truths being spoken seem at odds with the hollow statements reflected in values and diversity and inclusion programs professed by organisations. Beyond our platitudes and promises, employees and customers are now looking for processes, practices, and proof of commitment. This is both the challenge and the opportunity. Our eyes cannot unsee the all- or mostly-white leaders of our organisations, governments and institutions. We cannot unhear the jokes and derogatory statements spoken in back rooms and boardrooms. We cannot unfeel the unrest when we realise that our systems and ourselves perpetuate and support discrimination. Organisations have the opportunity to acknowledge, listen, and fix inequities and internal communication professionals have the opportunity to lead the conversation to champion change."

PRIYA BATES

COMMUNICATIONS AND
ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE STRATEGIST



Empathy and sensitivity have **rocketed in importance** when it comes to leadership skills. Not always a comfortable fit for those at the top, these softer, more nuanced abilities have come to the fore as displaying humanity and understanding have become integral to how organisations function.

A **diverse range** of experiences, opinions and thoughts will also be **vital** to fuel the innovation and creativity that will help build businesses back up.

Policies and ideas sourced from a diverse pool will best help address the many challenges to come.



In the new world of remote working, **organisations may have to work harder** to make this happen. Technology has presented us with new questions about inclusion.



Is everyone heard on a Zoom call, or do more introverted team members struggle?

Does everyone even have the capacity or personal circumstances to be able to work remotely?



Working flexibly and remotely has also been seen as mainly craved by women trying to balance family life and work. Will this gender-biased assumption now be put to rest when everyone, from the CEO to the admin assistant, is home working?

Kindness and humanity have flowed through communities and societies in the last few months. The same is now expected within organisations, which have the **opportunity to adapt and evolve** to create a more inclusive environment for everyone.

Your inclusion and diversity checklist:



The CIPD's

TOP 5

action areas for organisations



Involve everyone

Inclusion is built by people, so clear standards of behaviour should be set around treating others with dignity and respect, and a safe environment should be provided for challenging exclusive practices. Introduce discussion and opportunity to talk about inclusion in relation to job roles at all levels.



Support for managers

A person's relationship with their manager is often key to their experience at work, so leaders must be supported with training and development to address any biases and ensure everyone is treated equally and respectfully.



Commitment from the top

Senior leaders set the tone for behaviour and their advocacy for inclusion should be encouraged and fostered. They should openly champion inclusive activities and develop self-awareness to understand their own biases.



Policies and practices

The frameworks that support inclusion must be relevant and current. Can mechanisms, both formal and informal, be improved to enhance inclusion, for example, those that provide employee voice? Are specific policies needed to support specific groups or needs, and how widely are these communicated?



Culture and values

An inclusive climate comes from people valuing difference and feeling empowered in decision-making. Is this backed up by policies and senior buy-in? Do your norms and values align with inclusive practices and policies, and do people understand their role?

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED



Abnormal and unusual we can do.

Dealing in the peculiar, the unfamiliar or the downright weird is just the Alive way. So, if you're struggling to make sense of the unknowns and the unexpected, get in touch and let's navigate the new abnormal together.

Connect with us...

Email us: hello@alivewithideas.com

Blog: alivewithideas.com/blog

Website: alivewithideas.com

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alive.

Creativity in your corner!

