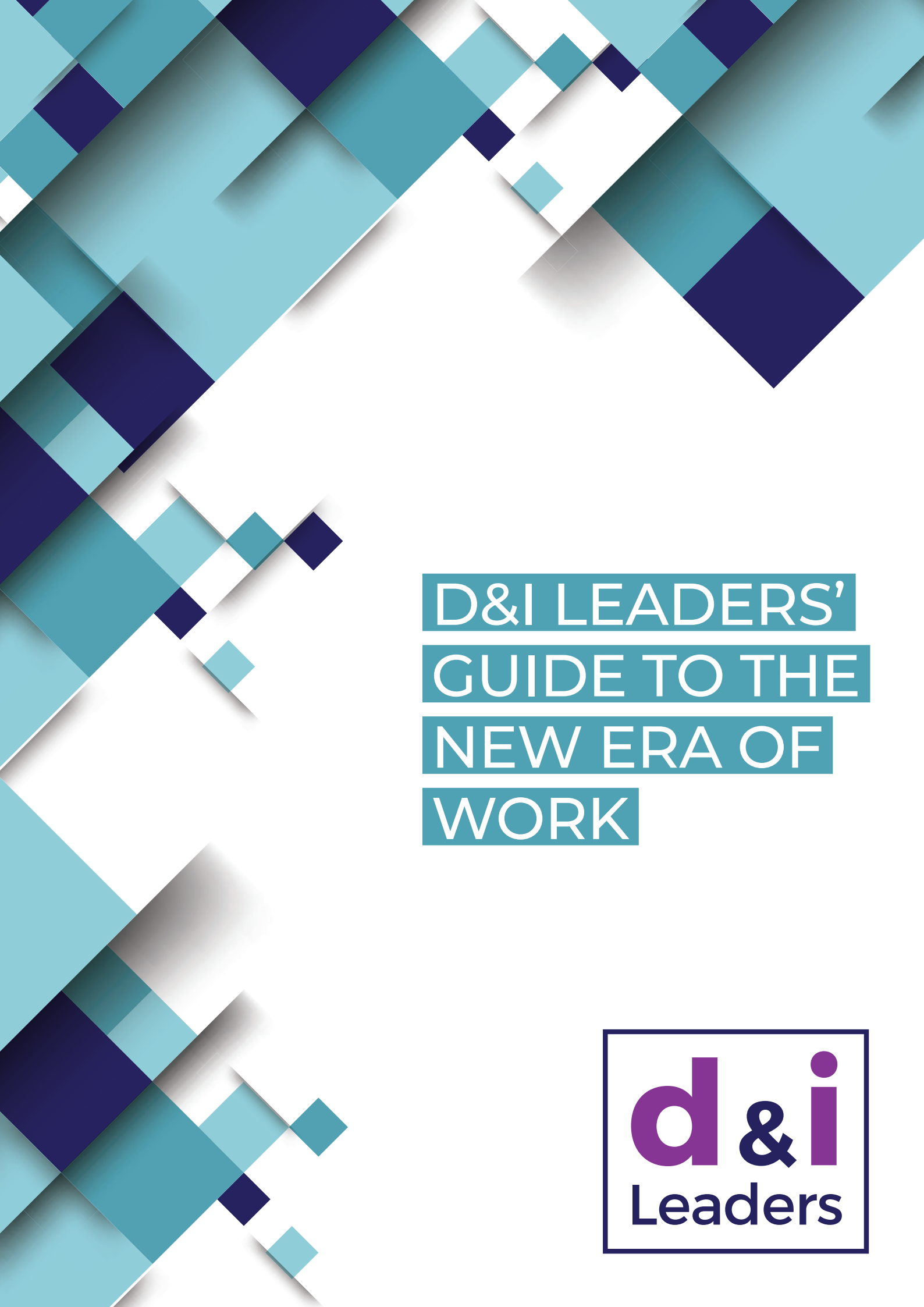




D&I LEADERS' GUIDE TO THE NEW ERA OF WORK



INTRODUCTION

On 1 August, the government changed its guidance for employers in England. Instead of encouraging employees to work from home where possible to minimise the risks of coronavirus infection, it was now up to organisations to use their discretion if they wanted to bring staff back into the office.

The hint was clear: getting people back to work would (in the words of the Prime Minister) “give people hope and give businesses confidence” and would send a clear signal that the economy was getting back on its feet. Yet many businesses had embraced the switch to remote working: the Office for National Statistics reported that almost half of people in employment did at least some of their work from home during lockdown, and many organisations reported increased productivity and employee engagement. Some reported that remote working had had a positive impact on inclusion for their organisation, with managers showing greater levels of empathy for others’ circumstances and Zoom calls breaking down traditional office hierarchies.

Not surprisingly, a huge number of businesses now feel reluctant to perform a wholesale return to the office and revert to how they operated before. Household names such as Facebook,

Twitter and Fujitsu have announced ‘work from anywhere’ policies that stretch well into 2021 and beyond. Other employers are considering how they can create better agile and flexible working policies going forward - whether that means a hybrid workforce (some at home and some in an office); adaptable shift patterns/days; or only bringing people physically to an office when that suits the task at hand (such as project collaborations).

So how do organisations manage the shift to this ‘new normal’ in a fair and equitable way? D&I professionals should be at the centre of discussions and helping to shape policies around flexible working, applying learnings from how different groups’ experience of the pandemic has impacted their needs in this new environment.

In this guide, d&i Leaders looks at how employers and diversity practitioners view the post-pandemic workplace, how best practice might look and what that means for the role of D&I.



Mark Baker,
Founder, d&i Leaders

WHAT WILL YOUR RETURN TO WORK LOOK LIKE?

Firstly, it's important to look at how employees feel about a potential return to the office, or how they envisage working in the post-pandemic world. LinkedIn recently surveyed more than 7,000 people for its Workforce Confidence Index, and found that 60% are worried about exposure to others if they return to work, while a third (35%) are concerned about commuting.

"Companies that are reopening workplaces are putting health and safety as a top priority, and ensuring they're listening to and acting on the concerns of their employees, which is paramount to maintaining trust," explains Janine Chamberlin, a director at the professional network. "As normality starts to resume, we're likely to see a more 'blended' work experience emerge, where people have greater choice around where and when they work."

"Physical offices will still be important to many companies and are likely to serve as centres of culture, collaboration and connection. However, a more flexible future is inevitable, particularly with some organisations noting higher

levels of engagement and productivity during this time, which will ultimately be good for people and business. HR professionals will play a crucial role

60%
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in shaping the future of work and ensuring employees are set up for success."

The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) believes organisations have four main options when it comes to navigating new arrangements:

- To continue working from home until social distancing restrictions are relaxed;
- To delegate the decision to employees by opening the office and asking if they would like to attend;
- To fully re-open, making a return to the office compulsory from a certain date; and
- To remain completely closed, with staff on furlough until the scheme ends.

35%
are concerned
about commuting



WHAT WILL YOUR RETURN TO WORK LOOK LIKE? continued

The CIPD argues it will be important for employers to ensure that - in whatever decision they make - they maintain an inclusive culture. "The uneven nature of people's work and personal experiences and the challenging nature of the lockdown and ongoing situation, means there could be potential for some negative feelings creeping into the employment relations climate," it advises. "Therefore, it's important that the organisation fosters an inclusive working environment, and managers are sensitive to any underlying tensions and confident about nipping potential conflict in the bud."

An essential part of doing that will be to listen to employees: many companies have used pulse surveys or similar tools to ask staff how they feel about their current work situation, whether they would like to physically return to the office, or whether they prefer to continue working from home.

"It's powerful to ask, but in the current time it's perhaps more powerful to listen," argues Lisa Kepinski, founder and director of Inclusion Institute and co-founder of Inclusion Nudges Global Initiative. "An engagement survey will only ask how someone experiences the workplace now, rather than things that might be happening outside for them. It can be incredibly powerful to ask about other influences in their life."

Claire McCartney, senior policy adviser for resourcing and inclusion at the CIPD, agrees: "We shouldn't assume that because people are working from home they have flexibility." She advocates empowering teams to decide rotas between them, if this works in terms of roles and tasks. "Rather than imposing arrangements centrally, this builds trust and people are more committed to making it work."



AN ENGAGEMENT SURVEY WILL ONLY ASK HOW SOMEONE EXPERIENCES THE WORKPLACE NOW, RATHER THAN THINGS THAT MIGHT BE HAPPENING OUTSIDE FOR THEM. IT CAN BE INCREDIBLY POWERFUL TO ASK ABOUT OTHER INFLUENCES IN THEIR LIFE."

Lisa Kepinski, founder and director of Inclusion Institute and co-founder of Inclusion Nudges Global Initiative

“THE GREAT RESET”

Some employers view the post-pandemic workplace as a clean slate, and are building innovative new strategies around flexible working, time management and where work takes place. The World Economic Foundation describes this window of opportunity as ‘the great reset’ - and while much of its focus is on global and social justice, this is a mindset organisations can embrace too.

Technology company Fujitsu, for example, has set out a vision of how work will look as the coronavirus eases its grip. ‘Work Life Shift’ is billed as a “campaign to redefine working styles”, introducing new ways of working that will empower employees, make them more productive and boost creativity and innovation. Construction company Skanska also plans to re-launch its approach to agile and flexible working in the autumn, known as ‘Back to Better’, which will introduce flexible working

for all roles, outlining how this will work depending on someone’s job, personal circumstances and working conditions.

How this looks for your organisation will depend on a host of factors: your sector, different job roles, workforce demographics to name just a few. But already companies are looking at more agile approaches, including:

- **Staggered starts** or people attending on certain days/weeks

- **‘Work from anywhere’** strategies so the **focus is on output** rather than when or where someone performs their work

- **Hybrid approaches** where some team members work from home, others from the office - but **all communicate over digital media such as Zoom**

- Creating **office hubs** where people come together much less frequently but when there’s a need to collaborate, for example **product innovation or a training day**

- **Ad-hoc team gatherings** where most work is done from home/virtually, but people meet with colleagues to **catch up and bond**.



THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

At the start of the pandemic, digital platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams played a huge role in the success of moving office-based teams to home and virtual environments in a matter of days. Collaboration tools such as Slack have enabled teams to work productively on joint projects, while mental health initiatives and Friday get-togethers have been propelled into a virtual world.



But technology has also had its downsides. A recent study of more than 3 million workers by the National Bureau for Economic Research in the US found increases in the length of the average workday of 48.5 minutes; while another survey of UK employees suggested many were adding as much as two hours to their average day. In some cases, being able to connect online has inadvertently created a 'virtual presenteeism' where employees feel compelled to show they're visible by being in constant online meetings.

"If you take this draconian approach where you're constantly pushing people for more productivity, rather than as

much as they can give given the unusual situation, productivity will go down as you're not caring for your people," says Amri B. Johnson, CEO of inclusion consultancy Inclusion Wins. Instead, organisations should look to technology as a way of building connectivity and ensuring everyone can contribute. He adds: "Sometimes employees need time to just sit down and talk as they would in the office, so be deliberate about check-ins, putting time on the calendar where employees can check in with their manager or someone with the relevant expertise they need."

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Amri B. Johnson, CEO of Inclusion Wins

THINKING ABOUT DIFFERENT GROUPS

Gamiel Yafai, founder of D&I consultancy and coaching company Diversity Marketplace, believes a good starting point for building more equitable policies and processes as we emerge from the pandemic is the guidance offered by the Equality Act 2010. "It urges organisations to have 'due regard' for everyone, that policies and practices don't adversely impact any particular group," he explains. "If you follow its guidelines, they're good business practice."

With this in mind, consider how any changes to how you work will affect groups that come under the nine protected characteristics covered in the Act. Even better, consider other factors such as social mobility and develop policies from an intersectional point of view.

Here are a few examples of issues facing different groups that organisations should consider when developing agile and flexible working approaches:

Disability adjustments: if the office has been adapted for social distancing reasons, have disabled employees been consulted? How will neurodiverse employees be supported if they continue to work from home (do they have the right software? Are they supported socially?)

Childcare issues: uncertainty around whether schools will open and the potential for local lockdowns may mean parents need to drop work commitments at short notice. Parents that work from home with preschool children may prefer to work non-standard hours until childcare arrangements are more stable. How should managers respond?

Generations at work: In employee surveys, younger employees tend to be most likely to request a return to the office due to unsustainable working circumstances at home (a flat share, living with their parents). At the same time, some older workers may fall into risk categories or need to self-isolate, so how can you ensure your policies are as age-agnostic as possible?

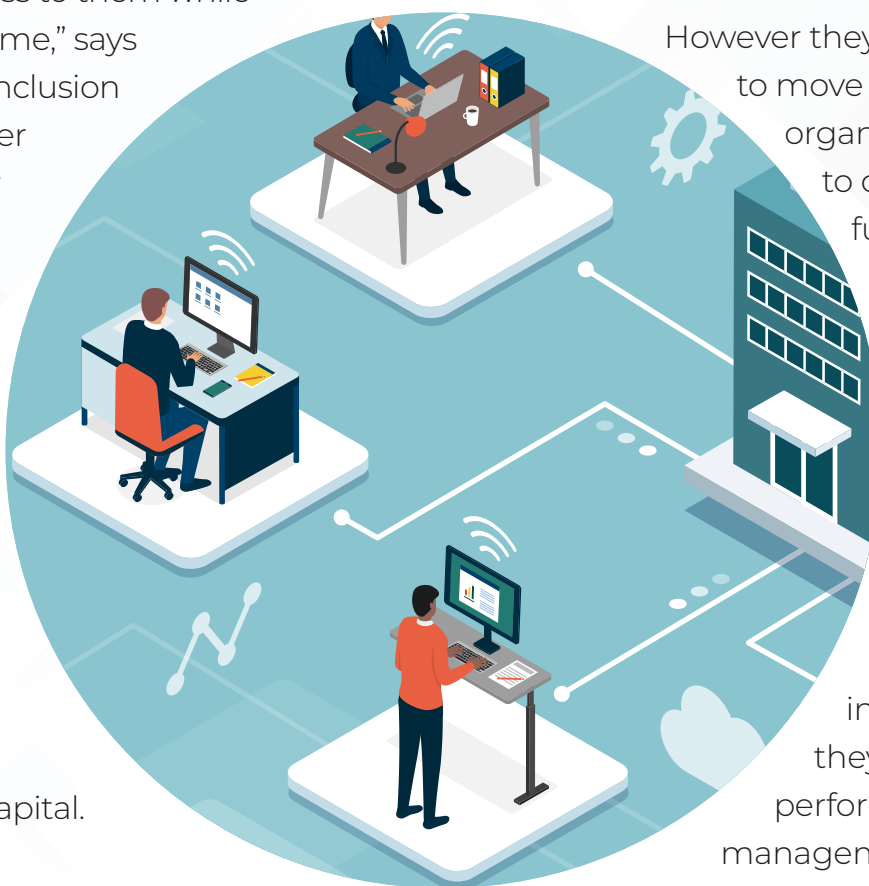
Support for employee networks: How does this transition to the office if some employees return? Are there ways to step up support and visibility of networks, particularly as many will not be able to hold their usual events?

[THE EQUALITY ACT] URGES ORGANISATIONS TO HAVE 'DUE REGARD' FOR EVERYONE, THAT POLICIES AND PRACTICES DON'T ADVERSELY IMPACT ANY PARTICULAR GROUP

Gamiel Yafai, founder of D&I consultancy and coaching company Diversity Marketplace

AVOIDING 'PROXIMITY BIAS'

"If the people in power are in the workplace, the people in the office will have more access to them while others are at home," says Johnson from Inclusion Wins. The danger in bringing only a portion of the workforce back to the office, he explains, is creating a proximity bias where those that return to the physical workspace end up making decisions and gaining social capital.



working approaches, to ensure their voices are heard.

However they decide to move forward, organisations need to design their future set-ups in a way that mitigates an 'us and them' workforce that is half at home and half at work. This includes how they approach performance management and reward, adds Johnson:

Dr Mariann Hardey, an associate professor in marketing at Durham Business School, agrees. "If you are a CEO you want an office, it reflects your stake in the company, your position, you're not hot desking. Organisations need to consider different needs - people will have their own experience of what's OK for them and that will frame how they return to work," she says. One option is to ask employees to form groups to investigate different

"This is a huge opportunity to design performance management not around visibility, but what someone has produced given the circumstances around that output. Focus on equity and context - does someone get a smaller bonus because they've produced something while they're managing children versus someone else, for example?"

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PUSHING THE GENDER AGENDA FORWARDS

Numerous studies have shown that women have borne the brunt of the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic. In July, campaign group Pregnant Then Screwed surveyed around 20,000 working mothers and found that 15% had either been made redundant or expected to be; 46% said a lack of childcare provision played a role in their redundancy; 72% had to work fewer hours because of childcare issues; and 65% of mothers that had been furloughed said lack of childcare was the reason. The disproportionate impact on women is the subject of one of three inquiries by the Women and Equalities Committee (the others being BAME individuals and disabled people).



more agile approaches to working in the coming months. “Despite initiatives like shared parental leave, the ‘norm’ is still overwhelmingly that the women take the lead on childcare and are the ones to work part time or flexibly,” she says.

“More than 6 million women work part-time in the UK, whereas just 2 million men do the same. Sadly during lockdown we have seen women more likely to be furloughed, made redundant or felt forced to give up work and lack of childcare has been a contributor.”

72%

had to work fewer hours because of childcare issues

Claire Campbell, programme director at Timewise, believes it’s crucial that organisations don’t let this inequality become further embedded as they shape

There are two key actions companies can take to tackle this, she adds: “Firstly tackling the myth that part time can’t work at senior levels by showcasing senior people who do work less and secondly by ensuring that flexible working is discussed and considered for everyone, whatever the reason, so that it becomes the norm.”

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Claire Campbell, programme director at Timewise

PUSHING THE GENDER AGENDA FORWARDS continued

Employers can and should get on the front foot with flexible working requests, too: “We are advising employers to lead the conversation about ways of working for the future. A survey or chat forum can be a great way of engaging employee opinion as a whole, backed up by both individual and team conversations. As an employer, think through which types of flexible working will work well in your organisation, and any that won’t work, so you can give people a framework which supports your organisation.”

Claire McCartney from the CIPD argues that flexible working is just one part of the solution, and refers HR and diversity teams to guidance from the Government Equalities Office: “There are lots of evidence-based strategies in that advice that we must focus on if we’re not to run the risk of going backwards,” she says. Suggestions include ensuring female representation on assessment and recruitment panels, more

transparency around salary ranges and forming a diversity committee or board that can hold business to account on its diversity initiatives. Filing your gender pay gap report for 2019 - even though this requirement was postponed in March 2020 - will also show commitment to the cause.

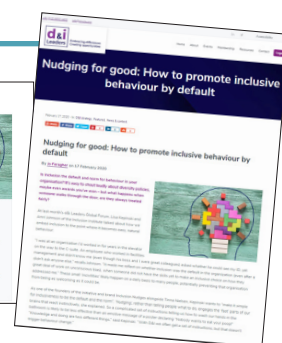
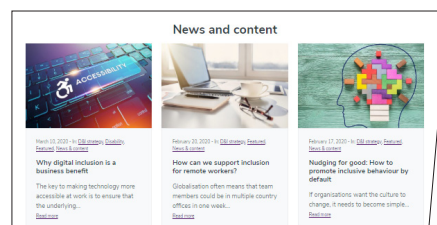
And while recruitment may not be a priority at the moment, a progressive approach to accommodating different arrangements will support you to attract female talent in the future. Campbell says: “We know a positive approach to flexible working is a key attraction factor to talent when job hunting, and contributes to real estate savings [as there are fewer people in the office at the same time].” This is why we have been advising employers to go on this journey for the last eight years, even before lockdown was a thing. It’s what employees want and organisations who can get it right will benefit in terms of diversity and engagement of talent.”

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Claire Campbell, programme director at Timewise



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WHAT NOW? REFRAMING YOUR APPROACH

The pandemic has highlighted a demand for greater agile and remote working that was there already, but has accelerated the need to meet this demand. What are some of the practical considerations when reviewing and adapting HR processes and systems?

What will work and what won't?

Before you even deal with requests for greater flexibility, it's important to review what that might look like for your organisation. Campbell from Timewise advises: "As an employer, think through which types of flexible working will

work well in your organisation, and any that won't

work, so you can give people a framework which supports your organisation

- such as how many days a week might it be good for people to be in the office? Are there any 'core' times where people need to be



CASE STUDY: ROCHE

As a healthcare provider to the NHS, the People & Culture team at Roche was in the positive position of not having to place any employees on furlough during the pandemic. "The make-up of our business meant that lots of people could work from home, while we kept those on the front line as safe as possible," says Nebel Crowhurst, people and culture director at the healthcare company.

Moving into the next phase, the company is looking at what it has learned during lockdown and how it can take this forward, with a strategy known as 'Back to Better'. "We're looking at how we work in a more agile way, as Covid-19 has catalysed the need to look again at remote and flexible working," she adds. "It seems wrong to have flexible and policy in the same

sentence, and we want to shift and evolve, challenge the status quo." They are doing this through a series of project workstreams, considering whether a 'location-agnostic' approach might work.

Co-creation and employee voice are an essential part of the process, and Roche has invited employees from across the business who feel passionately about moving to new ways of working. A listening group called 'What's Brewing?' feeds back on employees' perceptions of what's working well and what isn't. "With any decision you make, the employee voice is vital. In a leadership role or HR you can think you know best, but unless you open that dialogue how can you know? Some circumstances are so nuanced. You want people to feel they were part of the solution, and feel pride," Crowhurst explains.

Offices are open and there will be a phased return depending on government guidance, but whether employees return will remain flexible and as part of a dialogue with their manager. "We want to get to a place where there's real choice over where people work, how they work and when. We're also looking at how we connect with our customers - including the NHS - and continue to provide the best service without creating risks for employees," says Crowhurst. She is also keen not to create a 'half and half' workforce that pitches those at home against those in the office and is non-inclusive. "We want to break down those silos between those in the field and in the office, move away from 'owning your spot' and change our culture around how people operate," she concludes.

WHAT NOW? REFRAMING YOUR APPROACH continued

available for key meetings? In this way, you can help people find a type of flexibility which works for them and the business.”

Educate managers

This is likely to happen, so be prepared and educate managers on how to have these conversations in an inclusive way. Campbell adds: “Alongside this framework, the other important thing for employers to do is train managers to feel confident in flexible job design, handling flexible working conversations and leading flexible teams.”

Avoid one-size-fits-all

Just as everyone’s experience of the pandemic has been different, so will their needs as we move into longer term working arrangements. Consider targeted support, for example, for those with childcare issues or those without a suitable home workspace. “Some specific examples we have seen would be funding online learning for children at home; providing people with additional paid leave for caring responsibilities during this time and ensuring people who record hours on timesheets have a code they can use whenever they need to for non-work commitments with no judgment,” adds Campbell.

Set boundaries

Stephen Frost, founder of Frost Included and co-author of Building an Inclusive Organization, believes that despite the freedom to work from home during the pandemic, many employees will have felt a loss in boundaries - responding to emails at unusual times or feeling unable to switch off as their workspace is their place

of relaxation, too. “An inclusive perspective will acknowledge that people work best when they can have their own margins of productivity,” he says. “So maybe you work best little and often or someone prefers a long day. It’s a challenge where line managers need to be both prescriptive and nuanced at the same time - for example setting clear ‘on and off’ times or mandating away time from a screen.”

Get feedback and adjust

Johnson advocates a “robust organisational listening strategy” that asks employees not just about what’s not working, but what they are finding useful. “You don’t know whether something works unless people say it does. So think about how you amplify the positive, as well as thinking about where the gaps are. What works for this group? Could this work for others too?”

Use this opportunity to build trust

According to David Liddle, CEO of The TCM Group, a conflict resolution specialist, says this is a unique opportunity for HR “to remodel itself as a people and culture function” and to take some of the adversarial elements out of policies and systems. So rather than making employees try to fit into rigid policy frameworks, organisations should be moving towards their people’s needs. “We need to meet people half way - the workforce has proven that it can be trusted without micromanagement, people have often been working more than they needed to - but now there should be greater focus on compassion and empathy.”

THE ROLE OF D&I: TIME TO STEP UP

As organisations prepare for either a return to work, continued homeworking or a mix of the two, the role of D&I professionals will be as advocates, says Lisa Kepinski of the Inclusion Nudges Global Initiative. “This is a heavy burden for D&I leaders - we’re asked to go and fix something and that can mean we’re set up for failure,” she says. “We might not have HR on our side, or there are good intentions but the actions are not happening.”

One way D&I professionals can overcome these barriers and advocate effectively for under-represented groups is to tell their stories, she says. One exercise that can help with this is to capture stories through speech bubbles using employee networks or in conjunction with leaders. This can be done remotely, focusing on colleagues’ concerns and their experiences of the pandemic. “This can capture the essence of someone’s experience of coming to work, but also what happens at home, their whole person. It activates emotional reactions and gets leaders engaged.”

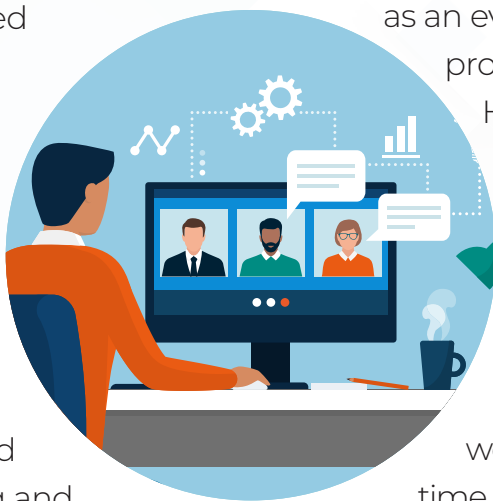
Gamiel Yafai agrees that stories are one of the best ways to amplify the voices of those who need it. “Sometimes you need to show people where they are. Most of the people you’re trying to help are not in the decision-making groups and there are not enough in senior management

to be heard.” Gathering these stories as an evidence base means D&I professionals can then work with HR and managers to develop agile and flexible working approaches that are inclusive.

Looking forward

While the Labour Party and unions have argued for flexible working as a day one right for some time, it’s likely that the pandemic will see many more employers embracing it as a default. Recruitment may be slow with a recession on the horizon, but the trust an organisation shows to its workers could be a deciding factor in talented recruits choosing to work there. In most cases, the pandemic has accelerated a shift to a more trusting relationship between organisations and employees that work can be done anywhere.

D&I professionals must now step up to ensure that progress doesn’t go backwards.



LIST OF RESOURCES

- Timewise: Line manager guide to dealing with flexible working
- Acas: Working safely during coronavirus: Returning to the workplace
- Government Equalities Office: Actions to close the gender pay gap
- Equality and Human Rights Commission: Equality Act Guidance
- CIPD: Returning to work after coronavirus

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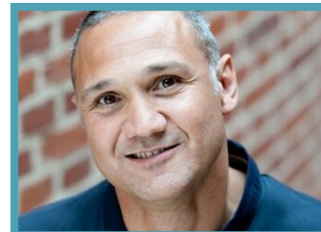
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