Inclusivity in this virtual world of work

Diversity creates innovation, but how can we make our workplace more inclusive in the ever-changing world? Inclusivity is having a sense of belonging. It can be difficult to accommodate everyone’s needs, or is that just a mindset that has stopped us from progressing?

The recent crisis has forced us into a new unknown world, everything we knew as normal, whether that be work life, social life and even family life has changed. Everything is now conducted at home; work, keeping healthy and even, strangely enough, socialising. One of the challenges we face is how do we keep inclusivity in the virtual world? In this blog I’ll talk about my and other experiences in the hope that it helps others.

Keeping in Touch

As a Faraday Institution Research Fellow, my main responsibilities have been finding new ways to maximise the value of staring at a laptop all day. Instead of mixing chemicals and avoiding explosions in the lab I joined many groups on WhatsApp, Slack, Telegram, which helped with fostering a sense of belonging and enable me to keep up to date in a new virtual world. The university started a new Facebook support group and even my local community started a Facebook group to help the vulnerable in our area. There was so much help, support and energy coming from all directions it was refreshing and helped make the adjustment so much easier!

Zubera Iqbal is a Faraday Institution Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham, and member of the organisation’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, and provides her personal view...

Zoom meetings were welcomed, as they are a great to catch up with everyone (plus explore the virtual background settings!) It’s strange how you miss catching up with people on campus - the random conversations and knowing what day of the week it is! It was also good to hear updates on what the university was doing. I managed to get our group picture - can you spot any themes?

Dr Rob Sommerville from the ReLiB team also provided his experiences of the lockdown and how he’s been making the most of his time: “Whilst this is a very troubling time, I’m fortunate to be able to put isolation to use clearing a backlog of paperwork, and working on review papers. Our research group’s regular video calls allow me to keep in touch, and not feel isolated whilst working from home. In my spare time, I’ve been able to complete a couple of projects I’ve been putting off for a while.”
Challenges

Very quickly my calendar, as I’m sure yours was, became filled with meetings and I felt that I may have celebrated too soon. I watched the Royal Society of Chemistry talk on kindness, which focused on the topics of diversity and inclusion. It was refreshing to hear from all of the speakers including Dr Zoe Ayres, who is a research scientist and a mental health advocate who is very active on twitter (@ZJAyres). She gave an insight on how to manage your time best, and tips on how to manage your general health and wellbeing during lockdown. I’ve included a few tips from her above.

Dr Zoe’s top tips were: don’t feel guilty about relaxing, implement a routine with SMART goals and plan your day with time blocks so you can have rest periods without feeling guilty. Also remember most of the online meetings are recorded, so if you can’t attend you can catch up later. Consider getting your teams to shorten meetings from say 1 hour to 50 minutes instead, just so you can have a quick break before the next one starts.

Top Tips on Meetings, Inclusivity and Socialising

To the right are some great tips by Charlotte Caimino, Eszter Porter and Stephanie Pearson, who work in Hearing Sciences at the University of Nottingham. They listed some effective ways to help maintain the feeling of community and productivity in these unusual times, in the hope that it will help others. I do hope you will find some useful. In this time of change we can embrace new and creative ways of working that will help not only ourselves, but others feel connected and included.

About the Faraday Institution EDI Working Group

The Faraday Institution aspires to create a truly inclusive environment where all its researchers can thrive and feel a sense of belonging whilst empowering everyone to have a voice. We celebrate individuality and know that combining the skills and talents of a dynamic and diverse community brings great strength. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, headed up by CFO Susan Robertson, is looking at positive ways to ensure these values are lived out throughout our community.

If you would like to raise an issue with the EDI Working Group or write an EDI blog, please contact Susan Robertson or Fran Long.

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