The Inclusion Initiative

# Virtual Inclusion in The City


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# Context

On March 16th 2020 the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson started giving the nation daily updates urging its citizens to work from home as part of the COVID-19 response.

Even before that date, over in the City of London, many firms had introduced working from home for a large proportion of their workers, expecting that they would soon no longer be able to travel to site. Therefore, throughout March 2020, as part of the COVID-19 response, financial and professional services firms made the transition from physical workspaces to virtual ones, with limited or no planning time. **Soon, save for those people nominated as key workers, such as certain traders and salespersons, the majority of employees from the City of London were working at home.** The first and biggest challenge to this transition was hardware based. If employees didn't have a laptop, monitor and a good working at home space there was a teething time to when they could effectively show up for work. Some firms took it upon themselves to provide this environment, purchasing and/or transporting what was required to their employee's homes. Others put the onus of assembling a home office on their employees, with some subsidising costs. There was also a learning curve with technologies, with some firms choosing and adopting quickly one preferred way to work virtually, and others relying on whatever was the meeting organiser's preferred option. This posed obvious inclusion challenges for colleagues that were less technology savvy. In the meantime, the high demand for network capacity in some home areas meant that virtual meetings could not necessarily run seamlessly.

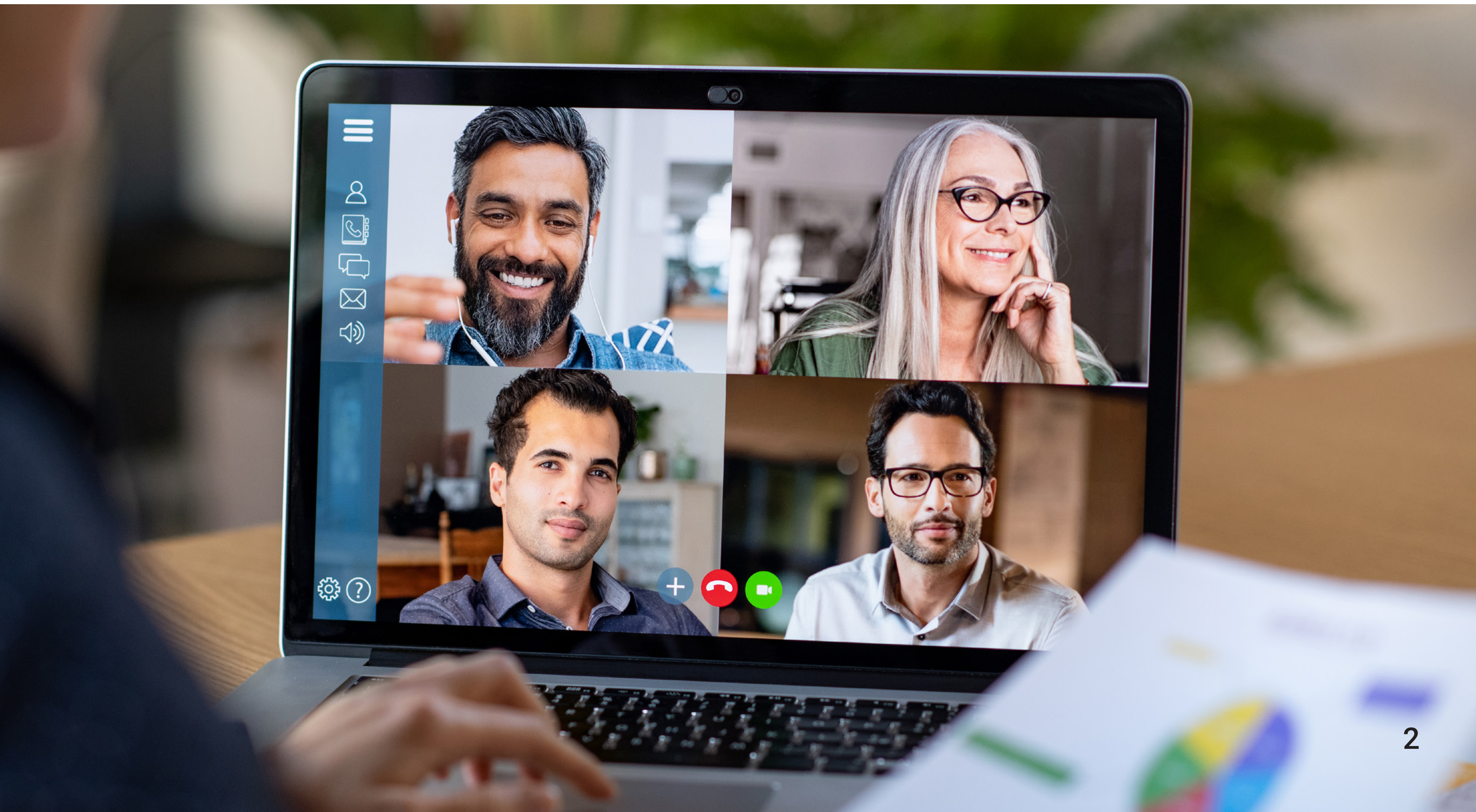
One month later, most organisations have moved beyond the initial hurdle of shifting their workforce to a virtual format, and are now **searching for a new definition of business as usual**. This need for a new business as usual model is echoed in the uncertainty of when lockdown will end for workers in the UK. It is also echoed in the sentiment that this may be the perfect time to figure out if agile working models can be operationalised well for specific worker types.

# Why Virtual Inclusion?

## In financial and professional services, we regularly organise people into teams to do work that is viewed as innovative, creative and/or strategic.

This can include product creation or the assessment of risk. During the COVID-19 response a major challenge is then to get teams working and deliberating effectively together.

Why do we care so much about having team discussions? The overall intuition is a belief that two heads are better than one, and that the outcomes we end up getting are greater than the sum of the parts. If we get inclusion right, both physically and virtually, there are big gains to bottom-line outcomes. For this to happen everyone needs to participate freely, have their voice heard in discussions and be motivated by goals that are collective rather than individualistic. **We need to have people with different perspectives and life experiences at the virtual table**. Empirical evidence from the lab and field suggests that this does not usually happen in physical settings, implying the outcomes we get from these discussions are sub optimal. There is no reason to expect anything different when we move to virtual discussions. The aim of this report is then to think about how we can enhance virtual inclusion during the COVID-19 response, in a manner that does not distract from the core business of the firm during this stressful time, but enhances both traditional business outcomes and employee wellbeing.



# Finding the Obstacles to Virtual Inclusion

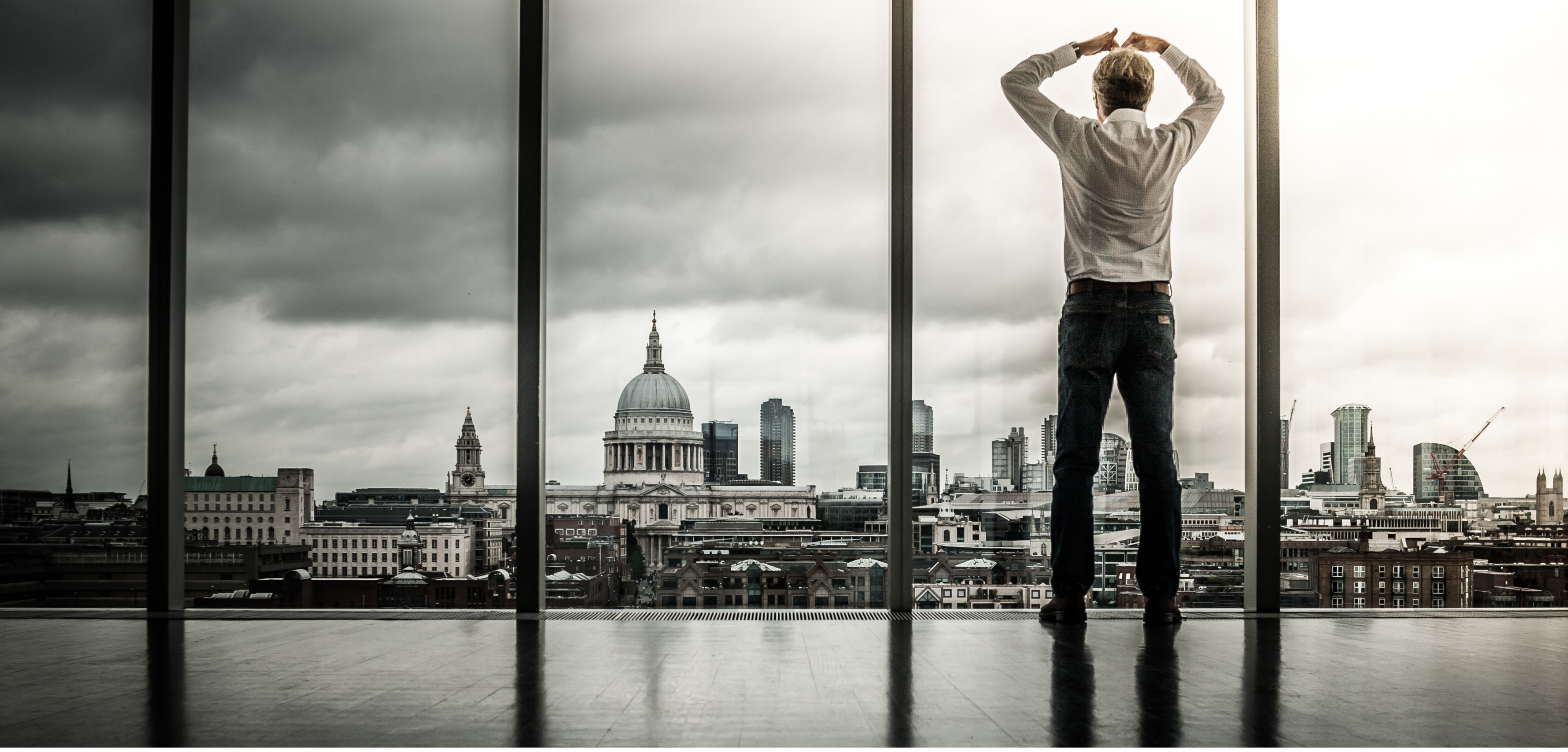
In order to understand the obstacles that stand in the way of virtual inclusion for the City of London's workers I went on a virtual listening tour engaging 35 of its most senior leaders.

These leaders came from 16 companies and comprised CEOs and other executive committee members (5), non-executive board (2), income generators - managing director level + or equivalent (15), senior HR (5) and senior non-HR functions (first line of defence, technology, risk and audit) (8). The companies represented were: Aberdeen Standard Capital, Alliance Bernstein, Allianz Global Investors, Citi, CIBC, Goldman Sachs, HSBC, ING, J.P. Morgan, Mustard Seed, NatWest, Rathbones, Refinitiv, Standard Chartered, Starling Bank and UBS. The following two questions were sent to the leaders that participated in an email with an option to provide responses in writing (21 received) or via a video conference (14 received).

1. When  thinking of inclusivity when all team members are working at home, can you identify one best practice that you will definitely be using to manage your team?
2. When thinking of inclusivity when all team members are working at home, can you identify the biggest challenge or obstacle you expect to face with respect to keeping your team engaged in their daily tasks?

I complemented the comments received by the 35 senior leaders, leveraging my LinkedIn network and posting the same questions. From this I received 77 responses, of which 59 were from people that worked in the financial and professional services in the City of London. Their demographics varied widely in terms of position in their firm, age, gender and ethnicity. Together this approach allowed me identify the obstacles stated by senior leaders of the City of London to virtual inclusion during the COVID-19 response most often, and corroborate if they were echoed as important by others at various levels of seniority.

For this report I put a specific focus on question 2. **Specifically, I take the most often cited obstacles and emphasis the behavioural science insights that may help understand the root of the obstacle. For each obstacle I recommend three independent actions that can be carried out to help alleviate it**, leveraging both behavioural science insights and the best practice frequently cited by the senior leaders who participated.



# Problem 1: Physical distance can lead to psychological distance

When working at home there is a physical distance between co-workers, which if not paid attention to **can cause an increase in an employee's psychological distance from their firm**, owed to lower levels of social connectivity. Decreasing social connections among colleagues in financial and professional services causes lower levels of impromptu conversations that stimulate creative and innovative solutions, erodes attachment to the organisation and makes it even more difficult for managers to monitor the progress of their team members on core tasks. Together these consequences have obvious negative impacts on the day to day running of the firm, along with its future trajectory. In addition, lower levels of connectedness increase behavioural risk. This arises as psychological distance, independent of physical distance, is a factor that determines conduct and culture. This potential behavioural risk issue is exacerbated by the controls functions at many institutions being much less effective at monitoring home workers, making the need to pay attention to psychological distance all the more pertinent. Additionally, psychological distance makes it harder for managers to know if their team members are coping, as they can no longer simply walk around and identify persons who are stressed or burnt out.

## Action 1: Take steps to humanise interactions with colleagues

By paying attention to humanising our interactions with colleagues we can maintain high levels of psychological connectedness despite physical distance. **There is no doubt that we feel more connected by being able to see each other, versus simply being on a call.** Leveraging video technology, examples of humanising interactions with colleagues include, turning the coffee break into a virtual coffee break, scheduling water-cooler meetings with open agendas, having a buddy system that connects colleagues outside work hours and organising virtual meetings for the sole purpose of being social.

### Action 2: Actively seek feedback

We can decrease the psychological distance between ourselves and those we work with by actively seeking out, listening to and actioning their feedback. This sets off a virtuous cycle as **colleagues realize they are being listened to despite physical distance, lowering psychological distance**.

### Action 3: Open the virtual door

Making it known that there is a virtual open-door policy can help decrease psychological distance between co-workers. Practically this implies **keeping a video conference line open for the same time period each day for anyone to drop in**. This process can also be opened out to other colleagues that we are not directly working with who we wish to maintain ties too.

## Problem 2: Presenteeism may be replaced by virtual presenteeism

For some, the move to at home working has meant an increase in emails, impromptu phone-calls and instant messages. This barrage of communications, coupled with the fact that most technology platforms default to users being visible when online can lead to virtual presenteeism replacing physical presenteeism. In addition, it can have negative impacts on core business outcomes by crowding out the time needed to carry out complex tasks. **Whether designing a new product, coming up with a creative solution to a problem or assessing risk, we all need periods of time without interruptions.** The briefest of interruptions (like responding to a beep on a computer monitor) de-rails work flow, and causes mistakes to be made when concentrating on something challenging [1-2]. Interruptions don't just take up time in the moment. They also cause a need for more effort and time to return to the same level of flow experienced prior to the interruption. Interruptions also negatively affect wellbeing. They have been linked to irritability, depression and lower levels of job satisfaction across a variety of worker types and contexts [3-5].

### Action 1: Rethink attitudes to working at home

The mass move to working at home as part of the COVID-19 response is the perfect time to trial agile working, which can be a way to get the best out of talent if used effectively. Not everyone does their best work during core business hours. Devoting some resources to figuring out when individual employees are operating at their peak can allow firms to **deconstruct what the traditional working day looks like, in favour of a system that allows for individual differences in concentration style, while still maintaining some core hours for virtual team gatherings**. This approach gives employees more autonomy which has been linked to higher levels of productivity and worker wellbeing [6]. It also allows for the inclusion of a variety of different workstyles, beyond the traditional core hour working model, allowing more people to perform at their best. If operationalised effectively, during the COVID-19 response period, it can be directly cost effective in the long run, allowing firms to downsize on their space requirements as working at home is adopted permanently for staff within specific functions for a notable proportion of their time.

## Action 2: Have daily set times free of digital disruptions

Everyone needs to have some time in their day that is in an environment free of interruptions for tasks that require deep thinking. At the firm level, **set times when colleagues should not communicate with each other** except when it is objectively urgent.

## Action 3: Opt-out of being green online

As individuals we tend to follow the work habits of multiple comparable others. To ensure that virtual presenteeism doesn't become embedded in working from home culture, leaders within the firm can set new norms by having their on-line status set to 'away' for periods throughout the day. This **signals to team members that it is OK to a take time out from being virtually present**. In the same way, leaders can signal that work life balance is important by going off line outside the core working hours of the firm.

## Problem 3: Communication

The COVID-19 response has led to a period of great uncertainty for many employees. Many firms are going through a period of flux, for example downward demand shifts, changing modes of customer delivery and relocating workers from site to home. These changes increase the need for effective communications within the firm, but **it can be difficult to get key messages to land because of information overload**.

### Action 1: Give certainty

Giving certainty in a period of uncertainty can help employee wellbeing, with knock on effects to productivity. **Having an update message from the CEO or equivalent leader, which candidly describes the knock-on effects COVID-19 is having on the business prevents employees seeking out information to deal with their uncertainty**. Having to seek information exposes employees to anxiety and other negative emotions, which is compounded if the information they find lacks clarity, is incorrect or bears bad news. Information in this communication should be clear and to the point, with no room for misinterpretation, with an accompanying authentic message that encourages employees to look after their own health and wellbeing. The message should be sent out at a set day and time to provide certainty of when this key communication will arise and be written in plain language.

### Action 2: Make salient what is important

During this period of uncertainty, with the added complexity of a transition to at home working, **managers should provide clarity to team members on what tasks are pressing, and identify tasks that can be dropped or put on ice**. These messages can be delivered in virtual person ideally, with the major message on key tasks described early in the conversation, and re-iterated at the end of the conversation. This saliency helps provide clear messages to employees about what they should be focused on.

### Action 3: Pay attention to messenger effects and framing

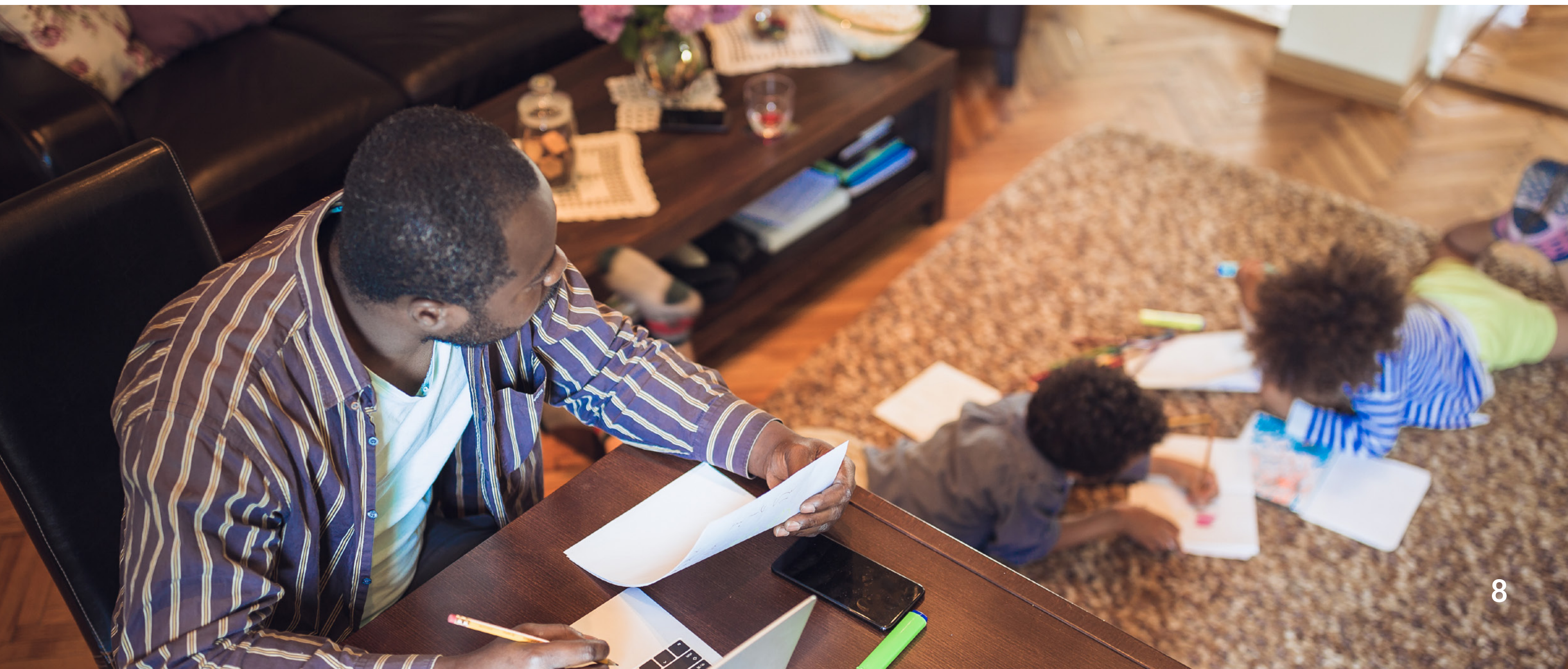
In action 1 it was recommended that the business effects of COVID-19 are communicated regularly by the leader of the organisation in plain language. However, while the messenger effect in behavioural science highlights that we are heavily influenced by the person who communicates information, it is not always a given that these messages should come from the top of the organisation. **Firms can have more effective communications if they devote time to understanding how best to frame their desired message, and who the ideal messenger should be at any one occasion**. Framing and messenger effects are key behavioural science insights that can maximise any communications probability of being successful.

# Problem 4: In-groups

COVID-19, along with being a major health shock, has brought major economic uncertainty, causing increased pressures for many workers in the financial and professional services industry as they grapple with large swings in global markets, and increasing job insecurity for others. **During times of economic uncertainty, it has been shown that employees are more likely to form in-groups**, usually along some dimension of similarity [7]. This has a potentially detrimental impact for inclusion. Additionally, individuals have been shown to favour members of their own group at the expense of members of other groups, even if securing this outcome creates economic inefficiencies [8]. In-groups can cause hoarding of information, exclusion from key conversations and impact on who gets assigned key projects. **In-groups increase the risk of tunnel vision** and decrease the likelihood that diverse input is sought out when engaged in strategic decision making. The creation and maintenance of in-groups is often unconscious, exacerbated in the current context by pressures causing a natural inclination to surround ourselves with those we feel comfortable with.

### Action 1: Make salient that diverse perspectives add value

During team meetings, as a group, call to mind the customers that the team are trying to serve and the pressures these customers now face. Ask whether these customers are well represented by who is sitting at the table, **emphasising the differences in perspective around the table as a definite positive**. Approaching team meetings by making salient the value of having different voices in this way makes it more likely that in-groups do not monopolise the conversation, and later, that they do not over-allocate stretch tasks among themselves.



### Action 2: Identify weak ties to bridge information silos

In-groups within an organisation cause information silos. However, **ensuring that information diffuses effectively within organisations is key to their success**, as are strategic collaborations across teams. Monitoring how teams interact with one another in medium to large organisations can make salient if one team is siloed or excluded, so that it can be addressed by management. This can be easily achieved with social network mapping utilising data on individual communications, which is easier at a time when all key communications have moved online. This exercise also allows weak ties in the organisation to be identified, and for this information to be used to encourage these key individuals to bridge information silos.

### Action 3: Audit who gets what and why

Day to day opportunities include stretch project assignments, exposure to networking opportunities and having a seat at the table to input into important conversations. Ensuring there is inclusivity in these opportunities, during the COVID-19 response, is key to keeping talent moving along the pipeline. **Auditing opportunities makes salient who in the organisation is missing out**, and whether the underlying cause may be in-groups. This is most easily done for project assignments, and can be reviewed on a monthly basis to ensure that managers are giving their entire team an opportunity to grow. **Drawing attention to the fact that this monitoring is happening encourages managers themselves to pay attention to their allocations**, allowing them to self-correct any favouritism.

## Problem 5: Virtual groupthink

Recall the last virtual meeting you were in. Did one person speak for the majority of the time? Did introverts participate significantly less than extroverts? Did many people avoid turning on the video function making it hard to decipher whether they were tuned out? If you answered yes to any of these questions it is highly likely your meeting was affected by groupthink. **Groupthink is a psychological phenomenon that steers a team away from well-evidenced decision making to the practice of making decisions as a group that are unchallenged because of a desire for conformity**. Groupthink is problematic for meetings whose primary goal is to solve complex problems, create new products or assess the financial payoffs of project options. We come together in groups because we believe that the outcomes, we end up getting, are greater than the sum of the parts. For this to hold true everyone needs to participate freely, have their voice heard in discussions and be motivated by goals that are collective rather than individualistic.

### Action 1: Intervene to ensure that all voices are heard

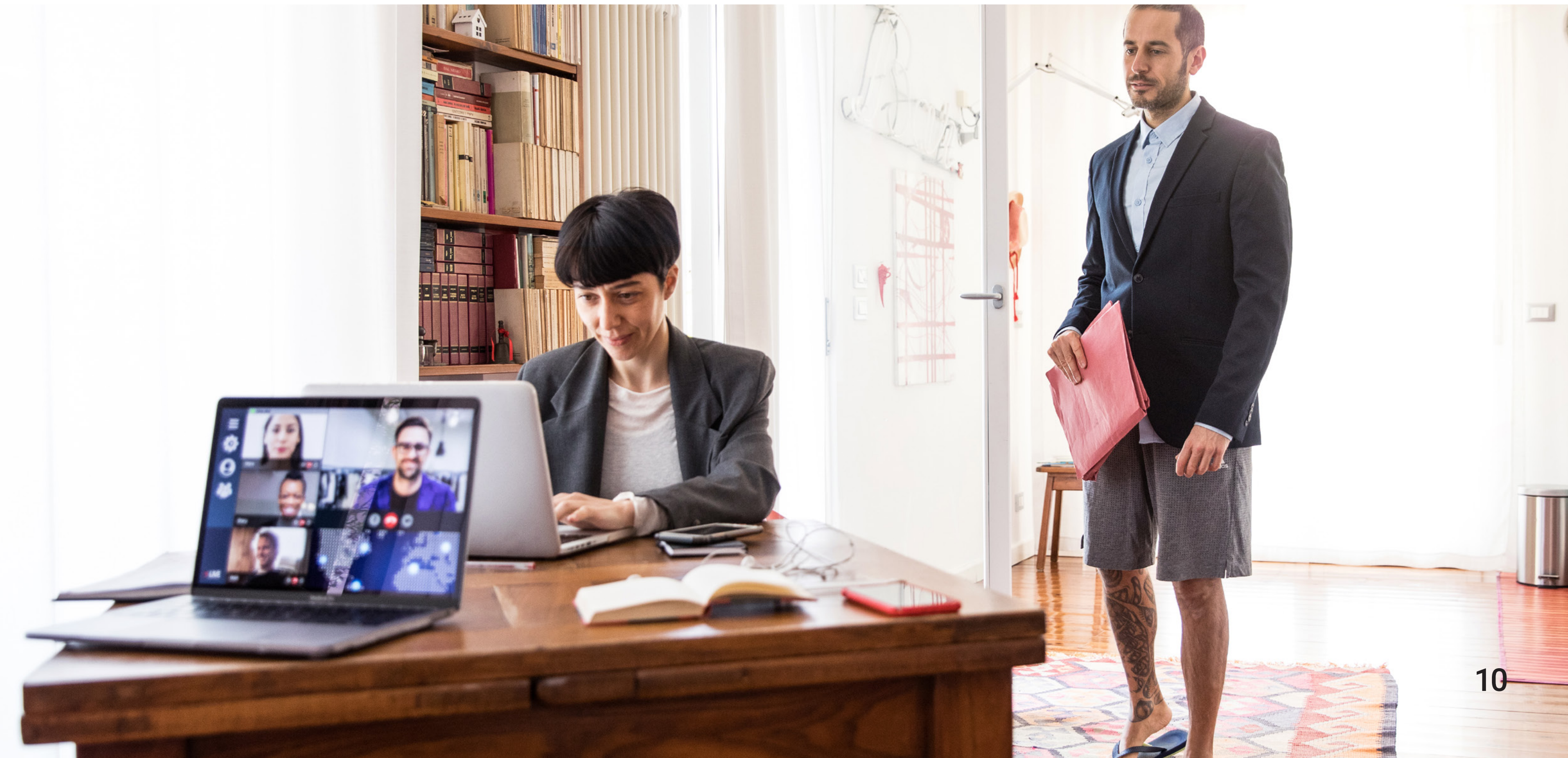
To move a team away from virtual groupthink it is important to ensure that everyone who attends the meeting participates. This is particularly important for meetings where the objective is to brainstorm creative solutions or decide on a road of travel that has large opportunity cost. **Not everyone wants to speak in a meeting**, so embrace the chat function of technology and allow written, along with oral responses. Combine this with calling on people in the meeting randomly to give reactions, rather than relying on people to push themselves forward. The chair of the meeting can also take the opportunity to follow up on those who had low levels of participation, in the case of meetings where the object is brainstorming or major decision making.

## Action 2: Discourage an over-focus on shared information

Even if action 1 is taken there will still be a tendency to over focus on shared information. After all, we feel good about ourselves when we are discussing something that is familiar to us. This is not a good thing when employees need to be innovative and what is needed is a discussion of hidden information, and outlier ideas. **To avoid virtual groupthink, it is a good idea to separate out the brainstorming session from when a decision is actually made**. Brainstorming sessions may relate to product design, pitching approaches or the assessment of risk. During this phase encourage people to bring their hidden information to the table, with an emphasis on the goal being to generate as many ideas as possible. Putting some time between the brainstorming phase, and when the option "to go with" is chosen takes the emotion out of the decision-making process. When picking between options the decision phase will also benefit from being based on hard evidence, ideally generated by people outside the group so the choice between options feels less personal.

## Action 3: Embrace dissent

It is OK to agree to disagree, and such a stance should be encouraged in meetings. Dissent should not be seen as a bad thing when brainstorming. **When making any decision forcing the group to find a consensus, inadvertently encourages groupthink**. Allow a 'disagree but proceed' option at the decision-making stage. This enables colleagues to voice their disagreement, without holding up progress. Retrospectively auditing voting outcomes once the future success of the decision has been revealed allows leaders to identify whether there are team members that are routinely ignored but turn out to have had the correct judgments. This makes salient whether there is a tendency to hear certain voices over others.

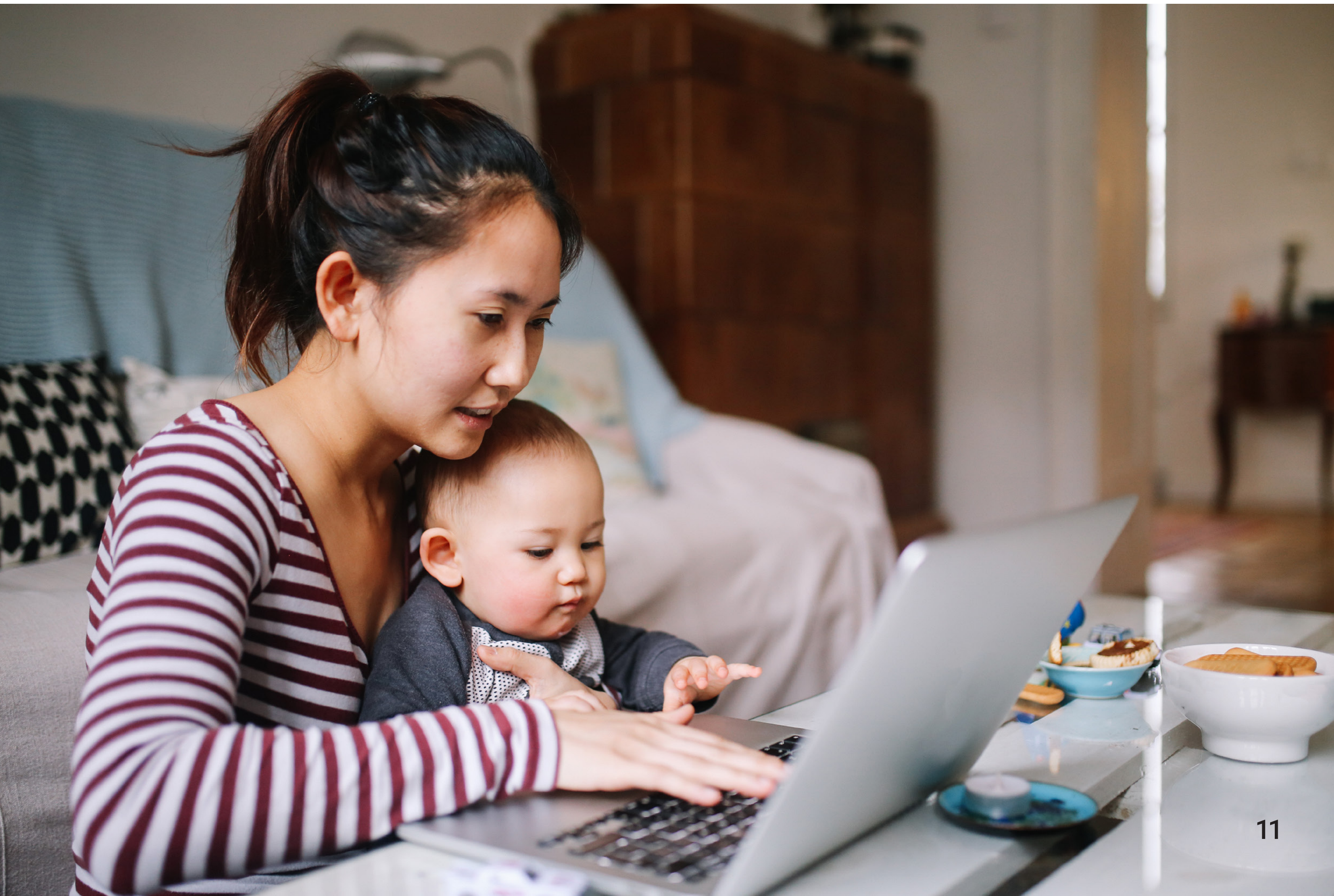


## Problem 6: Unfamiliar context

In behavioural science there is a well-worn adage that *context matters*. The current, COVID-19 response, context is unfamiliar with high levels of uncertainty. **One of the biggest challenges in terms of inclusion is the uncertainty as to how long virtual working will last**. This uncertainty poses challenges in maintaining employees' motivation for continuing to work at home. At the same time, it is likely that within many employee's households there are added pressures which may include feelings of financial insecurity, persons falling ill and caring responsibilities. It is therefore important that we put some emphasis on simple ideas that may increase resilience when working together, and lead to better outcomes despite the unfamiliar context.

### Action 1: Fundamental attribution error

Encourage colleagues to be more patient than usual with one another's mistakes and productivity levels. This helps avoid the fundamental attribution error, whereby an outcome is viewed as a reflection of the person rather than simply the situation they are in. Or in other words, an outcome is viewed as a reflection of a person's ability rather than luck. **Practising this thinking style within teams can help foster a culture of trust**, and also allow employees to be more resilient when their goals do not work out as planned.



### Action 2: Celebrate small wins

Loss aversion causes negative events to loom larger over our lives when they happen as compared to comparable positive events. During this period of transition many households are dealing with negative financial and/or health shocks. In addition, simply worrying that these things may happen causes strain, given that anticipation is a life experience in itself. At this time when it is easy to count our losses, **it is worth making conscious efforts to shift our focus, and those of the people we work with, towards celebrating small wins more regularly**. This can be achieved by setting up a 30-minute weekly team meeting whose sole purpose is to take stock of what has gone well.

### Action 3: Re-focus your attention

Encourage colleagues to pause when something negative happens at work, like a failure or a problem, and put themselves in an activity that takes their mind off it. **This serves to minimise the likelihood of the affect heuristic, a mental shortcut that causes decisions and reactions to happen quickly when emotional, that are not necessarily in the firms or an individual's best interests**. During a social virtual meeting discuss what these pause activities can be. If the failure or problem calls for decisions to be made, it is always better not to react in the moment and a change of activity allows for this space.

## Problem 7: Work is now home

Home is often viewed as a sanctuary from work, but now this personal space has been invaded by work, and **there is no longer that clean delineation between work and home**. This lack of delineation may cause people to fail to switch off from work, or equally make it harder for them to concentrate. In addition, most employees will not have the resources to provide for themselves spaces that enhance productivity and their wellbeing as compared to what their employers provided on-site.

### Action 1: A designated work space

Discuss with colleagues the importance of carving out a designated work space, and earmarking it as a work only zone within their own home. This may be a home office, or a simple nook with passing people traffic if space is lacking. Having the same space to work in everyday allows an easier separation of work and home. This has two benefits. First, **by repeatedly going to one particular space, only for work, there is an automatic association between that space and work tasks**. This makes it easier to settle into work tasks as the unconscious mind has a clear message of what is going to be completed once a person enters their designated work zone. Second, separation recreates in some respects the delineation between work and home which protects an employee's home sanctuary.

### Action 2: Maximise home work spaces

Discuss with colleagues how they can maximise their designated work spaces. Highlight that good air flow has been linked to better performance [9-10]. For colleagues that do not have the luxury of this choice, emphasise the importance of taking their allowed exercise during the working day. If they really cannot get outside during the working day, suggest that they **bring the outside in by adding plants to their work area**. This has the potential to augment attention, productivity levels and reduce the ill effects of staying indoors too long, such as increased stress and fatigue [11]. Keeping designated workspaces clutter free reduces procrastination and distraction[12]. Ideally, designated workspaces are environments with natural light to enhance cognitive performance [13]. However, most of us will rely on artificial light. **When exposed to artificial light, brighter options are preferred if there is a need to concentrate on a specific problem or task, but dimmer lights for creative thinking** [14-15]. When people are hot they have been shown to be less productive and co-operative [16-17]. Working at home, it is the same thing. Typically, people will work more effectively between 16 and 24 degrees. Quieter surroundings do promote motivation and productivity [18]. When trying to work in a noisy environment, noise cancelling headphones can help. For those working surrounded by family or flatmates, investing in a signal to indicate that they should not be disturbed, like a 'do not disturb' miniature orange fluorescent desk cone makes it more likely that those around you keep noise to a minimum and don't try and distract you.

### Action 3: Discuss what works

Devote time on social virtual catch ups to **discussing what has worked for individuals within teams with respect to work at home spaces**. This allows people to draw on each other's ideas when creating their own space, and fosters collegiality.

## Problem 8: Maintaining motivation

During this period of flux it is likely that **many people will become de-motivated**. This is particularly true for employees whose major tasks have lower levels of focus during their firm's fire-fighting stage, those whose tasks cannot be fully carried out at home and those who have been re-assigned to entirely different roles. It is however important to continue to motivate all employees to ensure high levels of productivity now, and an effective re-start after the COVID-19 response.

### Action 1: Identify meaning at work

Have regular check-ins with employees and connect their personal work goals to both the higher-level goals of the firm over the long run, and the short run goals during the COVID-19 response. There is ample evidence that **when a goal is identified as meaningful, individuals put much more effort into fulfilling it** [19-20]. Identifying meaning in team members tasks at this time can be viewed as an immediate morale boost that keeps them showing up. Another positive side effect is that finding meaning in one's daily activities has been linked to happiness and higher levels of motivation, as well as lower levels of stress and cynicism [21-23].

## Action 2: Link meaning to own skills and abilities

Armed with the meaning of an employee's personal work goals and how they link to the firm's objectives from action 1, managers can **highlight for team members the specific skill the employee brings to the firm that is unique to them, that allows them do this meaningful work**. This exercise allows team members tap into authenticity and self-efficacy as mechanisms to increase the meaning of their work [24]. Employees gain authenticity by realizing that skills that they possess allow them to carry out meaningful work. Self-efficacy then improves by increasing self-awareness of what it means to have these skills.

## Action 3: Use narrative or visuals to illustrate meaning

Use narrative or visuals to **bring the stakeholders of a firm's outputs closer to employees**. These may be the persons whose financial future will be more certain because of the firm, consumers who will be better off because of a new service or colleagues who gain from excellent leadership. Making the meaning of work salient in this manner has been shown to increase intrinsic motivation, causing employees to work longer hours and miss fewer days [24].

# Problem 9: Beware of illusory correlation

When people feel pressurised, they are more likely to succumb to relying on signals when assessing performance, and a person's suitability for new tasks or roles. This implies that the tendency for the illusory correlation is higher than usual during the COVID-19 response. **Illusory correlation is the phenomenon of believing there is a relationship between variables when no such relationship exists**. For firms, this is problematic when variables are falsely, and unconsciously identified as being proxies for ability or output.

## Action 1: Confidence is not competence

Pay attention to whether overtly confident members of the team get disproportionate amounts of time or resources. **Remember that putting a hand up says more about confidence and risk aversion levels than skills or ability** [25]. Managers can make salient their tendency to overlap confidence with ability by reflecting on who they gave their time to each week, and self-correcting their own behaviour when they notice anomalies.

## Action 2: Quality over quantity

Remember that the challenges that each team member faces at home are different, with many having increased demands of child care or other caring responsibilities during the COVID-19 response. **Rather than focusing on virtual presenteeism as a correlate for ability, measure a person based on their output**. Make the measurement system known to team members, and allow them autonomy regarding the timing of when they complete their outputs.

## Action 3: Don't log every ball that gets dropped

This is an unusual time, and a team members performance now may not fully reflect their skills and abilities because of external demands. Take care not to link missed milestones to future progression. Verbalise that sentiment, and give slack in deadlines when possible. This helps all employees, regardless of their circumstances, feel included and **assures them that their future career success is not unforgivingly linked to performance during the COVID-19 response period**.

# Problem 10: Re-start with inclusion

A major challenge ahead is that a significant amount of activity within firms has been put on ice, for example face to face meetings with clients or customers, product launches, business deals or campaigns. This implies that **firms will need to re-start with a momentum that allows lost time to be made up**.

## Action 1: Stay connected to customers and clients

During the COVID-19 response firms can **leverage other means of communications with customers and clients**, for example providing market commentary, bespoke services or learning tools, that add real value and underly the core values of the firm. This allows colleagues to maintain relationships with customers and clients, and also allows the firm to gain positive reputation effects for these engagements.

## Action 2: Speak to a different type of shareholder, client and customer

During the COVID-19 response firms can add to their objectives, additional goals that allow them to make things easier for customers, clients, employees and wider society who experience ill health or income insecurity. **Being seen as a leader in the COVID-19 response, to the inclusion of all persons, puts the good values of the firm in the spotlight**. This can attract new shareholders, clients and customers in a post COVID-19 world.

## Action 3: Create post COVID-19 priorities

Post COVID-19 priorities can be embedded into a firm's communications during the COVID-19 response as a mechanism to make salient what the focus will be when physical distancing is lifted. This saliency allows focused planning during the response period, along with serving as a reminder to employees that the physical distancing period is finite. It also highlights what employees with more down time should be spending their energies on. Senior leaders can also take time to get employee feedback on new directions through a consultation process. **Focussing on collaboration in deciding future priorities during the COVID-19 response has the added benefit of enhancing inclusion in the firm at a time of physical distancing. To the extent that this collaboration brings innovative ideas, it also has the added value of bringing the message that inclusion is worthwhile, into the entire business, moving it from "nice to have" to "need to have".**

# Conclusion

In this research I set out to listen to a relatively large number of individuals who work in financial and professional services in the City of London.

My aim was to identify their perceived obstacles to enhancing virtual inclusion in their firm during the COVID-19 response. From these obstacles I identified ten major obstacles, each with a set of three independent actions that can be easily pursued to enhance virtual inclusion in the firm, with a view to benefiting business outcomes now. **Enhanced inclusion can also maintain employee morale, allowing firms to re-start from a better place when the COVID-19 response is over**.

## Meet the Author

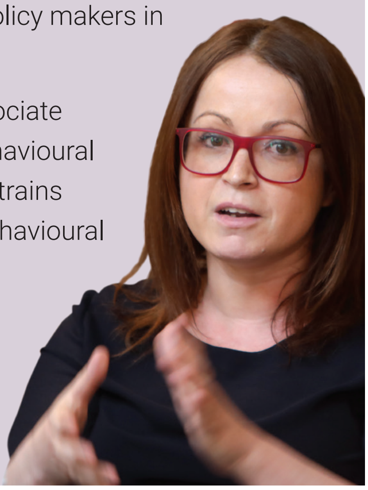
**Dr Grace Lordan:**
Director of The Inclusion Initiative

Grace Lordan is an economist by background. Her research is focused on understanding why some individuals succeed over others in work because of factors beyond their control.

Grace's research and consultancy draws on the cutting edge methodological techniques of behavioural science and economics to design and analyse interventions. The aim of these interventions is to help understand and change employment outcomes, conduct at work, diversity and inclusion within occupations, occupational sorting and worker wellbeing.

She is a regular speaker in the financial services sector on these topics, and has also led projects advising commissioners in the UK and policy makers in the EU.

Grace is an associate professor in Behavioural Science at LSE, trains executives in behavioural science and is the director of the MSc in behavioural science.



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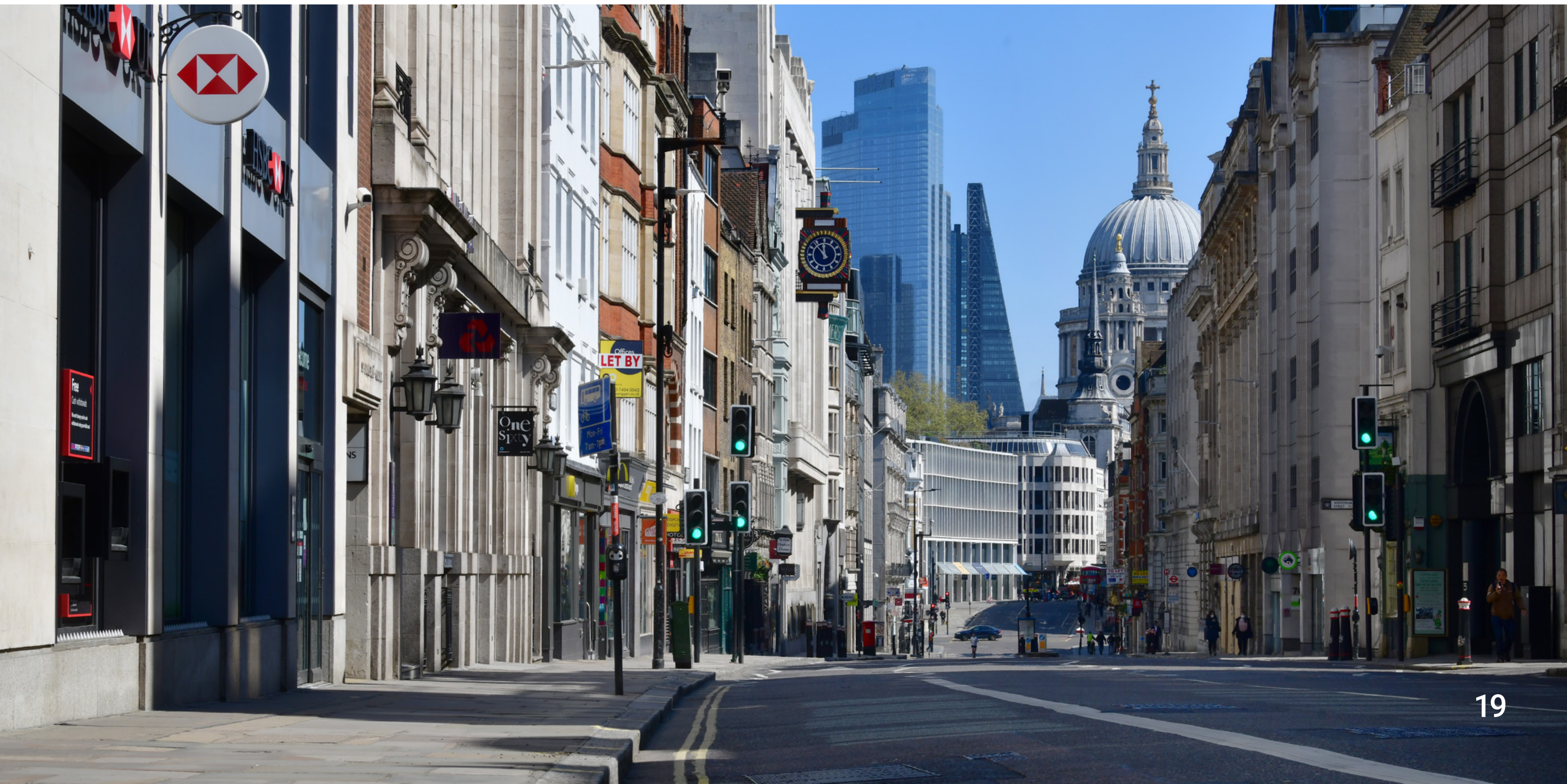

The Inclusion Initiative

The Inclusion Initiative (TII) at LSE launches in November 2020. TII will leverage behavioural science insights to advance our understanding of the factors that enhance inclusion at work. Our first area of focus is the financial and professional services. Over the next three years we aim to build an open source research repository that houses rigorous and relevant research related to inclusion at work, in the financial and professional services and beyond.

TII's research agenda has three main aims. First, to propose a viable proxy measure of inclusion. Second, to quantify the direct link between inclusion and the core business outcomes it should theoretically improve, such as innovation, creativity and behavioural risk assessment both within and across firms. Third, to propose to firms a menu of cost effective interventions that could improve inclusion of all talent from pipeline to boardroom.

The Inclusion Initiative (TII) will bring industry, academics and other stakeholders together regularly to exchange ideas, highlight new findings and build partnerships. Please do join the conversation.

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