Living Intensely: The strange warping and flexing flow of time – HR during the Covid Pandemic

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Conference
7 – 11 September 2020
Who are we?

Official Statistics
UK’s largest producer of official statistics

People
5,002 people combining office and field

Key Activities
GDP, Census, Covid, social and demographic

Offices
London, Newport, Titchfield
Could it get more personal?

- Notified whilst at work in close contact to the first Covid19 case in the Civil Service
- Call the emergency number
- Get tested
- Self Isolate!
- Mass confusion as messaging was inconsistent
- WFH – who knew it would be for this long
Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

When people ask me when I think we will be going back to the office.

- Offices in different nations (and different rules!)
- Managing our own emotions whilst managing upset teams
- Use positive words in the conversation (avoid “no” “but”)
Questions we got asked
What did People want to know?

- When can I go back to the office?
- When will the nursery open?
- How long will you pay paid special Leave for?
- How will you reward me if I didn’t use paid special leave?
- Can I claim flexi if I am on paid special leave?
- Can I come on site to go to the gym?
- Why haven’t you deep cleaned the office?
- My job requires me to come into the office but I don’t want to
  - I don’t enjoy working from home. What should I do?
- Should I do anything specific around visitors to ONS?
- Can I travel for work?
- What about me? I don’t have kids and want paid special leave

The normal response: I don’t know! ... but I had to find out fast ... agree it with policy, Unions, Cabinet Office and add to the FAQS and get it out there
Flexible working, working flexibly

• You are not “working from home”, you are “at home during a crisis, trying to work”
• Your personal, physical, mental and emotional health is far more important than anything else right now
• You may be very productive in your work in this current arrangement, you may be less so. You should not try to compensate for lost work productivity by working longer hours
• You will be compassionate to yourself and not judge how you are coping based on how you see others coping
• You will be compassionate to others and not judge how they are coping based on how you are coping
• Taking care of you! (Leading in a Crisis)
The ONS has become the go-to source for information on Covid-19, including weekly death rates and how they compare with the five-year average, and its infection study, based on a large sample of swab-tested people. It has monitored the progress of the economy through and out of the lockdown with new, useful surveys. I have not worked closely with Office for National Statistics until this crisis. The @ONS is a national treasure, teams fantastic to work with, flexible, informed, dedicated, agile. Fantastic colleagues. Brilliant work and great to work with you. Thank you. ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulati...
The recent announcement of our new large-scale virus infection survey provoked a huge and immediate public response.

Black Britons four times more likely to die of virus than white peers, says ONS

Analysis shows Bame groups exposed to greater socio-economic and work risks

Britain’s economy set for a ‘significant decline’, says ONS

Statistical agency warns of increased volatility in official data due to virus challenges

Coronavirus pandemic
Excess UK deaths blamed on undiagnosed coronavirus cases

ONS study explains why rise in toll since outbreak started far exceeds official Covid-19 mortality numbers
No symptoms in 80% of positive Covid tests

A survey by the Office for National Statistics looked at who had been infected in the community in England.

Almost 30,000 more care home deaths than last year

The figures from the ONS are the first to reveal the full toll of the epidemic in care homes.

Deprived areas hit twice as hard by coronavirus

London was overwhelmingly the hardest-hit area in the country, says the Office for National Statistics.
What next?

• Managing a return to the office?
• We all live in a world that no longer exists (pace, ambiguity, decision making)
• Worse than getting them out in the first place!
  – Gym
  – Catering
  – Nursery
  – Wellbeing
  – Cleaning
  – Keeping our employees safe
Learning & Development
We’ve always delivered learning face to face ....

The Team
• Wedded to face to face delivery
• Feeling lost themselves
• Wanting to help

The Offer
• Thrive
• Get Abstract
• Virtual learning
• ALS

No going back!
• Adoption by the organization
• Celebrated by disability networks
How else have we used these times to work for us?

- SCS Reverse Mentoring
- “Experienced” managers going through “working/managing remotely – with an inclusion lens”
- Reactiv8!
- Succession Planning Meetings
Has it only been six months?! – Any questions?

I am tired of being a part of a major historical event.
Appendix
• This (15 mins) presentation will focus on the HUGE cultural change – at pace - from traditional office(s) to remote working /flexible working and supporting our people through remote learning and development. Focussing on the experience of two senior HR professionals from the Office for National Statistics they will take us through their journey of having the first Covid case in the Civil Service to managing workloads, flexible working, technology and building capability when all of the UK’s eyes were on the data they were producing and what that meant