

MAINTAINING INNOVATION

IN ISOLATION

With traditional office-based work culture rapidly becoming a distant memory, how can we harness different personality types & neurodiversity to stimulate creativity?

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INTRODUCTION

Whatever your personal experience of working in isolation and expectations of the 'new normal' I'm sure we're all in agreement that the people and leadership challenges we have faced in 2020 have been incredibly challenging.

As we entered, navigated, and then left the first period of lockdown, I was having many conversations with my network about how they were feeling, how their people were performing and where on earth to start with the challenges of unplanned remote working. One of the biggest concerns was how isolation was impacting creativity and many in our community were keen to hear ideas and examples of how best to support their people in this period of uncertainty.

To get the discussion going we enlisted the expert support of Pete May and Lucy Cleveley to understand more about how businesses like Universal Music have been able to embrace different personality types and neurodiversity to encourage creative thinking.

I hope this guide provides some additional insight and ideas that you can take back to your own workplace, and if you would like to discuss anything covered in more detail please get in touch - I would love to hear from you!



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ABOUT HANDLE

Handle's heritage is in the entertainment and creative industries. Today we provide leading entertainment companies, social networks, global media brands, sports bodies, retailers, and digital technology providers with a constantly evolving range of talent solutions.



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THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY

We've been moving for a long time towards more flexible working patterns with a focus on the immediate benefits of reduced commutes, cost savings and fewer potential distractions but 2020 has definitely expedited the conversation.

When it comes to working in isolation, particularly if that working from home is not through personal choice, differences in personalities can really influence someone's desire and enjoyment of the situation.

Somebody with a preference for extroversion typically gets their energy from the external world and someone with a preference for introversion gets their energy from their internal world. Both can be sociable and both can enjoy having time on our own but they will most likely need different environments to maximise their creativity.

OFFICES ARE DESIGNED FOR EXTROVERTS

The world of work has for a long time, been geared towards extroverts. The offices we work in carry the expectation of constant meetings and constant interactions, it's very extroverted in preference.

When lockdown was announced, many introverts saw it as an opportunity to have some space and do their work quietly, to get on with it and not be interrupted. With no control over everything that was going on outside their front door, having the time to think first before sharing their ideas and without distraction was really useful. Expectations were lowered of how much communication introverts had with their colleagues and they were finding they were being more creative. They were able to generate more ideas.

The extroverts, were in turmoil. And because they're extroverts, you probably would have heard more about this! Just watch the Snoop Dogg video where he is sitting in his car listening to 'Let It Go' from Frozen. Extroverts felt confined and all of that creative energy, all of that ability to bounce ideas off of the people they feed off had been taken away from them in quite an abrupt way.

THE IMPACT OF ZOOM – LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD

There was a change in how people communicated and the increase in pre-planned video sessions created a democratisation of meetings. The chat function, for a lot of introverts, or people who just perhaps don't normally speak up in meetings, provided a really useful communication channel to share their thoughts.

Traditional 'sitting around a large table' meetings favour extroverts. If you haven't got a point to make immediately or you need time to reflect before contributing to the conversation, you miss your chance to speak. It meant that we started to hear a lot more from people who perhaps wouldn't necessarily speak out.

At the same time, for extroverts, the amount of talking that they do in a meeting became much more obvious because when you speak, your face pops up on the screen. It increased awareness of who typically dominates the conversation and that's something that can easily be missed in a traditional meeting setting.

BUT THEN ATTITUDES CHANGED

We surveyed a number of people in the middle of lockdown and again once lockdown measures had been loosened and after that initial panic from extroverts and excitement from introverts there was a clear change. Extroverts started to say that they quite enjoyed working from home and a number of introverts began feeling less positive about the impact of isolation.

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER

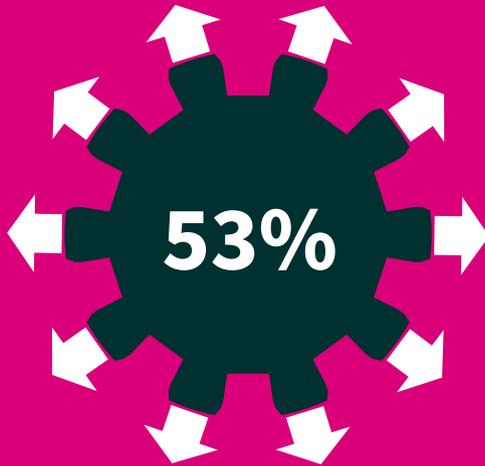


Not even Snoop Dogg can resist 'Let It Go' from Disney's Frozen
[instagram/@snoopdogg](https://www.instagram.com/snoopdogg)



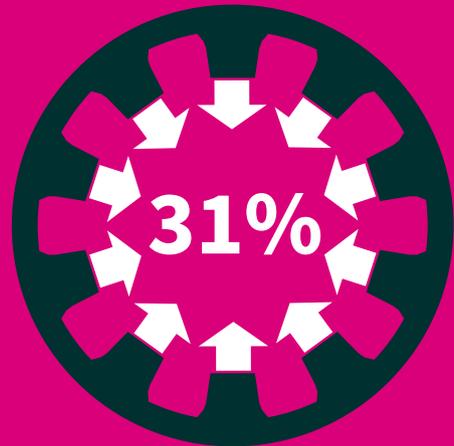
Possibilities driven by personality
The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®
www.mbtionline.com

HOW HAS ISOLATION IMPACTED OUR COMMUNITY?



I would describe myself as an
EXTROVERT

I would describe myself as an
INTROVERT



I FIND WORKING IN ISOLATION

12%



Brilliant. I love working alone

17%



8%



Pretty good. I focus well when I'm working alone

8%



44%



Not too bad. I quite like working on my own

42%



36%

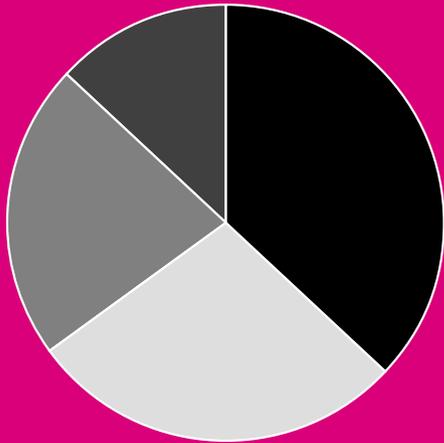


Awful. I hate working on my own

33%



WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST CREATIVE CHALLENGE OF WORKING IN ISOLATION?



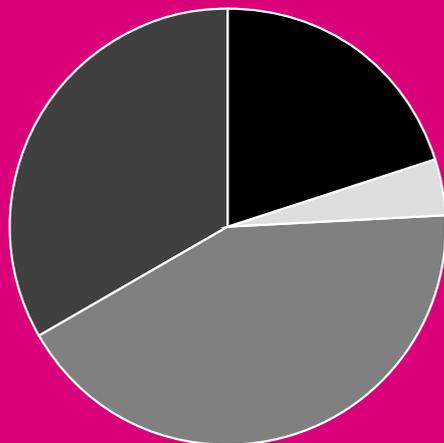
37% Not being able to share / generate ideas with other people easily

28% Not being able to switch off from home life to focus on work

22% Being distracted by the demand for online meetings

13% Not being able to switch off from work to percolate ideas

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MAIN BENEFIT OF WORKING IN ISOLATION TO THE CREATIVE PROCESS?



20% less distraction, more time to focus.

4% more focused meetings and more opportunity to contribute

42% no commute – more time to work

33% More flexibility of working hours

FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2020 I EXPECT TO BE WORKING:



42%
primarily at home

52%

half my time in the office, half my time working from home

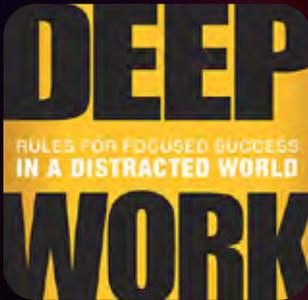


6%
primarily in the office

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER



Reed Hastings Deems
Remote Work 'a Pure Negative'
www.wsj.com



Deep Work - Rules for Focused
Success in a Distracted World
www.calnewport.com

We discovered that extroverts were benefiting from having to develop their ways of working and adopting workarounds to generate creative ideas. On the other hand, introverts were now finding they were in a bit of a slump because they need more social interaction than they thought they did. But without being forced into that situation, it's not necessarily something that they would naturally seek out in order to come up with their best ideas.

This brings the rise of ambiverts, whilst not recognised within the MBTI instrument, it describes somebody with a balance of extrovert and introvert features in their personality. A personality type that should thrive in the hybrid home/office working patterns.

SO CAN PEOPLE BE CREATIVE IN ISOLATION?

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, the CEO of Netflix, Reed Hastings, was asked if he's seen any benefits from having employees working from home. His response "no. I don't see any positives".

And Steve Jobs famously once said "creativity comes from spontaneous meetings, from random discussions. You run into someone, you ask what they're doing, you say 'wow,' and soon you're cooking up all sorts of ideas."

If traditionally your creative thinkers have personalities where they need to bounce ideas off of other people maybe this is true and it might be difficult for organisations to maintain their creativity.

But what do people need, and who is responsible for creativity? The one thing that isolation has shown is that it has provided an opportunity for other voices and that spontaneity is not always the only way to generate creative ideas. I won't go into detail but if you would like an alternative opinion Cal Newport's book 'deep work' talks about the concept that people need time, no matter what their personality type, to think deeply, solve creative problems and produce their best work.

DIG A LITTLE DEEPER



Laszlo Bock's 6 Tips for
Building a Better Workplace
www.shrm.org



GrowSmart - Smart people
development solutions to
help your business grow
www.growsmart.uk

*There is an assumption that all extroverts
would want to come back into the office and
all introverts want to stay at home.
The reality is that most people need a bit of
both but might not know what's best for them.*

THE INDIVIDUAL, TEAM AND ORGANISATION

Laszlo Bock, CEO of Humu and formerly the SVP of People Operations at Google, led some work with his team a few years ago to find out what the best working practices would be for them. And he found out that, as an organisation, two to three days in the office where everybody is in, or at least the people that you need to interact with is optimal for some really positive motivational working.

Now we're moving to a place in time where many people are being given the choice to return to a traditional office, continue to work from home, or a blend of both. My advice is to really question the people that work for you and the people that you work with to understand how they are feeling and how energised and motivated they're feeling about the working pattern they're choosing.

I am very aware that by focusing on individual personality types one of the things that many organisations are asking themselves, is 'how do we maintain a sense of cohesion in the culture if people are in and out'. What Laszlo Bock found is that this hybrid approach was not only positive for individual motivation levels, but left people feeling connected to the culture of the organisation. They are still 'part of it', but also getting the time they need regardless of their personality type.

There is no one-size-fits all approach but if you take the time to understand what your people need you may find that your creativity and innovation increases.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTOR



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THE POWER OF NEURODIVERSITY

Creativity is our lifeblood at Universal Music and we embrace the diversity of both our employees and artists, such as Florence Welch who talks about living with dyspraxia and dyslexia and how it has aided her creative process and Loyle Carner who told the NME that “all the best things about me come from my ADHD”.

This openness and understanding that people think differently and that one person’s thought process is not the same as another’s is really important. We recognise that there is neurocognitive variation among all of us and there is no standard brain or way of thinking which opens up creative possibilities.

We were underway with our diversity, inclusion and belonging work, which we’ve been delivering across the company, when it became clear that there was not a great deal of information available for employers to understand the power of neurodiversity.

We saw this as an opportunity and commissioned a research project including academics, neurodiversity specialists, and most importantly, we talked to lots of different people living with different conditions, such as autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia and Tourette’s. These experiences and our findings were then published in a handbook alongside practical hints and tips to help employers and companies support their employees by making adjustments and removing barriers to allow employees to thrive.

HELPING PEOPLE FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL

To attract new talent we state that everybody is welcome to work for Universal Music.

We specifically call out that we welcome applications from those living with autism, dyslexia, ADHD and other forms of neurocognitive variation. It's not work that's ever finished, we continue to explore and learn how to be truly inclusive. The feedback we've received is that by saying that we recognise the value of neurodiversity, we're encouraging diverse groups of people to join us.

The real key was talking to each individual, either looking to join us or already part of the organisation, about their specific needs to help them fulfil their potential. There's an expression that our partners at Exceptional Individuals shared with us "If you meet one person with autism, you've met one person with autism". The message is clear; do not generalise, and do not assume that because one individual displays certain aspects of a condition that it will be true for others.

SMALL DETAILS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

We've learned that it's about making simple adjustments throughout the employee life cycle and being open to all employees. If somebody shares that they're living with a condition such as dyslexia, ask them what it means for them, ask them what we can do to help them. It's about taking that conversation forwards. Similarly, if someone would prefer to first meet via a phone or video call, don't let a rigid in-person interview process remove that individual from a hiring process.

If somebody explains that because of their ADHD, they just can't sit in a space with constant traffic and people walking up and down because the distraction will make it difficult for them to concentrate think of how you could support them in a more appropriate space. In a similar vein, could changing the lighting make all the difference to aid concentration? These seemingly small things that can often be overlooked in a workplace can be the things that inhibit an individual's creativity.

SHARING INSIGHT & EXPERIENCES

Throughout the course of our neurodiversity work we've shared our insights with the business. We've taken our managers through training sessions, and we're

CREATIVITY IN ISOLATION



Watch The Video For Ellie Goulding's Track, 'Power'.

Working with an all-female team, the music video for 'Power' was filmed by the singer in lockdown at her home in London.

www.udiscovermusic.com

CREATIVITY IN ISOLATION



Drake's Unreleased Song 'Toosie Slide' Has Already Inspired a Viral TikTok Challenge

The Canadian rapper, who's no stranger to instigating a viral challenge online, appears primed for current TikTok dominance after a clip of an unreleased song has become a dance challenge for fans.

www.time.com

opening these up to the broader business to encourage conversations and greater understanding of neurodiversity.

It's about demystifying neurodiversity by sharing real life experiences. And we're extremely fortunate at Universal Music that we have had a number of our employees that have very kindly offered to be ambassadors, and they've given us permission to tell their stories so we can give first hand, real life examples of what it feels like to work here.

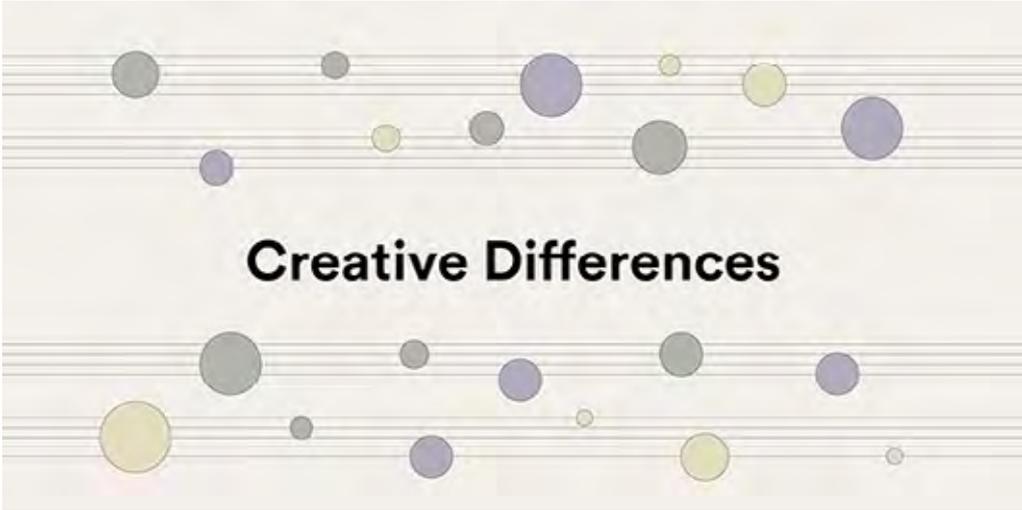
Through education and raising awareness, something that may feel taboo becomes shared openly and better understood. To encourage people to perform at their best it was important to create an environment where people felt free to come forward and say, "actually, I need some help, I'm really struggling with this".

MAKING AN IMPACT

We have found that our work within neurodiversity has created a ripple effect across the whole of our organisation. It just makes everybody stop and be a little bit more thoughtful about what they need to do to support their colleagues or what they need to do as a manager.

We are not saying, look, unless you have a diagnosis, we can't help you. Our approach is that if there is something that you think is going to make a difference to you or others, talk to us about it. The last thing I would recommend is to start trying to diagnose people!

When you look at some of the statistics about people living with conditions like autism or ADHD, you can see that their employment opportunities appear to be significantly reduced. This is a massive pool of untapped talent that companies are missing out on. By talking to individuals and understanding the adjustments they need to thrive in the workplace, we actively include them and improve the workplace for everyone.

A graphic featuring a light beige background with several horizontal musical staves. Scattered across these staves are various colored circles in shades of grey, purple, yellow, and green, resembling musical notes or data points.

Creative Differences

DOWNLOAD the Universal Music handbook for embracing neurodiversity in the creative industries

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The reality is that some people are thriving from home, some are struggling and others that enjoyed lockdown are now desperate to return to the office. The one thing we can control as leaders and managers is discussing how we can help keep people motivated and energised to maintain their creativity and that needs to be discussed at an individual level.

I appreciate that we are very fortunate at Universal Music in that we are a powerhouse of creativity with many creative individuals, but at the same time it's vital that we promote the best working environment possible to maintain that creative process, especially when so many of us really miss not being together in the office.

A photograph of a live concert performance. A male performer in a white shirt and blue jeans is standing on stage, holding a microphone. In the background, other performers are seated on a stage set that includes a neon sign and a small umbrella.

CREATIVITY IN ISOLATION

BTS' 'Bang Bang Con: The Live' Claims Record Viewership for Online Concert.

According to Big Hit metrics, the show reached a peak of 756,000 concurrent viewers in 107 countries and territories.

www.variety.com

THE FINAL WORD...

LUCY: Get back to basics. When you start to think about different personality types, neurodiversity and being mindful of individual situations it can be very overwhelming. If you are a manager or leader encourage people to continue to be creative, whatever their work environment, whatever their situation.

If you're changing working patterns, if you're thinking of bringing people back into the office, do they know; how this new world looks for them, how they can operate within it and most importantly, your expectations?

When we communicate we often tell people what needs to happen or we are giving information. Often not enough focus is put on asking questions of other people, and I think that's become even more important. People always need to feel heard, but if you are away from the office, then finding ways to help people to feel heard, whether it's their creative ideas or any issues that they're struggling with, is a good place to focus.

PETE: It's about being brave and if you do nothing, nothing will change. The very first thing we did at the start of lockdown was to say this is uncharted territory but we're all in this together and we will support each other. There's a whole series of unknowns ahead of us but if you are aware of how people are feeling and adapting and if you provide the support and psychological security they need, you can make a positive difference.

Explain that 'we know you're going to struggle and we know this is not straightforward. We know you're going to face some things that none of us have faced before' and try to create a sense of ease and a message of 'it's okay'.

And most importantly, ensure that people don't lose sight of their unique ability and unique creativity. It will always be there, but you might just need some additional help finding different ways to access and harness it during these extraordinary times.



- BUILD** a culture of Psychological Trust
- EDUCATE** your team about different personality types and attributes
- CREATE** a culture where 'difference' and 'Diversity of Thought' is celebrated
- TALK** to everyone individually about their experience of home & office working
- SCHEDULE** regular one-to-ones and ask how the individual would prefer to work
- SET** parameters and be very clear about what is expected of individuals
- ENCOURAGE** everyone to schedule time to do 'thinking' before meetings
- PRAISE** often to ensure home-workers get the recognition and dopamine hits they need

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