Importance of Inclusion during challenging times – COVID-19
Introduction

**Importance of Inclusion during Challenging Times – COVID-19**

This is an extraordinary moment for us as organisations. As the world deals with one of the greatest challenges of a generation, this is a pivotal moment to help one another, offer support and actively be inclusive.

At Standard Chartered we believe Inclusion is the choice we make as individuals to embrace the differences and richness of backgrounds and perspectives of our colleagues, client and suppliers. It is about creating a work environment where each person feels safe, accepted, respected and valued for their distinct skills, capabilities and individual experiences, and has the opportunity to participate fully and reach their full potential.

During times of challenge, when we all feel scared and anxious, Inclusion can create opportunities for strength and kindness. Practicing inclusive behaviours creates a sense of belonging that will enable us to support our colleagues, our clients and our communities.

This toolkit is a practical resource to support organisations navigate challenging times using inclusive leadership to reinforce the importance of wellbeing and a culture of belonging during periods of uncertainty.
Importance of Inclusion

Inclusion is particularly important right now to help fully realise a sense of teamwork, safe culture and belonging. Through empathising with fears and concerns that exist, organisations can demonstrate inclusive leadership which in turn can positively impact the wellbeing of colleagues, clients and customers.

Empathy
The ability to understand and share the feelings of another

Inclusion
The choice we make as individuals to embrace the differences and richness of backgrounds and perspectives

Belonging
The feeling that enables all individuals to have a connection with each other and within an organisation
About the toolkit

Research\(^1\) has shown that an increase in uncertainty and anxiety can have an adverse impact on wellbeing, including:

- **Uncertainty** – With regular routines disrupted and the global situation constantly evolving, the instability can be unsettling, and individuals can find it difficult to focus.

- **Fear and anxiety** – We are all human and have worries and concerns that extend beyond the parameters of work, which includes the health and safety of family, friends and communities.

- **Isolation** - Remote work can make it more difficult for employees to feel connected to an organisation, which can lower morale and engagement.

- **Decreased employee visibility** - Employees may feel that a lack of face time with their manager or other company leaders will impact growth opportunities.

- **Decreased work–life balance** – In some cases, not having a physical distinction between work and home can make it more difficult for employees to unplug, stop focusing on work, and decompress.

- **Lack of relationships among colleagues** - Working remotely can make it more challenging to establish relationships among colleagues and collaborate effectively, even when utilising teleconferencing, online chat systems, and other communication tools.

\(^{1}\) [https://www.mseap.com/disadvantages-remote-work/](https://www.mseap.com/disadvantages-remote-work/)
What does this toolkit cover?

The toolkit includes a range of resources to help you drive the conversation by addressing the following:

- Key actions organisations can take to drive Inclusion
- Support available
- Additional Resources
By proactively driving Inclusion we can mitigate the adverse impact that these challenges have on our colleagues, clients and communities.
We all need to feel that we ‘belong’ somewhere and when the world around us is in a state of flux, we want to feel that our concerns and worries can be heard. This could be as simple as asking a colleague how they are coping, checking whether a client has the support they require or reassuring a local supplier. It is more important than ever that leaders display and practice inclusive behaviours to safeguard the wellbeing of those around us and make a positive difference.

**Examples of inclusive actions include:**

Communicate key messages regularly and be transparent to mitigate the sense of uncertainty individuals may feel even though the current events are evolving very quickly. It is important for colleagues to receive regular updates. Celebrate milestones and successes of the team more frequently – this can build a sense of belonging and pride.

Ensure you run inclusive meetings. Create an environment where it’s safe to propose new ideas and everyone can be heard. Prepare by sharing the agenda in advance and take care to minimise interruptions during the meeting. Acknowledge each other ideas and contributions. This can help result in better meeting outcomes.

Build empathy and belonging by asking colleagues, clients and suppliers about their worries and concerns. There may be something tangible you can do to support, but it may be enough to also just listen.

Host weekly/monthly/periodic ‘tea & talk’ social sessions as a team by getting together on a conference call to check in on each other. Individuals working remotely for periods of time may experience isolation and loneliness, so it’s helpful to create virtual opportunities to regularly connect on personal interests in addition to only discussing work.
Examples of inclusive actions include:

Understand the impact of ‘in and out’ groups, recognising that times of uncertainty will impact introverts and extroverts in different ways. With your team, discuss and agree potential strategies to mitigate bias, particularly in a remote working environment.

Encourage colleagues working remotely to follow regular hours where possible to maintain work-life balance. Balance this with flexibility, as sometimes you may need to extend your day to accommodate someone else’s time zone or support personal and family commitments that arise throughout the day. In these instances, be mindful of finishing early/starting a bit later the next day to ensure you are receiving enough timeline offline to rest, decompress and meet your personal needs.

› Ensure your work environment is safe and secure – choose an area separate to your relaxation area that allows you to sit with good posture and comfortably whilst working. Make sure there is sufficient light, the temperature is comfortable, and any disruptive noise is minimised. It may require some trial and error to identify where and how you work best.

› Take breaks away from your workspace and get some fresh air if possible. Know when you are most productive and do your harder tasks during this time. Save your easier tasks for when you are typically less productive.

› Create clear boundaries with other people in your home – be clear when you are working and when you are not. This will help to manage expectations and avoid distractions.

Encourage colleagues to have a morning and end of day routine during work days, just as they would if they were physically in an office. This could include starting your day with exercise or brewing a cup of tea and ending your day by signing out of Skype messenger, shutting down your laptop or setting a “to-do-list” for the next day.

Avoid using language that could stigmatise certain ethnic groups over COVID-19. Be thoughtful in the use of language that could unintentionally lead to profiling individuals associated with the virus.

In-groups are associated with individuals we psychologically identify with. This is not one group in particular, but a group we associate with at any specific time. Positive feelings are associated with our “in-groups”. “Out-groups” are the opposite. We tend to be more sceptical, hesitant and have more negative feelings towards our out-groups.
Examples of inclusive actions include:

Make time for your own wellbeing and continue to support the wellbeing of other colleagues. In these times of uncertainty, you and others are likely to feel higher levels of anxiety and even isolation. Focusing on your mental wellbeing and spending time on things that bring you comfort; relaxation and happiness is vital. Look out for signs that others may be struggling and reach out to help, if only to listen to a colleague, a client or supplier.

Consider how you will engage new starters if you are unable to meet them in person for their onboarding; how will you ensure they feel integrated and part of the team?

Leverage virtual learning tools to support the continuous development of the team, which will provide reassurance that opportunities for growth will not be impacted by the uncertainty. Have regular career discussions - Anticipate your remote team members’ anxieties about not being recognised and use your 1:1s to check in and talk about their progress and professional goals.

Consider connecting individuals through mentoring or reverse mentoring to build relationship enabling the space for employees to learn from one another and stay connected.

Recognise that everyone is an individual and is different. What works for yourself personally, may not resonate with others. Practice empathy in understanding other people’s perspectives and circumstances.

Remember, not everyone is able to work from home. Actively show support for colleagues, clients and suppliers working in frontline services.
Support available

The health, safety and wellbeing of colleagues, customers and suppliers remains a priority for all organisations. The global pandemic has placed increasing challenges on individuals and organisations, however by continuing to drive inclusive behaviours we can ensure everyone feels supported.

Find out more about how we’re responding to the deepening COVID-19 crisis and how we’re helping our clients and colleagues: https://www.sc.com/en/about/covid-19
Additional resources

The World Health Organization (WHO) provides the latest news and information on COVID-19, including:

- Situation Reports
- How to protect yourself
- Training and eLearning

The WHO has also launched a messaging service in partnership with WhatsApp and Facebook to keep people safe and informed during this time.

The messaging services provides the latest news and information on COVID-19 including details on symptoms, Q&A, travel advice, myth busters and how people can protect themselves. It also provides the latest situation reports and numbers in real time.

The service can be accessed through a link (or direct to this number +41 797 818 791) that opens a conversation on WhatsApp. Simply type “hi” to activate the conversation, prompting a menu of options that can help answer questions about COVID-19.