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The State of Workplace Disability Inclusion & Digital Accessibility: 2020

How COVID-19 and the changing workplace are enabling more inclusive practices

COVID-19's Impact on Workplace Inclusion

October 2020 marked the 76th observance of Disability Employment Awareness month, and the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). While disability-employment awareness is a core business priority every day at UKG, we used the holiday as a chance to take a deeper look at our company policies as well as what disability inclusion looks like today for other companies across the United States.

Today's workplace landscape is nothing like we could have imagined at the outset of 2020. For decades, companies with office workers have thought about employment-disability inclusion and digital accessibility[1] as it pertains to our workplace environment—not our homes. With the two suddenly conflated, we were curious: How has COVID-19 impacted the workforce's ability to accommodate employees with disabilities and prioritize digital accessibility in our increasingly digital world?
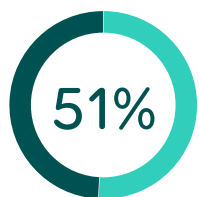
Recent research shows nearly

50%

of the workforce that can is still working from home, and

25%

of workers want to make their remote work permanent.

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We surveyed 1,000 employees working in a management role at U.S. companies with at least 150 employees. What we found gives us profound hope when it comes to fostering more equitable and accessible workplaces.

51%

Over half of managers (51%) said COVID-19's impact on their people has accelerated their companies' ability to accommodate employees with disabilities. They anticipate being able to hire a more diverse workforce and better retain employees with disabilities.

78%
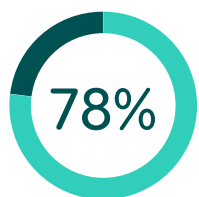
Moreover, when things return to normal in the office, **more than three quarters of employees** think their companies' accommodation of employees with disabilities or employees requiring reasonable accommodations[2] will be better, compared with times before COVID-19.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted business. However, it's inspiring to see companies use this obstacle as an opportunity to go back to the basics—building a culture of inclusion, reexamining technology and accessibility, and advancing disability inclusion initiatives.

Although this may seem like a 'pause' in the way we work, we will soon see which companies have taken action now, positioning themselves for a more resilient, sustainable, and innovative future ahead."

Jill Houghton
President and CEO,
Disability:IN

[1] *We define digital accessibility as the ability of a website, mobile application, or other digital tools and technologies to be easily navigated and understood by a wide range of users, including those users who have visual, auditory, motor, or cognitive disabilities. The purpose is providing all users access to the same information regardless of the impairments they may have.*

[2] *We define reasonable accommodations as assistance or changes to a position or workplace that will enable an employee to do their job despite having a disability. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified employees with disabilities, unless doing so would pose an undue hardship.*

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Benchmarking Disability-Inclusion Practices

Before diving into how work-from-home orders have changed things, we wanted to hear from managers on what they currently understand about disability inclusion, and how their employers stack up when it comes to training and providing accommodations.

Most managers (85%) think their companies' performance in addressing disability inclusion is "above average." More importantly, our data showed these managers know this space well and that the praise isn't just lip service. When asked what is covered under the ADA's legal requirements for organizations to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities, a third of managers claim to know its ins-and-outs entirely, while an additional 36% claim to know "a good amount."

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What Companies Are Doing to Aid Disability Inclusion

58% Allow flexible working hours

43% Offer training programs specifically designed for employees with disabilities

41% Have a dedicated resource in IT to assist employees with disabilities

33% Contract with interpreting-service provider to fulfill remote meeting requests as needed

28% Include language in partner and vendor agreements requiring new applications be accessible

Additionally, training and resources around accommodation for employees with disabilities are abundant. More than three-quarters (77%) of managers say that, if their direct report disclosed they have a disability, they received the proper training on responding and providing insights on potential accommodations.

Today's employer is taking disability inclusion seriously:

Managers have had a training on potential accommodations for direct report with disabilities	77%
Company has an employee resource group (ERG) for team members with disabilities	65%
Company has a feedback mechanism for employees to raise concerns about digital accessibility	82%
Company has an Accessibility Champions Program	51%
Employees with disabilities are included in the procurement process for new digital work tools	73%

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Work to Do

Despite the positive numbers previously mentioned, there's still ample room for companies to improve disability inclusion and training.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of managers surveyed say they haven't had—or weren't sure if they had—the proper training to respond to or provide insight on potential accommodations when direct reports disclosed details about an employee's disability.

Today's managers face a knowledge gap— nearly half (47%) of managers indicate they have a direct report with a physical or cognitive disability. So while the bulk of companies have a feedback mechanism for employees to raise concerns about things such as digital accessibility, one in four managers isn't sure how to start a conversation on disability inclusion with their direct reports.
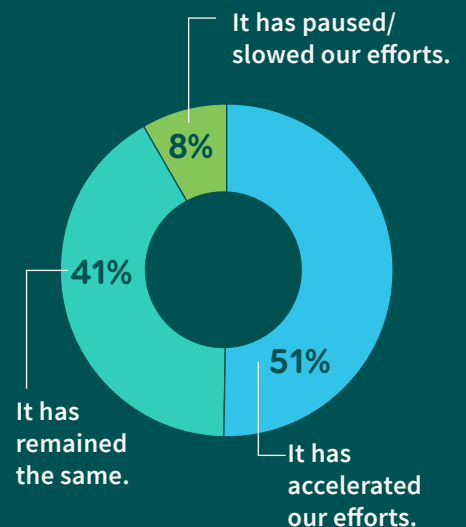
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COVID-19 Silver Lining

The shift to remote work has accelerated diversity-inclusion efforts and may make it easier for companies to accommodate employees with disabilities.

While COVID-19's impact on the workforce has been tremendous, one bright spot is that it seems to have had little negative effect on disability inclusion. In fact, more than half of managers (51%) indicate that work-from-home orders have accelerated their companies' efforts to accommodate employees with disabilities.

That perception of improvement is even stronger from managers who identify as having a cognitive or physical disability: 71% of managers with a disability think COVID-19 has accelerated inclusion efforts, and 65% of managers with a direct report with a disability feel the same.
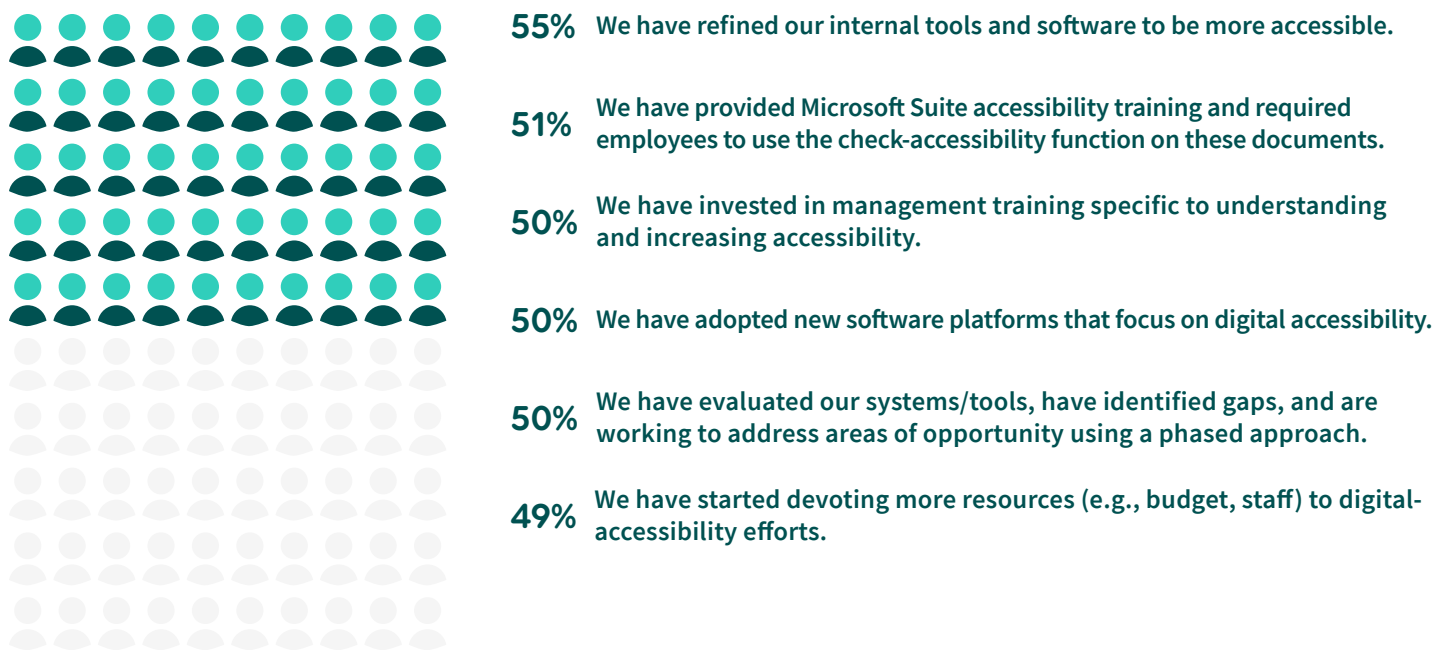
How do you think COVID-19 and its impact on the workforce (e.g., an increasingly remote workforce, new ways of collaborating and accessing software) have affected your company's ability to accommodate employees with disabilities?

It has paused/ slowed our efforts.

8%

41%

51%

It has remained the same.

It has accelerated our efforts.

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Since COVID-19 began and the way we collaborate has fundamentally changed, three-quarters of managers report having received a training on conducting accessible remote meetings.

But the changes didn't stop there.

When asked, "How has remote work accelerated your company's efforts to prioritize digital accessibility or accommodate employees?" roughly half of all respondents said their companies are doing the following:

55% We have refined our internal tools and software to be more accessible.

51% We have provided Microsoft Suite accessibility training and required employees to use the check-accessibility function on these documents.

50% We have invested in management training specific to understanding and increasing accessibility.

50% We have adopted new software platforms that focus on digital accessibility.

50% We have evaluated our systems/tools, have identified gaps, and are working to address areas of opportunity using a phased approach.

49% We have started devoting more resources (e.g., budget, staff) to digital-accessibility efforts.

While this "pause" in the way we work has been a call to action for employers and managers to take stock of their inclusion efforts, it hasn't been the case for every company.

8% of companies say COVID-19 has impeded their ability to accommodate employees with disabilities, citing shifting budget priorities or the lack of budget to invest in additional software and managerial training.

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A Look Ahead

In our research, we surveyed office-based employees—those who have the ability to work from home and are now experiencing remote work as their "new normal." For many companies, a more flexible work-from-home situation will be the reality even after the pandemic is over. So we wanted to learn whether managers think disability inclusion will be better post-COVID-19, and if companies are taking the actions needed to make that a reality.

Thinking ahead to a post-COVID-19 world in which many businesses will have shifted to remote work as their new normal, how do you think your company's accommodation of employees with disabilities or employees requiring reasonable accommodations will be different, compared to before the pandemic?

- Worse 2%
- 20% The same
- 78% Better

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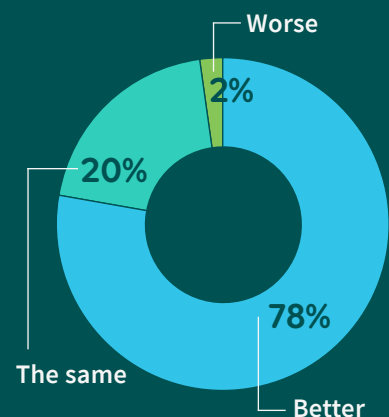
More Inclusive Hiring

As to why it will be better, more than half of managers (57%) say they plan to continue adding resources and accommodations for employees and 48% say that remote employees who need reasonable accommodations have already reported being more productive and more comfortable.

What does this mean for company growth?

Remote work could make a marked change in disability-employment statistics

49% expect to hire more employees that require reasonable accommodations

57% believe they will be better able to retain those same employees

Let's Get Digital

An increasingly remote workforce puts the focus on digital accessibility and not just reasonable accommodations in the office for physical and cognitive disabilities. We asked managers: When it comes to digital accessibility, what topics does your management team plan to prioritize in the coming year?

51% Making our internal tools, documents, and software more accessible.

45% Software accommodations for employees who are deaf or hard of hearing, or blind or have low vision.

45% Managerial trainings for managing employees with disabilities, including neurodiverse employees.

45% Company-wide disability etiquette or sensitivity training.

45% Software, hardware, or other peripheral accommodations for neurodiverse employees.

37% Adding disability inclusion to the company's ESG (Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance) efforts.

36% Conducting an audit to understand where we are and where we aren't accessible.

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Challenges Remain

While only 2% of employees think disability accommodation post-COVID-19 will be worse than it is today, all managers acknowledge that there are challenges ahead.

When asked what they see as the three biggest challenges to expanding digital accessibility over the next 12 months, they said budget restrictions, provision of reasonable accommodations in a remote environment, and system accessibility.

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COVID-19's impact on the workforce has been monumental. When it comes to disability inclusion and increased digital accessibility, it appears the "pause" in the way we work has given companies and managers room to reflect on everything from how inclusive their hiring practices are to how they can simply be more accommodating to employees who identify as having a disability.

While the "new normal" remains largely unknown, it's promising to see so many managers optimistic about a more inclusive and accessible future.

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About This Report

Survey Methodology

The recruitment period was September 14 to September 21, 2020. A total of 1,000 respondents, who are U.S. office workers in managerial positions, completed the survey. The sample was provided by Market Cube, a research-panel company. Panel respondents were invited to take the survey via email and were incentivized to participate via the panel's established points program.

Kronos Incorporated and Ultimate Software merged on April 1, 2020, and on October 1, 2020, became UKG.

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