

The art of consultation: talking, listening and much more

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Tom Neil has a wealth of knowledge and experience in employment relations. He works as a policy adviser at Acas and develops good practice guidance, including our latest advice on information and consultation arrangements.

When, as now, we are faced with huge upheavals in our home and working life, do we need to be told what to do or asked what to do? I believe we need a range of responses to cope effectively, some involving advising staff of what to do, and some involving actively listening to feedback and new ideas.

For years Acas has been extolling the virtues of genuine consultation. Our advisers use the following simple descriptions to explain the differences between briefing, consultation, negotiation and delegation:

- This is what I have done = briefing
- This is what I have done, what do you think? = briefing with feedback
- This is what I am planning to do, what do you think? = single option consultation
- These are the options, which do you think I should take? = multi-option consultation
- Let's get together and negotiate a deal = negotiation
- You decide what we do = delegation

When many people may be worrying about their jobs in the wake of coronavirus, having a job may be more important than the quality of that job.

But it's not surprising that the government commissioned metrics of what makes a job 'good', includes having a voice in how things are done at work. This is because all the research tells us that feeling involved in decisions that affect us makes us more productive and boosts our sense of wellbeing.

Changes to Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) regulations

The good news is that from today (6 April) consultation gets easier. Changes to the law mean that it takes fewer people to request that their employer inform and involve them in changes to the business or working conditions (down from 10% of employees to just 2%).

Many employers consult with their staff as a matter of course, but in these troubled times it's worth reminding ourselves of the value of getting together and keeping each other informed and involved.

If you are an employee, manager or employer and want to know more, we've just published [new guidance on the ICE regulations](#) which takes you through it step by step.

Consultation has a rich history. As I've been immersing myself in it for the past few months, let me reassure any of you who may be put off by any perceived 'process':

- the traditional name for working groups made up of employees and employers is 'joint consultative committees', but you can call them what you like –? new guidance from CIPD suggests 'innovation forums'
- although the regulations set out clear guidelines about how, when and what you should be informed and consulted on, voluntary arrangements often work best, so it's good to be proactive where possible

Consultation is very much an art, rather than a science, so try and build flexibility into how it works best for you. We do not always choose the change that comes our way but we can all work together to help manage it the best way we can.

[See Acas's new guidance for employers on ICE regulations.](#)