



“We won't let the arts treat life as an afterthought”

Introduction

PiPA (Parents and Carers in Performing Arts) is the cultural sector leader in inclusive working practices for Parents and Carers.

We have over 70 industry partners who we train up, talk to, and learn alongside - all in the name of making the Performing Arts sector a better place to be for people with caring responsibilities.

Because we know that a truly world class performing arts is inclusive of all talents and circumstances.

And when Parents and Carers aren't supported – they leave the sector, and it's worse for it.

So, given all that – how do we live our own truth?

How do we work as an organisation?

It's a question we get asked a lot.

Do we do a 4-day working week?

Do we work whenever we want?

Here's how we do it. [OBJ]

Notes on this document

1. It's really important to know that the way we work delivers not only for the people who work here, but for the organisation too.

We put people first, and in doing so, the operational rigor and clarity that we have developed ensures that everyone in PiPA knows what they, and their teams, need to deliver to achieve our strategic objectives.

2. Hold it lightly – we do!

This document is not intended to be a 'how to' for your organisation - we all have very different needs and output.

It's more of a 'how we do' and it works for us – until it doesn't, then we explore it, learn from it and change it. We'd encourage you to find the glimmers in this document that could work for you and your team.

3. We have anonymised individual staff members' quotes and stories about working in our team. We have done this so we don't pin anyone to a certain view at a moment in time.

As a team we change and develop our thoughts all the time on how we do things, one of the very reasons we believe our system works.

The people & location

We're a team of 8 people – we all work part time, bar 1 person who works full time. This makes the full-time equivalent of our team 5.6 people.

We have no office and no set base.

We all work remotely, from the South Coast of England all the way to Scotland, and use Microsoft Teams to hold meetings and chat.

Remote working takes discipline, there's no doubt about it. We all have different ways of

making it feel good. Walks before work, swimming, set lunch breaks, or prioritizing seeing people for lunch – in person or over a call.

We are working to meet up in-person more, as we know there's a certain energy we get from being with each other and being close to the product of our partners – live arts!

Getting together costs money (we pay everyone's travel (and accommodation when necessary) and childcare if someone doesn't have an alternative, so we have to find a good balance of how much we can do this.

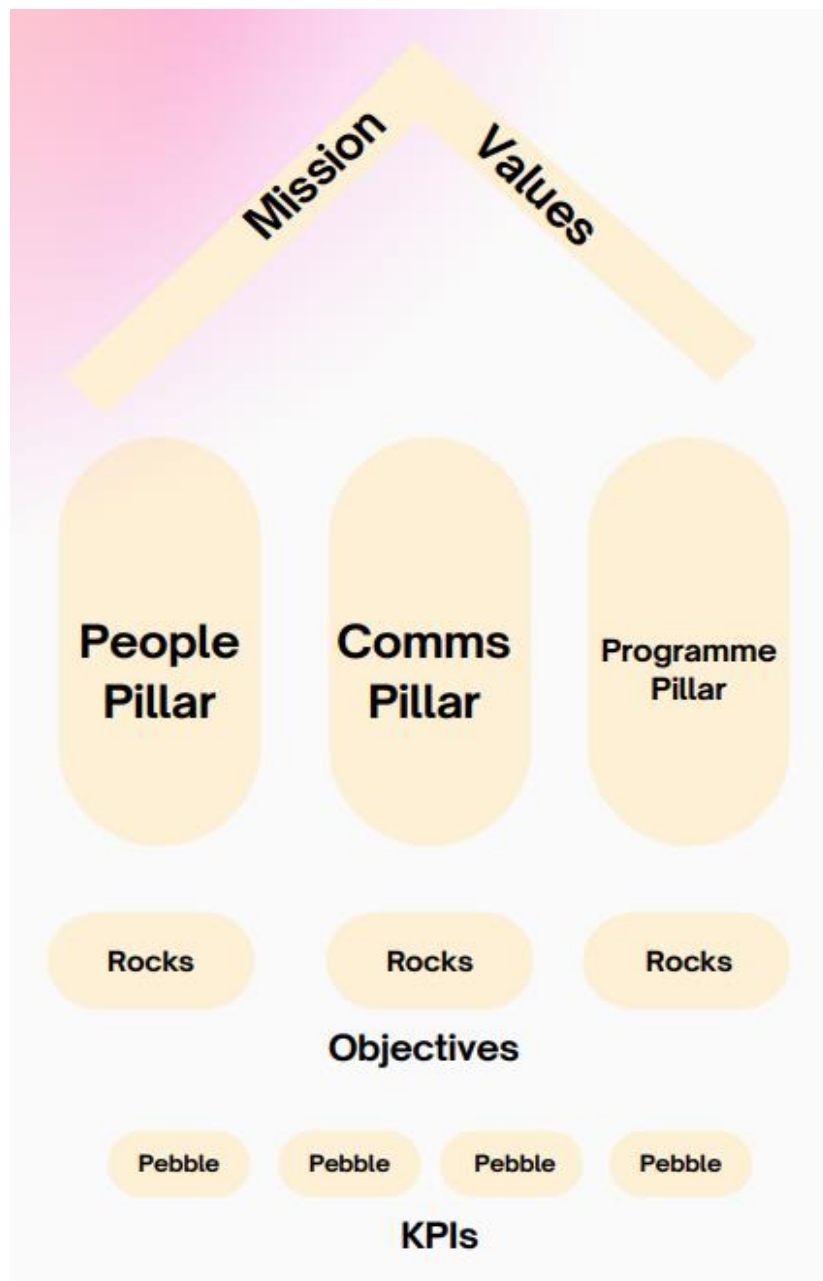
“I share a home working space with my partner, who also works from home, and we are lucky enough to have our own ‘office environment’ from which we can

physically enter and leave the space which is significant to supporting our work/home balance”

“Communication is key – not being able to just look over at someone’s desk to see if they’re in, or tapping them on the shoulder to ask a question, means we all work hard and creatively to be clear about when we’re available and not– for a work reason or just to catch up on Strictly / The Traitors”

Planning & work design

We use a system of pillars, rocks and pebbles that make up our 'PiPA house'



- The roof is our mission and our values; it is held up by pillars - the key areas of the organisation.

- The pillars are made of rocks – the objectives for each of our key areas.
- Pebbles are the KPIs that sit alongside the objectives.

It takes all the elements to be in sync to keep our ‘PiPA house’ standing and thriving.

At any point in time, a staff member can check their pillars, rocks, and pebbles and check the work they are doing is on the right track. We plan on annual and quarterly cycles and report against that.

This is how we operationalise our strategic objectives and make sure they are delivered to the best of our collective ability. The way we work sometimes resembles a task-based approach to work.

Hours & how we set them

We each set our own hours.

We work to PiPA'S Principles of Flexibility: APPENDIX 1
“We value flexibility and we ask for fluidity in return”

You can work at a time that works for you, whilst supporting collective goals and being mindful of yours, and others, deadlines. We do have core hours (10-2pm) to ensure we get cross-over time, but start and finish times vary a lot.

Some team members have chunks of time out of the office during the day for example working 9am – 2pm then back at 6pm.

“I love finishing at 3pm and being fully with my young person – trying to work in that strange bit between them coming home from school and 5pm would never work for me and actually really stress me out. Perhaps when my young person is older – but not now.”

“I need a good long walk in the morning to do good thinking. Then I sit down to work at 10am and I find my thoughts are calm and useful”

If we need to ask a question of a team member and we're not going to cross paths for a few days, we'll write out and schedule our message on Teams chat or email (depending on how we/they communicate best) for the next time they are in, then when we're back, we will most likely have our answer.

Because we are so small – we work hard to share information with each other in specific Teams chat channels and on our shared drive, so we minimise single points of failure.

If we have an in-person event or want to work in person, we book it well in advance – ideally around 3 months so that those with caring responsibilities can put whatever support they need to in place. This is not only a respect-for-time move, it saves the charity money as advance fares are cheaper.

“Leaving ‘breadcrumb trails’ in our work is vital – but for those of us who come from the Production/performance side of the industry, not uncommon – we know that sometimes the ‘show must go on’ and we work hard not to be the person holding up the flow”

We do have a core Team Day: Monday, between 10-2pm (designed this way because many of us have a school run, so it's rare we would put a key meeting in for 4pm).

This helps everyone know when they can safely book a meeting with each other, and we all check in with each other.

Mondays can feel very busy sometimes – something we're working on. Some team members like having one full meeting day with the rest of the week to set their own pace / location / meetings.

For all of this to work, we have to keep our calendars up to date – so if you need to grab someone, you know when you next can and if your paths aren't crossing within a timeframe that's needed, you need to take a proactive approach to negotiating a time that works for everyone involved.

“If I want to shift my hours in a week – e.g. I want to work Friday instead of Monday for whatever reason, I can just change it in my diary and communicate it to my manager. It's my responsibility to check in on meetings I need to be at and move things around so that they work if I do that.”

“It makes me so much more relaxed knowing this is possible if life changes, and life changes all the time!”

We get asked a lot about the 4-day week, which is one framework of a great range of strategies, that can help embed flexibility.

We did consult with the team on it a couple of years ago and they decided that they didn't want to a 4-day week because the focus for us here is autonomy. **We** set our hours.

A 4-day week would actually constrict us, and we all work such varied and fluctuating working patterns.

AMA recently published a brilliant behind-the-scenes on their 4-day week pilot:

<https://www.culturehive.co.uk/resources/behind-the-scenes-with-ama-4-day-week>

What this means in practice

Does this mean things take a little longer sometimes? **Yes**

Does this mean our team have protected time when they are not working? **Yes**

Do the wheels come off? **They can do, and that's ok.**

We foster a learning culture, and we see the opportunity in wheels coming off.

Do we have a plan in place to mitigate against wheels coming off? **Absolutely we do.**

When you focus on autonomy, staff are happier – they can care for their people and themselves in a way that suits them.

“I don't stress about the person I care for being ill one day – I know I can just shift some hours to give them what they need”

“I feel so supported as a parent. It is assumed and expected that the children of PiPA come first”

To sum-up

You could call what we do **autonomy - with anchors**.

Perhaps this is because we are a very small team. We can set the guidelines and the next day, see how they go. We don't have a show on the stage either – you can class what we do as office work (but we do work with partners who do have shows on stages to find the flex!)

We know our way of working does not suit everyone. There's a level of 'unlearning' we find people go through when they start at PiPA, especially if they have been in a working environment built on rigidity.

You have to be ok with guidelines instead of rules. You have to be really comfortable working digitally.

You have to be responsible for how your week works, you have to think about who is where and when you might need to talk to them in advance.

But it would be nice to think we operate with that level of respect for our colleague's time anyway, right?

The tough part, as with anything like this, is sticking by our working choices, even when they are tested.

It will never not be busy. We work in an often chaotic sector where funds, resources and deadlines are tight.

But we have made a choice to work as we do – to show it can and should be done.

Working at PiPA is to live the values we advocate for, and it's not always straightforward. It takes a lot of navigation and communication – but it's the right problem to have.

“Having worked in another sector with a traditional 9-5 set up, working in a more flexible way has been incredibly restorative. This way of working has meant I can engage with my passion for the Arts and also hold my passion for another role in another sector, where I have a duty of care to others, in a more balanced way. It also means that I can also take better care of myself.”

Appendix 1

PiPA's principals of Flexibility

“We value flexibility, and we ask for fluidity in return”

Flexibility means:

We break away from the 9-5 norm i.e. You can front-load your hours, you don't have to work the same pattern, week to week (we don't mean working evenings and weekends as standard – unless you want to)

Sharing your calendar availability proactively so everyone knows when they can contact you

Trust is key. You have autonomy over your work hours, within PiPA's guidelines and role requirements

We work remotely but we come together at key times. Monday is our non-negotiable core day for us to catch up as a team (with children if needed!)

Fluidity means:

Being open to adjusting your work hours as needed to support team needs and collective goals with notice and in alignment with your availability

Taking TOIL (time off in lieu) for extra hours worked to get a project/ task completed

Taking ownership for managing our hours. We take responsibility for self-managing our time, but there is support if you need it

Positive, fluid communication is key – always talk to your manager – when everyone is flexible and fluid it's hard enough to keep track of your own hours, let alone others!

Thank you for taking the time to read how we do things.

If you share elements of this document, please credit us.

If you're a member and want to talk more about this, drop us a line.

If you'd like to become a member, get in touch - we would love to talk about how we can support you.

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