



Views from a cross-sector group of global organisational leaders

October 2020





INTRODUCTION

At the outset of 2020, for many organisations, remote working was still a relatively unfamiliar experience, but Covid-19 has had a radical impact on this norm.

Research undertaken by Global Workplace Analytics estimate that:

25-30% of the workforce will be working at home on a multiple-days-a-week basis by the end of 2021.

It is here to stay.

As lockdown fatigue increases and with the reality of impending restrictions, we can expect the disconnect between teams, and within teams, to grow. Therefore, fostering

and maintaining high performance in teams will also become even more challenging.

The traditional characteristics of high performing teams are under threat. A united purpose, shared objectives and common goals can be maintained virtually. However, we are finding that the innate human connections that underpin high performance, the ability to have great debates and come up with creative solutions and to feel part of a team, not an isolated, individual member ... these are all being progressively negatively impacted by the unremitting virtual environment we are all working in, day after day.

We miss our watercooler conversations!

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is based on the output from the third virtual workshop that Sticky Change has run with our clients and partners globally. The workshops have been held to identify the challenges of, and the solutions to, working differently during and after the crisis.

Once again, our participants came from a wide variety of organisations and included representatives of healthcare providers, utility companies, insurance companies, educational institutes, central government, local authorities and charities.

The focus of this workshop was on how to manage the challenge of building and sustaining a high performing team in a remote working environment.

There were three main scenarios that our participants expressed an interest in exploring:

1. Onboarding a new member of the team
2. Setting up a new team to perform effectively
3. Continuing to maintain and develop an existing team



Report Structure

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 1 outlines the general barriers to effective remote team working that were identified
- Section 2 – 4 considers the three topics in more detail, outlining specific challenges, considerations, ideas and solutions
- The Appendix lists references for further reading.



SECTION 1: THE CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE REMOTE WORKING FOR TEAMS AND INDIVIDUALS

During the discussions, it became clear that remote working has many advantages. Some teams definitely feel more connected, with managers making herculean efforts to communicate with them, prioritising activities to bring them together, both for work and fun. The virtual meeting environment has meant it's easier to hold a whole team meeting, and there is a real sense that, for the most part, we are all in it together.

But that was at the beginning of the crisis. Now, our participants highlighted that maintaining the energy, engagement and attention of teams and team members who have been going above and beyond for a long period of time, is becoming increasingly challenging. What are those challenges to effective remote team working?



The following challenges to working from home (WFH), as a team or individuals, were identified:

1. Work-life balance ... we're always on

Homeschooling; homes not set up for home working; the pressure to be seen to be online all the time; the list of pressures on maintaining a separation between home and working life is growing.

At the outset, for many people, working from home was a novelty. Still, even with children now back at school, the prolonged exposure to WFH is putting increasing pressure on people.

For many observers, seeing a three-year-old interrupting the Teams' meeting has

been hilarious, but for the parent at the other end, it's both distracting and concerning. How will this be perceived if it keeps happening? What will your manager feel about how focused you are? Might it impede your promotion in the future if you are felt to be distracted? Or your ability to take on high-value work and projects?

Many report that time spent travelling to work has now been consumed by endless back to back meetings with little respect being paid to organisational meeting etiquette – should this even be



in place. This puts pressure on everyone, whether you have children or not, as you spend time doing your 'real work' well into the evening.

This is further exacerbated by some organisations beginning to measure performance through presence on a platform, monitoring people's virtual clocking in and out, forcing a culture of being always 'on.'

2. Lack of a real (physical) connection



The personal touch is hard to replicate in the virtual world. We take most of our cues from people's body language and other non-verbal indicators. Still, on a virtual call, it's more difficult to read and interpret. And that's when you are not obsessing about your own when you can't help catching sight of yourself!

Making real eye contact is a challenge, and that's just with a couple of people in a virtual room.

Knowing when to speak, not interrupting or speaking over someone else makes conversations seem halting and wooden, lacking spontaneity.

And then there is the whole other matter of team members who won't put their cameras on – thereby sending signals that they are not engaged and/or could be multi-tasking.



3. The tussle with technology

It's been a learning curve for many of us! Teams, Zoom, Webex, whatever your favoured platform for communication, we've often learnt the hard way.

Lack of familiarity with the software, poor quality connections, weak broadband, old and inadequate equipment – all conspire to make communication difficult at times, exacerbating the sense of distance within and between teams.



4. Inequalities of experience

For some managers, the introduction of the remote working culture has actually meant more team cohesion, as they reported actually managing to get all their team in a meeting for the very first time. Past the initial euphoria, however, an inequality of remote working experience has emerged. They take several forms.

- Some of the team may be working face to face still, while others are

fully virtual. Depending on where the manager is, they may feel more connected to those in a similar situation to themselves.

- The 'don't have kids/ have kids' has already been highlighted above. Still, there is little doubt that the latter scenario continues to put great pressure on parents to be perceived as pulling their weight as much as the former.



- Furloughed vs not furloughed. If non furloughed team members had pressure covering for furloughed colleagues (and at times felt resentment towards them for what could be perceived as an easy time), now returning employees feel a need to overcompensate and put unhealthy pressure on themselves.
- The home/physical environment. While 'being' in someone's home and seeing more of their personal

side has helped team members feel more connected, it's also highlighted the inequalities between them. Do you have a garden or not? Are you working in a makeshift office – with a laptop on an ironing board in a bedroom or in your own home office? Are you competing for broadband with several others in the house or happily eating up the internet?

5. Managerial skills under pressure



Trusting your team and team members has never been more critical. Managing performance has never been more complex and challenging. How do you have an effective 1:1 or a difficult conversation over the virtual platform that allows you to really respond

empathetically and/or appropriately to their reactions?

Does it all feel more intense? In a remote working environment, it becomes evident if a manager has good emotional intelligence or not. And for the manager themselves, how do they hold their team member's powerful emotions at



the moment, while letting go afterwards?

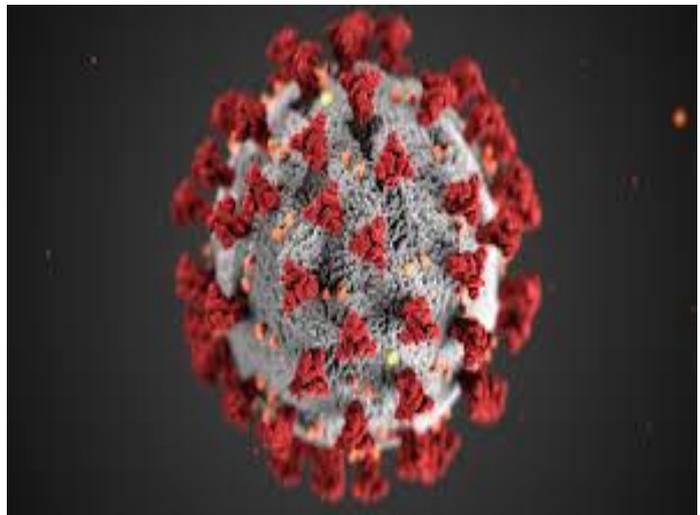
In the early days of lockdown, managers put enormous energy into communicating with their teams, making them feel connected ... but as the sense of the initial enthusiasms becoming stale as remote working becomes the norm, with no hope of meeting up for many

months, then maintaining this level of communication and camaraderie is challenging.

It's also becoming more of a challenge to do both formal and informal team-based and team building activities as everyone becomes just a bit fed up of the virtual calls and being on screen all the time.

6. Fear and uncertainty in Covid-19 times

Amongst most of our participants, there was a recognition that people are suffering from low levels of depression; ranging from feelings of 'fed-upness' to full-blown signs of stress and distress. Fatigue, loneliness, uncertainty and fears for the future are all impacting team and individual morale, making maintaining high performance a challenge. Self-discipline is pushed to the limit. Constantly working in a crisis mode is unsustainable, without a continued focus on well being at both organisational, team and individual levels.



SECTION 2 - ONBOARDING A NEW TEAM MEMBER

1. Practical Considerations



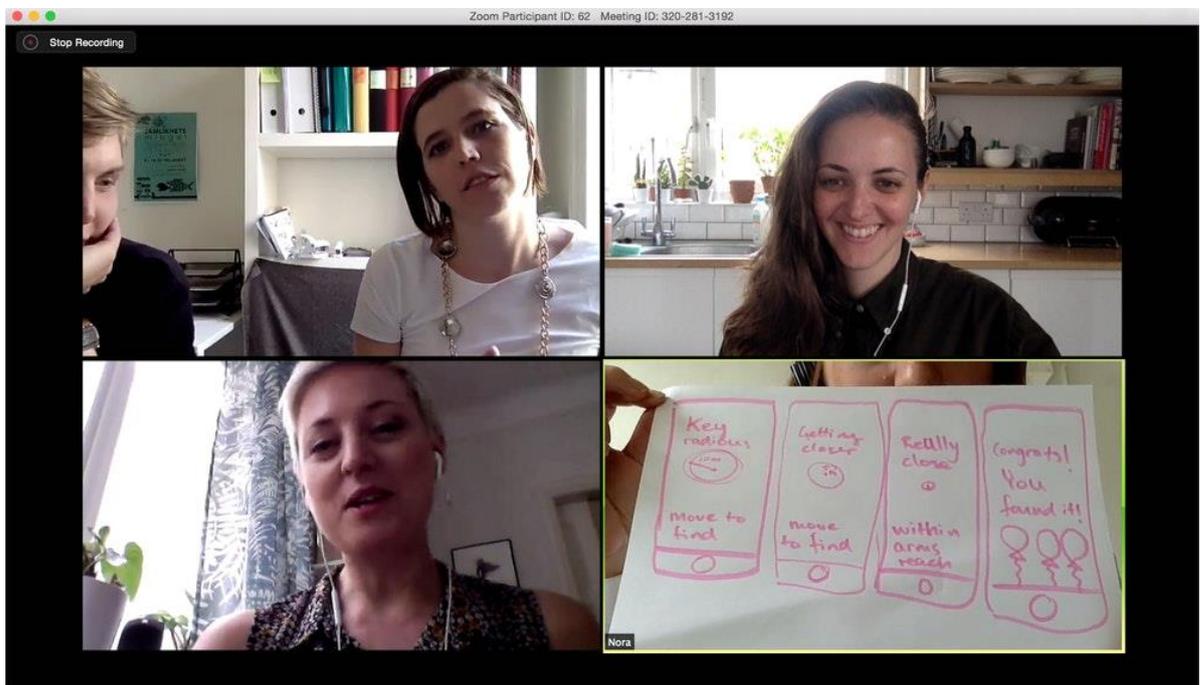
There were some practice considerations discussed for staff who are coming new into an organisation:

- Plan their induction, and in particular the first week, well in advance so that you can get the relevant meetings set up, space them out so that the new recruit is not overwhelmed with too many new faces and new information in the first 2 – 3 weeks.
- Put a pre-meeting in before the first week to find out what the new member of staff needs, how they prefer to work and any concerns they may have about virtual onboarding.
- Put together a pack of information for the new recruit, including organisational strategy, org charts, annual reports (if relevant), key business presentations, policies and procedures.
- Make sure the IT kit arrives at the new recruit's house before the start date.
- Set up a welcome meeting with the manager for their start time on the first day and ensure they can access the meeting with their own laptop so that they don't have to have the organisational IT kit up and running by then.
- Book time in on the first day for an IT support person to get the new member of staff up and running.
- Book time on the first day to train them in whatever virtual platform the organisation uses.



- Organise briefing/training on the essential organisational systems and make sure that they have the contact details for any IT help desk support...
- Set up a meeting with HR to ensure all the practical employment activities are covered, such as bank accounts for salary, pension contributions, booking holidays.
- If you have a WFH policy, make sure this is shared at the start of the contract. Talk the new recruit through the policy – or the approach to WFH if you don't have a written down policy. Make sure they know that the expectation is that cameras will be turned on when on virtual calls.
- Make sure the new recruit is added to the relevant distribution lists on day one.
- If you can find an opportunity to meet safely face to face, set this up, for example, booking adjacent desks in your office or arranging a socially distanced team social in the local park

2. Organisational Culture



- One of the challenges for a new recruit who is working remotely is working out what the organisational culture is – i.e. how do we do things around here. If you are a values-based organisation, talk to them about the values and how they impact on behaviours.



- On a practical level, talk to them about the accepted protocols for checking in with people when working remotely – email/chat room/video calls etc.
- Share your experience of what is important to the leaders of both

your function and the organisation as a whole. Talk about what behaviours are rewarded, for example, if people are valued and recognised for taking the initiative, make sure they know, or if taking risks is frowned upon, ensure they know that too!

3. Team

- Introduce them to their fellow team members in the first day or two.
- Hold 15 – 30-minute sessions every morning with as many of the team as you can, this will enable the new recruit to understand how you work as a team.
- Organise one to one meetings for the new recruit with each of their team members.

- Hold non-work sessions: if you were in the office and would have taken the team out for lunch in the first week, think about how to recreate that virtually. For example, meet for coffee and chat, have a Friday late afternoon drinks session. If it is a small team, you could even send them all a picnic box and have a virtual joint Friday picnic lunch!
- Use an interactive tool such as www.mentimeter.com to engage with your team members.

4. Their Role



- Enable them to shadow someone remotely, if at all possible.
- Share with them the overall picture of the role and how it fits in with the organisational/function and team strategy.
- Discuss with them what they find particularly energising and excel in, and identify specific tasks to complete in the first 2 – 3 weeks that will energise them and enable them to excel. Avoid setting bigger objectives for the first few weeks to allow them time to land in the business and the team.
- Discuss their understanding of the role, and find a way to assess their current skill levels in undertaking the role effectively. As a result, build a development plan around their specific needs.

5. Well-being



- Provide the new recruit with a buddy. If possible, have the buddy reach out to the new recruit before they start, to introduce themselves and enable the person to ask questions.
- Provide the new recruit with the 2nd point of contact in at least the first week, in case their manager is not available.
- Talk to the new recruit about their WFH set up – for example, do they have a desk or are they working at the kitchen table, and what distractions are they likely to face. If the person has children who are likely to be a distraction make that okay for them. Encourage them to let the kids say hello and acknowledge that you expect them to not be completely focused at times.
- Be prepared to share something of yourself and your home situation – avoid corporate backgrounds and let the person connect with the real you.
- Make it safe for them to say they need help, or they are struggling. People need to know it is okay to admit they need help, even more so when they are new in an organisation. It is critical that new members of staff feel psychological safe: they can ask for help, they can admit they are struggling, they can say they made a mistake, and they will not be penalised.
- Make sure they are informed of the more formal or structured well-being support mechanisms and resources available to employees and how to access them.



- Check-in with them daily to start with, one of the challenges of working remotely is that you don't just walk past someone's desk or bump into them at the water cooler. It is harder to notice if someone is struggling. Make sure your language conveys that you really do want to know how they are, it is not good enough to say 'All going well then?'. You need to find a way to genuinely ask how they are, demonstrate you want to hear the truth and take the time to listen to their answers; some example questions:
 - ✓ How has today gone?

6. Calendar Management

- In the first two weeks ensure that the new recruit has appointments set up with key people that they will be working with. Make sure you have briefed the people they are meeting effectively, so they know who the new person is and the purpose of the meeting. You could join the virtual meeting for the first few meetings to do introductions in person.
- Provide the new recruit with background material to read/watch/listen to.
- Make sure that their calendar is not overloaded with meetings; they need time to read the material and

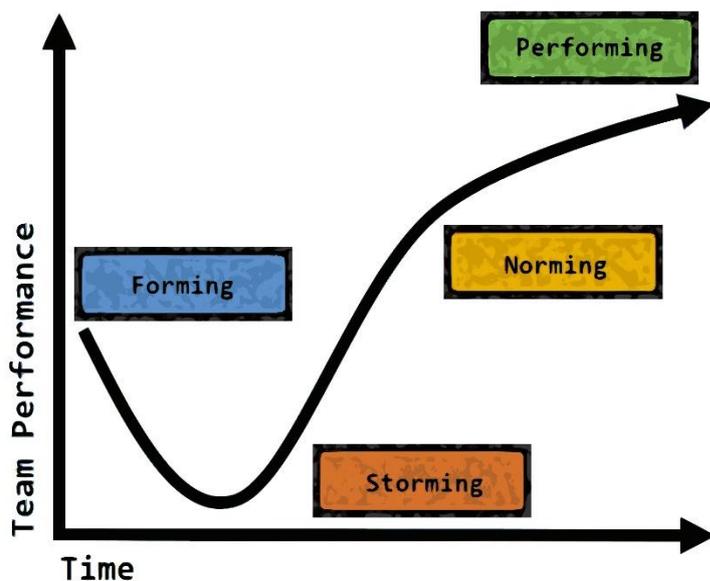
- ✓ On a scale of 1 – 10, if 1 was dreadful and 10 wonderful, what score would you give today?
- ✓ And as a follow up - What is the basis for that score?
- ✓ What has gone well?
- ✓ What has gone less well?
- ✓ What support do you need from me?
- Maintain regular contact for longer than you would in the office. Having 1 to 1 sessions for the first 4 – 6 weeks gives the new member of the team the comfort of knowing they have access to you regularly.

to reflect/recover. It is absolutely exhausting to start a new job – everything is new; they are constantly learning and are quite likely to be permanently outside of their comfort zone. Ensure they have space in their calendar to reflect on what they are learning and to have recovery time.

- As they start to organise their own meetings, encourage them to arrange meetings that are shorter than they would be face to face AND to avoid back to back meetings. Encourage them to organise 30 or 45-minute meetings and then have at least a 15-minute break.



SECTION 3: SETTING UP A NEW TEAM TO PERFORM EFFECTIVELY



The key thing is moving the team through the stages of team development to performing as quickly as possible – and undertake team-building with intent.

The more the team members get to know each other, really understand – and value - their colleagues, have a shared sense of purpose and direction and a set of behaviours to sign up to, the quicker they will be able to have open and honest conversations and perform effectively.

1. Informal Introductions

It is important that people get to know each other on a personal level.

Think about how to emulate as much as possible activities you would undertake if you were in an office. Such as, going out for lunch, going for a few drinks together - something that breaks the ice between the team members. As we

write this in October 2020, people are a little weary of lockdown quizzes and virtual yoga sessions. It is getting hard to think of innovative ways to engage with people remotely. Check out with the team members what would work for them and explore option such as the app 'Let's Talk'.

2. Introductory Workshops

Setting up a new team requires regular meetings, virtually if face to face is not possible. The recommendation is for regular short sessions – say a maximum of 2 hours (with a 15-minute break) every week. The following series of workshops will fast track the forming and storming stages:

a. Personal Histories Patrick Lencioni in his book 'The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team' introduces the concept of the 'Personal Histories' exercise in which people share some generally low-risk information about their upbringing. In our experience, this exercise is highly impactful.



b. Who are we?

It is a great start to use a personality tool such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or Everything DiSC as a way to better understand each team member. People tend to enjoy these sessions, as a fun and interactive way to increase their own self-awareness and that of their colleagues. It gives people a language to articulate differences of approach and behaviours that depersonalises it.

c. What is our Purpose and Vision?

Engage the new team in defining both the purpose – i.e. why we exist – and the Vision – i.e. where we are going. This is a great way to get commitment and common understanding from the team members in what you deliver and the direction of travel.

d. What are our individual values?

Understanding the values of your team members and how they impact on how they turn up at work can be very enlightening. It facilitates a stronger understanding of each other and what is important to everyone. Brené Brown has a great set of values in her book 'Dare to Lead' which are available in the attached download in the Appendix Her challenge is to choose two only!

e. What are our team values?

Defining a set of values and behaviours for the team enables everyone to know what behaviours are expected - and importantly, what

behaviours are not accepted - around here. If organisational values exist have a conversation about what they specifically mean for the team concerning how you all behave with each other. If you don't have a set of values, creating a set of team values – alongside the underpinning behaviours – helps ensure everyone is clear about how to behave. The same list of values from Brené Brown mentioned in point 4 - above can be used for this exercise.





f. What are our strengths?

Understanding the team strengths can really help to ensure that people can focus on what they are good at AND find energising. Ask everyone to complete their strengths profile – link is in the Appendix - then

discuss, as a team, how you can distribute the work so that people are working to their strengths, rather than having to focus on overcoming their weaknesses, which will potentially be de-energising for them.



3. Team Vision Alignment

Ensure that the team vision is aligned with the organisational Vision. Research in 2020 identified that only 29% of employees said that their leader's Vision for the future seemed to align with the organisation's. 16% said their leader's

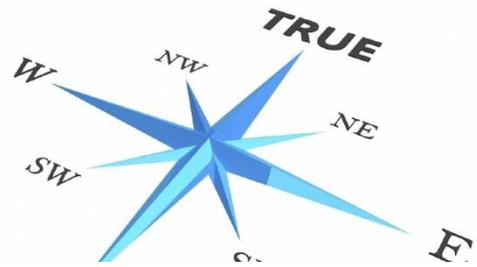
Vision for the future was never or rarely aligned with the organisation's. Make sure that your Vision is aligned so the team members can see how what the team is focused on – and by definition, what they are focused on – aligns with the organisation.



4. The Team Charter

Create the Team Charter (using the output of the workshops where appropriate) that the team members all engage with and buy into, the key elements are:

- a. The purpose – why we exist
- b. The Vision – where we are going
- c. Goals and measures of success – how we know we have been successful
- d. The Values and Behaviours – how we behave
- e. Roles and Responsibilities of the team and the individuals – the part we each play



5. Learning and Development

Identifying common development needs and creating opportunities for the team members to learn together is a great way to further build connection within a team. Find an online programme that everyone would benefit from completing and enable all

the team members to attend. Provide the opportunity to discuss the learning and how the team members will apply it in their day to day activities.

6. Keep it Going

Once the initial 'setting up the team' workshops have been completed, it is important to keep the connection between the team members. Ensure that the team continues to get together regularly; and that there is clear, consistent communication between team members, both on a 1 to 1 basis and as a group.

Enable the team members to talk about how they are feeling and keep a particular eye out for signs that well being is impacted. When people are working remotely, it is harder to establish if someone is struggling and/or suffering from anxiety.

SECTION 4: MAINTAINING AND DEVELOPING THE EXISTING TEAM

Common to all our participants involved in this discussion was the key question: what does high performing actually mean in this new working environment, even for teams who are used to working remotely?

It was generally agreed that defining this should be the starting point for all teams but especially if you are looking at maintaining and developing an existing team.

1. (Re)Define what the new high performing looks like



- As people have moved into a new performance year, it is worth discussing what great looks like in the new Covid world of remote working. Not just what the future looks like but what people need to leave behind. What is their role now and how has it changed? Some other great questions that are participants had asked were:
 - ✓ Do people still love their job?
 - ✓ What advice would they have given themselves in February that they still need to give themselves now?
- These conversations were found to be very cathartic and were then discussed in the full team.
- The team may also benefit from discussing all their roles and what can be done from home? This is particularly pertinent if you are not a company that has historically worked from home and may feel



that it is not possible. These norms can now be challenged to gain team commitment and understanding.

- Work even harder to catch people doing things right. It is hard to see people doing things right if you aren't in the same office, make sure that you go out of your way to spot the excellent performance and recognise it.

- It's now even more critical than ever to manage poor performance sooner rather than later as this can have an increased negative impact on other team members and may not be so easy to spot.

Firstly check in with someone, be curious about the poor performance rather than judgemental. Find out their story before you leap to criticising.

2. Maintain the focus on well being

- In these situations, it can be very impactful for leaders to demonstrate their own vulnerability, but it is so important. It normalises how people are feeling in the team and permits them to openly share their personal struggles. It builds trust.
- Take every opportunity to ask team members how they are – genuinely - and make sure you listen to the answer (see suggested questions in the Onboarding section). Many of our participants highlighted that they start each meeting with a 'check in' round. Even if people say 'Okay' at some point someone will say 'I'm not okay'... this allows teams to build a self-support mechanism and again promotes individual understanding of each other.
- Make a distinction between an operational meeting and an individual personal development meeting. Or between a team-building meeting and a support meeting. They should be as short as



appropriate – allowing for time to do the topic justice but not that becomes too tiring on the virtual platform.

- Where permitted, some participants were meeting their people in the park/outdoors for socially distanced catch-ups.
- Continue to run fun themed events such as 'Tuxedo Tuesdays'... the antidote to sweatpants sessions!
- Make sure that all your team know where they can find helpful resources that will support their well



being. A useful source is Able Futures which delivers the Access to Work Mental Health Support Service on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

- Always find time for your one to one meetings ... this is not a time to

3. Make working together effectively a regular activity and topic of conversation

- As a team, develop a charter on how to work together effectively *and* also how not to work together.
- Encourage people to hold each other accountable when the ground rules of the charter are not followed.
- Introduce a buddy system for co-coaching and support.
- Hold problem-solving sessions as a team, encouraging creativity and innovation in the solution-finding.

4. Use the communication technology well

- Not everything has to be done on Zoom. It's important to use all methods of collaborative communication, including the old fashioned mobile phone. Motivate team members not just through the virtual mean. Sending greeting cards, personal letters of thanks or a What's App message, even a small gift if appropriate. Consider what your team members would like most and then action it.
- Hold Virtual Coffee Lounges with the leaders of your organisations. Teams can meet up through Eventbrite and pose questions to the senior team. Make sure to use a facilitator and to promise to send an FAQ document afterwards for those questions not answered.

5. Equality of experience is key

- Be flexible and fair; find out what each of your people needs from you and meet their specific needs.
- Continue to develop people. People recommended getting groups of managers together to discuss what learning needs they had observed during the intense period of lockdown. Others put a real emphasis on coaching and coaching skills. It was agreed that all managers needed to be comfortable with coaching with empathy at its heart. Find innovative ways to encourage learning. One of our clients created an Educational Festival when staff could undertake a whole range of development activities, some of which were mandatory, and others were



completely voluntary. The sense of energy and buzz created meant that the uptake was high and teams learnt across the organisational silos.

- Remember that teams may be in different places as well as

individuals. This is especially relevant if you are a global company with different countries in different stages of lockdown and different restrictions on life. It makes messaging appropriately more of a challenge.

6. Finally, keep sight of the team purpose – to deliver to your customers

- Continue to reinforce the purpose of your team and review its goals and priorities collectively and regularly.
- Keep delegating appropriately, providing the necessary support to enable people to be successful.
- Focus on celebrating successes – it helps with the sense of team cohesion.
- Prepare for the worst, in the sense that things are going to get better very quickly. Get the team to brainstorm the 'what ifs' and to come up with solutions to pre-empt or manage the worst-case scenarios. That way, the team can leverage any opportunities which might come out of this adversity.
- Continue to run 'lessons learnt' sessions and identify what you could all do even better.
- Many teams are used to dealing with their customers face to face, so it's important to keep the latter present. There were really good examples of teams inviting customers to join Zoom meetings; sharing with each other photos or videos of customers giving feedback.



- Exposure to other teams in the organisation also helps. Sharing status updates from other teams highlighting what they are doing and achieving can raise the bar on quality.



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2. Dare to Lead by Brené Brown – the reference to Values in the Onboarding Section.
3. <https://daretolead.brenebrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Values.pdf> - Brené Brown's list of values for the exercises on defining values.
4. www.strengthsprofile.com – website when you are accessing the link to complete Strengths Profiles, you do not have to be accredited, and the Expert Profile is £30.
5. <https://www.leadershipiq.com/blogs/leadershipiq/leadership-development-state> - research about the lack of alignment between organisational and leader visions.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/3c3f5f1e-8402-4331-8591-e2b667873605> - good article on 'This is our big chance to create better workplaces' from the Financial Times.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/5e161760-69d7-11ea-800d-da70cff6e4d3> - another good article from the Financial Times - Middle managers: the unsung heroes of the crisis.