

StickyChange

What's worked well in
COVID-19...that you want
to maintain in the future?

*"It's putting the humanity back
into business"* Harriet Nelson

April 2020





In April 2020, we hosted a session with 30+ people from multiple countries, companies and functions to understand what is working well in COVID-19 that, post lockdown, they would like to maintain. The following is a summary of their discussions and conclusions. if you would like us to run a similar session, specifically for your organisation, please contact us on [**info@stickychange.com**](mailto:info@stickychange.com)

→ **1. Leaders have stepped up to the challenge**



1. Leaders have stepped up the challenge... by actively focusing on their people

Successful leaders and managers have actively put people over profit. They have taken time to regularly listen, to ask people how they are and to empathise. Leaders are recognising the importance of consciously focusing on people's feelings, not to avoid or ignore them and the need to genuinely enquire as to how they are doing. They understand the positive part they play in managing anxiety in their team.

With these simple activities, leaders are building even stronger relationships with their team members, engendering a feeling of engagement and unity. It is always important to know your people and not assume that one approach works for everyone but never more so than during these challenging times, when an individual's circumstances at home have an even greater impact on their productivity and engagement.



Some suggestions: Having daily calls at regular hours, coffee breaks where the chat is deliberately 'non' work related, scheduling 1:1s and *anda/ways* asking and discussing how the individual is feeling before proceeding to business. Being very clear about objectives and how they will help BAU... underpinning the value of what the team member brings to party. Give your people a seat at the highest virtual tables, alongside your other stakeholders, to brainstorm what the future looks like.

Finally, ensure they share in the rewards from recovery.

→ **2. Empathy is essential**



2. Demonstrating empathy overtly

Organisations and leaders have put significant and conscious efforts into writing internal communications that demonstrate they are empathising with their staff. We have seen some excellent examples of emails written to individuals and teams, highlighting that the leader clearly understands and identifies with the emotional pressures that people are experiencing and acknowledging the strain on their mental health.

Leaders are generally perceived as being 'kinder.' They are using and developing and recognising the value of stronger interpersonal skills. Where there is illness and grief, people are giving understanding, time and space to those impacted. As one delegate put it, 'We are putting the humanity back into business'.

Some people who are not used to working from home are struggling to manage the work:home balance effectively. The commute back home, that previously marked the end of the day and transition to 'home time,' has been lost. The danger is that people work longer and longer hours and are not able to switch off mentally. Effective managers are encouraging their staff to clearly mark the end of the working day and on a timely basis. For instance, shutting the door on a room that is used for work, putting away the laptop so it is out of sight, going for a walk - anything that psychologically marks the end of the working day for them.



Some suggestions: Focus on well being and ensure that effort is put into making accessible well being resources, using whatever channels are available to you. Hold sessions that allow for staff to share their feelings and to give ideas of what is helping them through COVID-19. Carry out 'pulse surveys' - short questionnaires that specifically target and measure the individual's state of mental health and engagement. And don't forget to immediately act on the feedback and tell people you have with 'you said... we did....' communications.

→ **3. Working from home means trusting your people even more**

3. Working from home also equals ... leaders trusting their people even more

Two for the price of one here. Working from home is working. While it was a challenge at the start, people have quickly come to terms with the difficulties and, technology aside, have settled into it. The really successful organisations have been highly responsive to staff working from home and are enabling flexible working practices without any loss in productivity.

The added, and interesting, dimension is that leaders, who have previously been inclined towards 'presenteeism' and distrustful of their people working from home, are now far more likely to trust them. To the extent that they recognise that it brings longer term benefits and flexibilities. It will also mean less business mileage, less travel and all the associated cost savings.



Some suggestions: Consider introducing a fully flexible day - no '9 to 5' but rather giving full permission to your people to work whenever they like, albeit attending key meetings as required. Reflect on how this enhanced availability of people may positively impact your customer services and how that might be of advantage to the business. Consciously stream line processes and develop new ones that better suit remote working.

→ **4. Seek to do things differently ... be nimble**

4. Being lean, nimble and decisive

There is evidence that the crisis has forced us to focus on rapid response to situations and the demand from the business. People have become more solution driven, with less discussions about the actions to take and more action being taken. The current bias for action and extensive use of technology has flattened hierarchies and driven out time-wasters like politicking, multiple approval levels and redundant meetings. Leaders must maintain this sense of urgency.

The urgency, the burning platform so to speak, has meant that even companies or teams that were notoriously rigid and fixed in their ways have been motivated to react and innovate quickly, getting people to work across geographies, time zones, and organisational levels to solve urgent problems. So leaders are realising that work can be done differently, faster, and with the use of technology, even virtually.



Some suggestions: Going forward, leaders should consider how to apply now proven technologies like video conferencing to supply chains, organisational structure, and shareholder communications, as well as to internal teamwork.

→ **5. Communicate, communicate, communicate ...**



5. Communication is vital

If there is one thing all our clients are recognising they need to do more of at the time of COVID-19, it is communicating with their staff. When there is a void, our tendency is to fill it with the worse possible imaginings, and when people are working from home, there is definitely a void. Effective leaders and managers are filling that void.

Companies have embraced the new technologies to enable video conferencing, particularly MS Teams and Zoom. Effective senior leaders using these mediums to be visible, to speak from the heart, to share high level strategies and keep their employees informed of plans and priorities to deal with the current crisis.

The best team leaders are holding daily catch up and check ins, both on a one to one and a team basis. When you can't just drop by someone's desk for a chat it is critical that you build in time for those conversations. Meetings are continuing virtually and for some they are from 0900 - 1700 hours and beyond, which is exhausting, so effective managers are encouraging people to take proper breaks and spread out their meetings.



Some suggestions: Consolidate your updates so, for example, Monday could be strategy, Wednesday HR and Friday, IT. Encourage team leaders to hold informal coffee/tea breaks as a team at least once a week, without a formal agenda. Ensure that people are not attending virtual meetings all day, have a 2 hour period from 12 - 2 when people are encouraged to take a proper break and stop communicating!

→ **6. The walls are coming down ... emotionally and virtually**



6. Breaking down silos

Effective leaders and managers are breaking down organisational silos. The crisis is bringing people closer together, within organisations and across supply chains, as they work in collaboration to deliver their products and/or services in difficult circumstances.

As organisations are under pressure, particularly with staff being furloughed, fewer staff are available and potentially key skills are lost from teams. This has led to some departments being forced to connect with others and as a result there is more collaboration, and cross functional team working is becoming the norm.

In addition, for organisations on the front line, staff members are being seconded into different sections and departments, building up the connections and breaking down the barriers. In the public sector, for instance, many local authorities are working closer with their partner organisations and neighbouring authorities to ensure they meet the needs of their most vulnerable communities.



Some suggestions: Organise secondments into departments under most pressure. Bring together people from different teams to develop innovative solutions. Consciously share business information with everyone, including what the priorities are for all the different functions in the organisation. Where possible encourage virtual online conferences that encourage collaborative problems solving.

→ **7. Plan and be organised ...**

7. We are much more personally well organised

The whole experience has meant that we seem to have found our inner 'planning and organised' ninja. While we've heard people comment that they really miss their colleagues and their water cooler conversations, in the same breath, they have said how much more productive they are without interruptions!

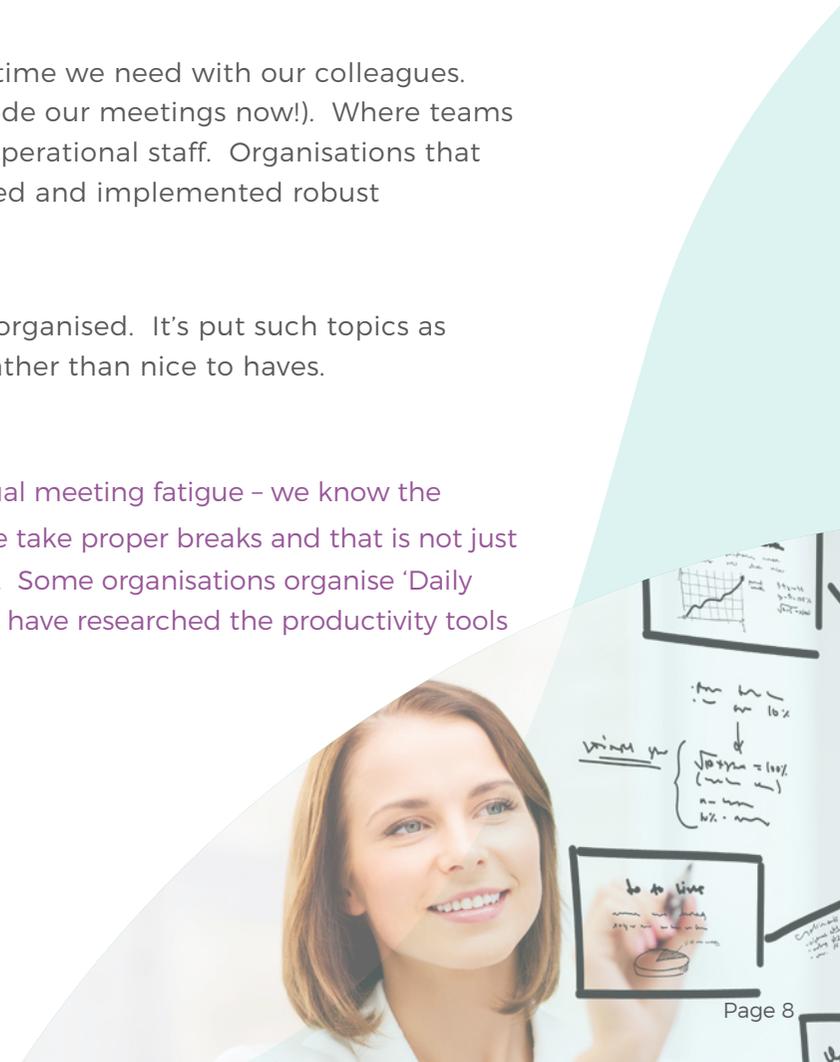
We recognise the need to bring more structure to our days and to plan the time we need with our colleagues. We are using our diary schedules even more (confession – we even colour code our meetings now!). Where teams have struggled, then leaders have proactively introduced working rotas for operational staff. Organisations that didn't have Business Recovery processes in place, have very quickly developed and implemented robust processes.

On a company basis, people have been using Agile Teams to be even more organised. It's put such topics as Business Recovery and Scenario planning firmly on the agenda – priorities rather than nice to haves.



Some suggestions: Limit the number of online meetings as people get virtual meeting fatigue – we know the 'Zoom' meeting is neuroscientifically more stressful. Make sure that your people take proper breaks and that is not just a lunch break. Schedule regular checking times with them at least twice a day. Some organisations organise 'Daily Breaks' where people from any department, just 'drop in' for a chat. Individuals have researched the productivity tools available or, at a minimum, used the 'task lists' on Outlook.

→ **8. It's needed an openness to learning something new ...**



8. We couldn't do it without embracing new learning, new tools and technology

For many, this has been a period of digital revelation! Whereas before we were overly reliant on email, we're all happily using more interactive tools such as Teams, Zoom, Skype etc. There is a new and real appreciation of technology and an enthusiastic adoption of the different mediums. And it is encouraging people to learn with energy and purpose.

Individuals are being positively stretched outside of their comfort zones as they are seconded to interim key worker roles. It's a challenge but people are enjoying it. Even under the pressure of an alien environment there are comments such as 'I'm not sure why but I feel like I'm learning a lot about myself!' It's great that individuals are gaining confidence in themselves through these opportunities that wouldn't have been on offer 3 months ago.

Some teams are even finding that virtual meetings have become a 'leveller', people are being more aware of 'taking their turn', avoiding talking over each other and are more focused on really listening to each other



Some suggestions: Don't forget that learning and development can continue using remote classrooms. Some organisations have pulled together dedicated teams to collate, curate and create content that support the on the ground needs in real time. Constantly challenge your people to contribute to different areas of knowledge and expertise. It will be rewarding.

→ **9. And finally We're all in it together ...**



9. At the root of it all, there is connectedness – we're all in it together, with a joint purpose

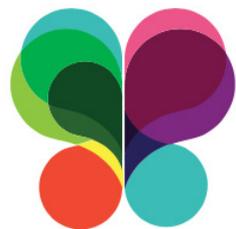
Ultimately, one of the very positive outcomes of COVID-19 is recognised to be a greater sense of organisational and team unity. People have stepped up and got stuck in. Fostering this sense of connectedness is something many leaders have done – being prepared to spend time organising creative ways of people getting together socially, just as much as for business oriented reasons.

This has often manifested itself in people having much better connections with others on a personal level. This extends to customers and real desire to understand their problems – even better customer listening.

All of these great behaviours are encouraged by having a common sense of purpose. We know that having a common purpose fosters motivation, commitment and collaboration in normal circumstances. In these circumstances, there is an even greater perception that not only are 'we all in it together' but also that we will only emerge and survive this crisis if we work together. It will be crucial that all businesses maintain and sustain this sense of unity in the future.



Some suggestions: If you are looking for a unifying purpose that works, now or in the future, this crisis has demonstrated how people get a great deal of reward and satisfaction from helping others. Many organisations have invested time and effort in charity activities as a way of giving people even greater purpose and unity. Similarly, if it's just that you'd like ways of bringing your team together – then using quizzes, card games, scavenger hunts, bingo, silly socks competitions, marvellous mugs, the most mad virtual background has worked for many .. and when this is over, you can bring out the big book of virtual activities ... someone is bound to do it!



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