



WHITE PAPER

TURNING LOCKDOWN HEALTHY PRACTICES INTO 'HOW WE DO THINGS AROUND HERE'

Views from a cross-sector group of global organisational leaders
captured during the 2020 Covid-19 epidemic

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1. INTRODUCTION

For many organisations, COVID-19 has been difficult at best and devastating at worst. Without warning, traditional ways of working have been rendered inadequate. It is unlikely that our business practices will emerge from this pandemic unchanged, and across the globe we are having to adapt to new ways of working that we cannot yet even envisage.

Yet, what if the entrenched norms that dictate our working practices are no longer serving our organisations? What if COVID-19 presents us with a real opportunity to re-define the 9-5 working culture and presenteeism? What if organisations can move beyond a ‘good enough’ style of working to create an environment that is able to serve the many diverse demands of a modern day workforce?

1.1 Research

At Sticky Change, we ran a series of webinars to engage with our clients and partners globally, to identify how we could sustain healthy practices beyond the crisis. Our participants came from a wide variety of organisations, and included representatives of healthcare providers, research companies, utility companies, educational institutes, central government, local authorities and charities.

The suggestions with the greatest impact were identified and grouped under the following main headings:

- Leaders focusing on their people
- Leaders trusting their people to perform
- Being lean, nimble and decisive
- Breaking down organisational silos
- Organisational learning, in particular embracing new technology

For each of the 5 topics, our participants firstly identified the behaviours that would need to be demonstrated and then what actions/activities could be undertaken to ensure they are sustained, and become ‘how we do things around here’.

1.2 Report Structure

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 outlines some general recommendations common to all 5 topics that would ensure the positive practices are retained.
- Section 3 – 7 considers the 5 topics in more detail, outlining firstly what behaviours would be associated with each and then specific recommendations about how to embed each into your organisational DNA.
- The Appendix lists references for further reading.



2. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Create a clear sense of purpose and priorities

More than ever before, people need a sense of purpose to unite them, particularly when they are distant. In addition, with the landscape changing so rapidly for many, with job cuts, cost cutting and the need to pivot an unpalatable reality, it will require real clarity of both purpose and priorities to enable people to make the right decisions that they will need to make.

Only 7% of Fortune 500 CEOs believe that their companies should focus on making profits and not be distracted by social goals. In the last decade, the focus has shifted from maximising shareholder value to meeting the needs of a wider stakeholder group – employees, customers, communities and the environment.

Executives who treat purpose as a core driver of strategy and decision-making make more money, have more engaged employees, more loyal customers, and are better at innovation and transformational change.

Developing or re-emphasising a coherent and engaging sense of purpose – such as poverty reduction, reduced carbon footprint, gender equality or ‘black lives matter’ – inspires employees and customers and builds trust – an increasingly critical and fragile commodity in today’s working environment, particularly when people are separated from each other.

Therefore, leaders need to focus on the core questions: Why do we exist? Why are we here? Whose needs are we here to meet? How can we have a positive impact on our community and environment? What will we do that creates value for all and makes a difference?

2.2 Find out what worked in lockdown and hold on to it

We are told people don’t like change, actually that isn’t the case. We might see that the change is logical but we don’t like the impact on us, we don’t like change that is imposed on us, that we have no control over and the benefits aren’t clear. We will accept, and even embrace, change that we are actively engaged with and believe will be of benefit to us.

We would suggest holding focus groups with your people to find out what they have appreciated about the time in lockdown, i.e. what good organisational habits were adopted that would be healthy to maintain.

Review all the feedback and decide which habits you actively want to keep. Engage your leadership population in defining how to retain these habits and in buying in to changing their own behaviours to align with the newly adopted habits.

Create a comms plan around the new ways of working – the aim being to keep it on the agenda until these new habits are engrained in ‘the way we do things around here’. It is a big mistake to assume that communicating once is going to be enough.

Share the best practices that each team/leader comes up with and encourage people to learn from each other.



2.3 Develop your people – particularly your leaders

People will be spending more time working away from the ‘office’ and will lose the social, cultural and physical context. The world of ‘distance management’ will demand more of our team leaders and managers; more in relation to getting to know people, building trust, recognising when someone needs help and managing performance. You can no longer just suggest a coffee and a chat if you observe the signs of someone under stress or struggling. You might even be in the unenviable position of having to make some redundant via a Teams Call. Managers need to understand how to do that sensitively AND how to manage their own energy. It will require a set of skills that will either be new to them or need to be updated.

Deliver training and embed the learning by holding pre- and post-course conversations with the participants’ managers. People are unlikely to embed the learning from just attending a training course, they need support from their managers to encourage them to do something with the learning. Buddying managers up and/or creating Action Learning Sets was agreed by our stakeholders as a great way to follow up, allowing managers to discuss how they are getting on in a confidential and supportive environment and increasing the likelihood that the training sticks.

Topics that are critical, particularly in managing remotely:

- Empathetic leadership – including importance of trust
- Mental wellbeing
- Delegation
- Performance conversations – setting objectives, feedback, ratings
- Agile management
- Collaboration

2.4 Manage the performance

Where you have defined new behaviours that you want to retain after lockdown, building them into your performance management processes will ensure attention is paid to them. Measure the ‘how’ people behave, not just the ‘what’ that is delivered.

360 or 180 degree feedback options are a powerful way of giving high quality, honest feedback to managers.

2.5 Engage your people

Engage your Employee Forum if you have one, and if not, identify change agents throughout the organisation, and from different levels, to discuss options and make recommendations for continuous improvements.

When you don’t see people in the office day after day, you need to find other ways to check how people are feeling. As well as checking in with them on a one to one basis, undertake regular staff pulse surveys to take the temperature and be able to react quickly if you identify a drop in engagement and motivation.



3. LEADERS FOCUSING ON THEIR PEOPLE

During Covid-19, especially at the initial stages of the lockdown, leaders became highly focused on their people, how they were coping, what did they need to do to connect with them and keep teams and individually motivated. This had a very positive impact on people. There is significant research to show that people will measure and judge their organisations in the future, on how well they feel they were managed during Covid-19. Sadly, as we write this report, there is already evidence that leaders have reduced their efforts, especially around communicating with their people. So, the behaviours below are increasingly important to practise, not less important.

3.1 Behaviours

1. I will be empathetic and aware of peoples' needs
2. I will actively listen to our people
3. I will treat people without bias and with respect
4. I will be open and honest
5. I will spend time coaching and developing people
6. I will demonstrate my own vulnerability
7. I will take every opportunity to recognise people for a job well done

3.2 Recommendations

- Schedule regular 1:1 sessions with each direct report – the agenda being defined by the direct report. Then ... no matter what, do not cancel them; they need to be prioritised and seen as a space where the individual can openly share what they think and how they feel, a safe psychological space to be vulnerable; where the leader can demonstrate empathy, openness and support.
- The same approach is required in the need to hold regular team meetings, both in person and when that isn't possible, virtually. In a remote working environment, these are needed to ensure that people continue to feel connected to each other. Suggestions for how to make these sessions engaging are highlighted in the next bullet point.
- Organise short interactive regular team building sessions – team quizzes, Desert Island Discs etc, 3.00 tea breaks - as well as more strategic team building workshops to build high performing teams.



4. LEADERS TRUSTING PEOPLE TO PERFORM

Managers with a tendency towards micromanaging have had to trust their people to deliver, when out of sight. Many have been surprised to discover that their people have flourished, away from their watchful eye. Research undertaken by Richmond Events has demonstrated that productivity has even increased throughout lockdown. With employees benefiting from flexible working conditions, and organisations saving office costs, it is likely that remote working policies will become the norm, not the exception.

4.1 Behaviours

1. I will challenge people to achieve high standards
2. I will provide the support that people need to undertake their jobs well
3. I will delegate effectively
4. I will provide feedback in a constructive manner
5. I will promote a healthy work:life balance for myself and my colleagues
6. I will avoid micro-managing
7. I will avoid confusing long hours with high productivity
8. I will avoid monitoring the time people spend working

4.2 Recommendations

There are some practical recommendations:

- Research the benefits of homeworking and create the business case to enable your leadership team to understand the well-being and financial benefits.
- Work with managers, employee representatives to create home working and flexible working policies. Engaging with people in defining HR policies will make it much more likely that these policies are embraced AND gives you a broader perspective. Ensure that the policies are not too prescriptive to enable teams flexibility in their implementation.
- Ask each team to create their own home working plan, taking account of how many people need to be in the office and when, and what desk space is available.
- Define how the team members will get together, both virtually and physically. It is important that people do meet face to face when it is safe to do so, so ensure you build in the opportunity for face to face meetings, both on a one to one basis and as a team.
- Provide people who are going to be spending time working from home with the appropriate IT and furniture, and ensure their Health and Safety is not going to be compromised in the home environment.

And recommendations for leaders and managers:

- Senior leaders have a key role to play. They have to be role models in trusting their team members and communicating the benefits of empowering people - avoid micromanaging. For leaders and managers who are struggling to trust their people, our stakeholders



recognised the benefit of investing in executive coaching for them, to support them in making the required changes in their behaviour.

- Empowerment is challenging for many managers, and our stakeholders noted the need to increase access to management training to enable lasting change. Training to provide managers with the skills to delegate appropriately, agree clear objectives, provide people with feedback that lands well and hold effective conversations on performance, and doing all those virtually.
- Ongoing one to one conversations on what good support looks like for each member of your team, as their needs change over time, were identified as critical. What will be interpreted as micro-management by one member of staff will be deemed as helpful by another. Our stakeholders highlighted the need to talk to people about how it is more difficult to pick up signals that indicate they might be struggling, when seeing someone on a screen. Managers need to reinforce the message that it is okay to ask for help.
- Hold quarterly meetings with your people on their objectives and monthly catch ups to review progress.
- And one to avoid if you can – implement a monitoring system that monitors working hours and time logged on. If you haven't monitored peoples' time when in the office, if you start doing so now, it sends a very strong message that they can't be trusted when you can't see them.



5. BEING LEAN, NIMBLE AND DECISIVE

The crisis has forced organisations to be more solution driven, with a bias for action that avoids redundant meetings, politicking and multiple approval levels. Cutting through barriers and bureaucracy, we have seen distilleries producing hand gel, aerospace companies producing ventilators, and flooring companies producing protective face shields. If we can respond quickly in a crisis, we can retain our ability to do so in the ‘new normal’.

5.1 Behaviours

1. I will respond with urgency to request from colleagues
2. I will be fully prepared for meetings
3. I will think creatively to solve old problems in new ways
4. I will entrust others to make decisions within their areas of expertise
5. I will positively support new initiatives
6. I will encourage my colleagues to experiment
7. I will challenge bureaucracy and seek to simplify ways of working

5.2 Recommendations

- A change that would require discussion at the senior table, a change in culture and a time commitment is to implement an agile approach. Agile is no longer just for the IT world. The fundamental basis is that to tackle an opportunity, you form and empower small teams, maybe three to nine people, most of whom are assigned full-time. The team is cross-functional and includes all the skills necessary to complete its tasks within a tight timescale. It manages itself and is strictly accountable for every aspect of the work and has the authority to request support from other colleagues as and when necessary.
- Implement meeting protocols, for example making sure the right people, and ONLY the right people are in every meeting, actions are recorded and followed up, and the chair or facilitator ensures all voices are heard.
- Adopt a decision making processes that allows you to speed up decision making and devolve it the lowest appropriate level in the organisation. Categorise your decisions – firstly which can you delegate to someone with the right expertise, secondly which ones can you make - without input from anyone - and announce to the team, thirdly which do you need to consult certain people about and then decide, and fourthly which ones do you need buy in and, therefore, should involve everyone. Don't treat all decisions as if they fit in the fourth category.



6. BREAKING DOWN THE ORGANISATIONAL SILOS

The Covid-19 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. The crisis has forced people to both co-operate and to implement long needed change rapidly: teams and individuals have broken down barriers and bureaucracy that has historically always stood in their way.

6.1 Behaviours

1. I will build connections across the whole organisation
2. I will involve appropriate people from different functions in decision making
3. I will avoid competing with people from other departments
4. I will actively listen to diverse opinions
5. I will create an environment in which people feel safe to speak out
6. I will ask for feedback from people I collaborate with

6.2 Recommendations

- When putting together organisational projects involve the right people from the start, from all appropriate departments. How often do we hear, for example, HR or Finance Business Partners saying ‘if only they had brought me in earlier!’
- Devise a secondments policy and actively look to second people, in particular your high performers, into different teams and functions. They will build connections, bring a fresh pair of eyes into a department, and recognise what the challenges and opportunities are, in the department they are seconded too.
- Set up cross functional groups with participants from different levels to focus on future themes and strategies, and ask them to report to the leadership team. This can be particularly effective when linked to a leadership programme.
- Implement cross functional mentor and/or coaching programmes. Stakeholders who have created a ‘coaching pool’ of managers who coach people in departments other than their own, point to the additional benefit of the coaches gaining a fantastic insight into the departments their coachees work within.
- Ensure your employee recognition scheme encourages employees to be recognised by colleagues from different functions.
- There are many digital collaboration tools in the market place which are particularly helpful for remote workers. Set up a team to research what is out there and make a recommendation to the leadership team.



7. LEARNING AND IN PARTICULAR, EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGY

The use of video conferencing has increased exponentially, with people needing to see people, not just hear their voices. And in personalising the interaction, we get to meet the kids, the cats and the dogs! Although 'Zoom Fatigue' is a valid concern, this has been a period of digital revelation for many of us. It has pushed us outside of our comfort zones and most of us have acquired new technological skills, that will absolutely serve us going forward.

7.1 Behaviours

1. I will embrace new ways of working
2. I will take responsibility for my own development
3. I will push the boundaries of my comfort zone
4. I will keep up to date with developments in my field and our markets
5. I will view mistakes as an opportunity to learn, not to apportion blame
6. I will share my learning

7.2 Recommendations

- Research different virtual ways of working, decide on the one(s) to be adopted, provide the right resources and deliver training for staff. Teams is very popular and is good for meetings, however you can only see a certain number of people on the screen and breakout rooms are clunky. Zoom has more functionality but there are concerns about security. Our experience is that this is a rapidly changing field and providers are having to improve their offerings to meet demand.
- Provide guidance for virtual meetings, such as web cams on, 2.5 hour maximum and breaks every hour. It is important to avoid 'zoom fatigue' – examples of guidance from our stakeholders include 2 hours 'meeting free' time in the middle of the day and none after 5.30 pm.
- Provide staff with access to online learning resources – for example LinkedIn Learning and Open Sesame. Encourage people to undertake virtual courses and then share their learning with the colleagues, through events such as 'lunch and learn' sessions.
- Make sure that managers have regular conversations about the development of their people, rather than just their performance.



APPENDIX - REFERENCES

Advanced Workplace Institute – ‘Managing the Virtual Workplace Management Summary’

Deloitte – ‘Workforce Strategies for a post COVID-19 recovery Workbook’

Fosway Group – ‘How is COVID-19 Changing Learning?’

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HBR – ‘5 Tips to Reduce Screen Time While You’re WFH’ by Elizabeth Grace Saunders

HR Magazine, June 2020 – ‘Leaders are failing to communicate with employees during coronavirus’

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McKinsey – ‘The Toughest Leadership Test’

Richmond Events 2020 – ‘The impact of COVID-19 on UK business’