

AMA RESEARCH

## Implications of the 2020 Pandemic: Managing Through Uncertainty

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### Disruption Now, Disruption Later, and Disruption Forever



AMA talked with Jeff Schwartz, principal, Deloitte, about his book *Work Disrupted* and what the impact of changes wrought by COVID-19 will be for managers in the future. See page 4



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## Disruption Now, Disruption Later, and Disruption Forever

AMA talked with Jeff Schwartz, principal, Deloitte, about his book *Work Disrupted* and what the impact of changes wrought by COVID-19 will be for managers in the future.

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# Managing in the Aftermath of COVID-19

An ending is in sight for the COVID-19 pandemic, as more vaccines become available and people get vaccinated. There is hope that by the summer, life will return to “normal.” But what will that new normal look like? Only one thing is certain: Things will not be like they were before the pandemic. Last March, many business went full virtual, as people who used to commute to the office every day began telecommuting from their couch. And despite all the hassles working from home can entail—juggling child care and homeschooling schedules, blurred demarcations between work hours and family time, and missing in-person interactions with other people—workers actually found themselves being as productive, if even more productive, than they had been in the office.

As a result, fewer people are going to want to come back to the office, if there is even an office awaiting them. Managers will need to learn how to better use technology and oversee all-remote or hybrid teams of employees, and expect policy shifts that meet the new needs of businesses, as Jeff Schwartz, principal of Deloitte, describes in his book, *Work Disrupted: Opportunity, Resilience, and Growth in the Accelerated Future of Work*. In his interview with AMA, Schwartz details these concepts as well as the new paradigm HR managers are facing.

AMA faculty member Haywood Spangler, PhD, shares the results of a survey of AMA members. One of the most surprising findings is that despite the uncertainty generated by the pandemic, workers managed to rise to the challenges and thrive. And Lauren Trees and Elissa Tucker of APQC identify two big remote work problems and what managers will need to do to fix them.

In response to the pandemic and to meet the new needs of managers, AMA continues to shift its offerings. AMA's remote courses and webinars can help you prepare for future disruption.

Christiane Truelove  
Guest Editor, *AMA Quarterly*

## AMA QUARTERLY

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## Leadership in a Chaotic Future

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has been a watershed event for many businesses. As we head toward the one-year anniversary of when lockdowns began in the United States, many of us are still working from home. Some offices have reopened on a hybrid basis, with social distancing and masking in place. Although there are workers who are raring to get back to the office, especially as vaccinations have started, there are many who have discovered the joys of working from home as well. Nonetheless, in a recent AMA survey, 67% of participants reported that they had taken on more responsibilities.

The COVID-19 vaccines mark the beginning of the end, but we still have a long way to go before many regions and industries get close to normalcy. In the meantime, managers are still tasked with executing their goals and effectively getting things done through others. I don't think anyone knows what the corporate workplace will resemble one, three, and five years out, but my sense is that it will be a lot closer to what it looked like 18 months ago versus today. Yes, businesses have adapted and become much more efficient and effective at leveraging technology that allows for management excellence in a virtual environment, but it is unlikely that corporate offices will not be better leveraged in the future. For now, many managers will continue to leverage best practices in managing teams virtually and in other cases managing teams in a traditional or hybrid environment with an utmost focus on safety.

AMA will continue to be a leader in management skills instruction, delivering classes wherever attendees are, whether online or perhaps in person once again. As you navigate the future work world, we will be there with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Manny Avramidis'.

Manny Avramidis  
President and CEO  
American Management Association



AN INTERVIEW WITH

Jeff Schwartz

# Disruption Now, Disruption Later, and Disruption Forever

BY CHRISTIANE TRUELOVE

*AMA Quarterly* spoke with Jeff Schwartz, a principal with Deloitte Consulting LLP and the U.S. leader for the Future of Work and the U.S. leader of Deloitte Catalyst, Tel Aviv. Schwartz talked about his new book written with Suzanne Riss and illustrated by Tom Fishburne, *Work Disrupted: Opportunity, Resilience, and Growth in the Accelerated Future of Work* (John Wiley & Sons, 2021). He elaborates on the changes COVID-19 has made in the workplace, how the pandemic accelerated technology use, how many of these changes are expected to last once the pandemic is over, and the changing nature of the U.S. workforce from almost exclusively full-time employees to a mix of full-timers, freelancers, gig workers, and “ghosts.” He outlines the challenges managers and leaders will have in the future and what they must do to respond in a way that will create growth.

**Your book is pretty comprehensive. It goes into what the new workplace is going to look like, with a hybrid of full-time and gig employees and everyone working remotely. What do you think leaders have to be doing in this time to prepare for this new reality, or even managing right now? What skills should they be developing?**

**Jeff Schwartz:** The book is titled *Work Disrupted*. In some ways I have been working on the book for seven years, but obviously we went into warp speed in the first part of 2020. The book could have been titled “Management Disrupted,” or it could have been titled “Leadership Disrupted.” And it is about disruption in several different ways. I tried drawing a distinction, and I think this is useful for managers and leaders, that there is a difference between acceleration and disruption. We’ve been experiencing acceleration for the last 10 or 12 years. You can go back to 2007, which was a seminal year, in which the iPhone was released, and it’s also the year that cloud computing began to come onto the scene. And 2012 marked what I call the reintroduction of AI. So we’ve been accelerating around digital transformation, particularly mobile, social, cloud, and AI, for the last 10 years.

But something different happened in 2020, and this is what I think is relevant in management and leadership. Anne-Marie Slaughter, who [was interviewed for the book and] is the president of New America foundation and think tank in Washington, put it really well, which is “The coronavirus is a time machine to the future.” And she goes on to say that things we thought would take five years took five weeks, and I think in some cases, five days. And it’s this disruption piece that’s really interesting across the board. So what we tried to do in the book was look and talk about what was being disrupted, and I try to outline how people and machines are working together and how each of these disruptions is an opportunity, and how the employee-workforce ecosystem is being disrupted and how workplaces are being disrupted.

Let me give two data points that really anchor my thinking, things that we all saw in 2020. There was some research from MIT in the spring that reminded us that something like 5.3% of knowledge workers—people who could work virtually—were working virtually before the pandemic. By May and June, it was 50%. Half the people in the workforce were working remotely. Almost everybody who could work remotely, was. That’s a 10x increase. It went from 5.3% to 50%. Another example of this is what we saw in telemedicine. This is from Intermountain Healthcare, which is one of the largest healthcare providers in the country, out of Utah. From 2015 to 2019, their daily telemedicine interactions were 454. In 2020, through the mid-fall, the number went up to 4,300 a day. That’s 10x.

So the reason I find the data very interesting is [that] as managers, we are in a 10x world. But this goes back to the premise of the book, which can be summed up by a

quote by Albert Einstein, which is, “You can’t use an old map to explore new worlds.” And that, in a sense, is what I am trying to talk about, which is when the nature of what we’re managing changes and the way people and machines work together. Machines are no longer just tools. They are assistants, they are colleagues, they are managers. The workforce is no longer employees and other. The workforce is an integrated ecosystem of full-time workers, part-time workers, managed services, freelancers, gig workers, crowd workers, and ghost workers. And the workplace is no longer where we go. Work is how we do it. These are the big shifts that we’re looking at.

The broadest challenge for us, and...an interesting question I raise in the book is, has management development changed enough given the way work has been disrupted? I think that’s really where the challenge lies. And in some ways, a lot of our management candidates still are very much focused on what I call in the book the last gasps of scientific management. The ghost of Frederick Taylor is still out there.

It’s not about optimizing workflow. It’s a very different discussion. It’s about collective intelligence. It’s about augmentation and collaboration between people and technology. It’s about managing workforce ecosystems. Even the employee lifecycle itself—*attract, develop, retain*—I raise the question of whether we should move from that to a focus on *access, curation, and engagement*. We’re no longer acquiring or recruiting most of the people who work with us. We’re accessing them. And how is access different than acquisition and hiring?

**You’ve mentioned the attract-hire-retain model, and the access-curation-engagement model. What is the new paradigm that HR managers today have to start acclimating themselves to?**

**JS:** I’m a senior partner in our Human Capital practice. I’ve been here at Deloitte since we set up this practice. I think this is a renaissance period for HR, which is a little different than saying this is HR’s time in the sun, which is what some people are saying, though I agree with that entirely. But I think it’s more than that. When I say it’s a renaissance period for HR, it’s a period where the role of people within organizations and in their work is more important than ever, but it’s more important than ever because it’s been disrupted and it’s been changing as well. It’s not as if suddenly everyone has realized that people are the most important asset in an organization. We’ve been saying that since I’ve been in consulting, for 35 years. What’s changed is the context, what’s changed for this is around the people issues that we’re seeing in HR.

HR has an opportunity to be really at the center of the reimagining and re-architecture of work. Our Human Capital Trends Report, which we just released for 2021, one of the headlines in that report is that we interviewed HR and



“Almost every organization we’re talking with today is asking a version of this question, which is, ‘We may have half of workforce today or all of workforce working remotely, so in 2022, what is it going to look like?’ I think that adaptive workplace environment question is a huge question in the HR renaissance.”

business leaders—very senior executives, about 3,600 from around the world—and one of the questions we asked them is, “How are you viewing work transformation before COVID, and how do you think you’re going to view it after COVID?” And one of the statistics that really jumped out at us is that before COVID, about 29% said that their focus on work transformation before COVID was on reimagining work. The other 70% were really focused on work optimization, cost cutting, and redesigning work, which is using technology to substitute for labor. After COVID, when we asked these executives back in September or October, that number went from 29% to 61%. The 61% of executives around the world see their focus on work transformation, post-COVID, as reimagining work, thinking through what are the outputs, what are the outcomes, what are the combinations of technology and people, that are really focused on augmentation and collaboration. We actually refer to this as the re-architecture of work, because it’s not just an imagination exercise. We need to build something new.

So one of the biggest challenges for HR is being a leader and an orchestrator of the re-architecting of work. And by that, we mean two things. We mean looking at what are the outputs and the outcomes of work—not just doing it faster and cheaper and more efficiently, which is productivity, but also creating new value, more impact, and more meaning. This is going to be a huge part of the role of HR in the HR renaissance.

The other thing is the role of HR in orchestrating the workforce ecosystem. For many organizations today, the majority of their workers are not employees. Some of the biggest companies in tech, if you look at their 200,000-workforce space, half of their employees are “employees,” and half of them are in the other category. And this workforce ecosystem is not just commodity services. In many industries, the people working in these new categories—freelance workers, cloud workers—can be among the most important IP contributors to the work that’s being done. It’s certainly true in data sciences, it’s certainly true in innovation.

So what role do HR leaders play in the HR renaissance in helping to reframe the move from an employee-centric focus to an integrated workforce ecosystem focus—joining up with IT, procurement, and business leaders—so that when we look at the totality of who does the work in the organization, we’re looking at that ecosystem and we’re asking questions about culture, performance management, etc.?

The third challenge is being an orchestrator of adaptive workplaces—adaptive, flexible, hybrid workplaces and workplace strategies. Some of this is about space, some of this is about what equipment people need to have, some of it is about cybersecurity. But almost every organization we’re talking with today is asking a version of this question, which is, “We may have half of workforce today or all of workforce working remotely, so in 2022, what is it going to look like?” I think that adaptive workplace environment question is a huge question in the HR renaissance. Because it’s not a question of whether people are going to work from home, or work from anywhere, or work from the office, but managing this portfolio of people who prefer to work from home, people who prefer to work at the office, people who prefer to work from anywhere, or people who prefer to be road warriors. That portfolio of workplace personas will be as diverse as the workforce ecosystem is in terms of employment models.

There’s this incredible set of opportunities for HR in the renaissance, but it’s not doing always what HR has historically done. It’s growing into the question of how do people and machines work together, how do we manage a workforce ecosystem, and how do we lead adaptive and hybrid workplaces.

**What are the skills HR managers need to manage these hybrid workplaces, to adapt to what’s going on? If there was a class, what are the things that would need to be taught?**

**JS:** This is a thought-provoking question. If members of the American Management Association, these HR leaders and business leaders, believe that work is being disrupted,

then we have an opportunity to ask, should management education also be disrupted? I think it's really worth considering. Even asking the question of what should the core of an HR curriculum be. I think the core of the HR curriculum today, at most organizations that have an HR degree, and the HR courses that are taught at business schools, they are really anchored in a 20th-century view of an employee lifecycle. They're 20th-century models of attract-develop-retain, with almost the entire focus on full-time employees in linear, prescribed career paths. We need, I believe, 21st-century mental models and maps for careers and work and business and certainly HR. So that raises the question of not only what should be the substance of the course, but what the curriculum should look like.

At a high level, there are probably four things that need to be in the curriculum. The first is the role of strategy and the workforce. And by the workforce, not only employees on and off the balance sheets, but I also mean technology. Technology is actually part of the workforce today. Many companies today have something that is called "a digital full-time equivalent." We are issuing software licenses to RPA systems to access ERP and other systems. So we need to look at the workforce in its totality. And when I say strategy and workforce, for many years companies would come up with a strategy, and then they would staff the strategy. HR was a derivative function. It wasn't a driving function. Today, your workforce strategy can drive

what your business is. You can't have an Uber or a Lyft without the workforce strategy of a platform-based ecosystem—I mean maybe when we have self-driving cars we'll be able to do it. We're seeing an increasing number of business strategies that are driven by the workforce strategy.

Number two is an understanding of collective intelligence and how people and machines work together. This is a really great and interesting area because nobody seems to own it now. It's not IT, it's not HR, it's not business. But understanding the integration and evolution of AI and robotics and the way that work is done by people and teams, is huge.

The third is the whole workforce ecosystem, and the fourth is adaptive workplaces.

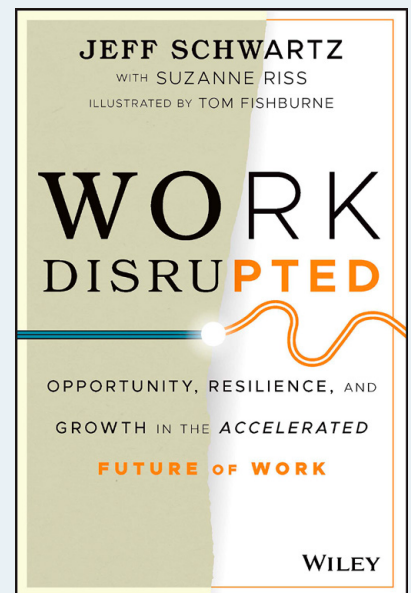
Let me mention another perspective on this. I have a chapter in the book looking explicitly at the future of work, and work disrupted, and management and leadership. And I list about a half a dozen disciplines that today I think are probably on the outskirts of HR and management but really need to move to the center. Number one is behavioral economics, the role of psychology. I actually start the chapter by talking about Dan Kahneman. He won the Nobel Prize in economics. He was a psychologist, but he never took an economics class. But he's one of the creators of behavioral economics. I think the role of behavioral economics and the role of psychology, that whole area is important.

## From Fear to Growth: Mindsets and Playbooks for 21st-Century Careers and Work

BY JEFF SCHWARTZ



When the coronavirus pandemic took root in the United States, we entered a time machine to the future. Practically overnight, people in industries that had restricted telecommuting found themselves crawling out of bed and dialing into Zoom conference calls from their couch. For many teachers, bankers, lawyers, even NASA aerospace engineers, the coronavirus crisis was a trial run for remote work. With most of the country under orders to shelter in place, many business leaders pivoted on a dime to reimagine products, reassign workers, reshape supply chains, and reconfigure operations to join the heated race to save lives. Near the top of the critical list of needs was the demand for ventilators, potentially hundreds of thousands of ventilators. In an unprecedented move, Ford and General Motors shut down car production and went into the ventilator production business.



The second is the role of managers as coaches. I especially talk about the role of player-coaches, and the shift from management as a supervisory and compliance function to a coaching function—the role being to fuel performance, not just to manage it. We talk about the role of HR managers and managers as diviners of the future. We just don't have to manage the future of work, we have to design it—so there's the whole role of design thinking, both for HR processes and all work processes and workplaces. And then of course, digital—the role that we have as HR people managers to understand the intersection of people and digital technology, obviously for HR itself but also for the broader work experience. Those are just a few thoughts.

### **What are the barriers to adapting to this mindset? Where are people struggling and what can be done to help them?**

**JS:** One of the barriers is the challenge of literally moving from one mental model to another mental model. This mental model in HR and management of the employee lifecycle is very deep. The mental model of a career as being a three-box model—training or education, work, retirement, meaning you train for 20 years, you work for 25 years, and then you retire—these mental models are very deep. They're very highly ingrained, and they're also very deeply ingrained in our educational institutions.

Overhauling production and ramping up that production beyond anything your company has ever done before are feats of magic that business leaders have known they would be expected to perform in the future world of work. When Anne-Marie Slaughter, the chief executive of New America, said the coronavirus exposed “an opportunity to make the changes we knew we were going to have to make eventually,” and also “deep fissures and failures in our culture,” she captured both the sense of inevitability and vulnerability that many business leaders were experiencing. They knew the future world of work would require boosting efficiency, proceeding at warp speed, seeking talent and expertise outside the walls of their organization, and a heavy dose of resourcefulness. However, they did not realize the future would arrive wholesale and so soon. After all, in survey after survey, business leaders consistently reported they did not feel ready for the future of work.

Enter the coronavirus pandemic, an abrupt fast-forward to the future of work. Changes expected to take decades, occurred within weeks. Slaughter, a former director of policy planning for the U.S. Department of State, declared that with the pandemic “the future of work is here.” Indeed, the coronavirus has illustrated both the extreme challenges and inspiring possibilities ushered in by a future that swept in sooner than expected.

One of the challenges for us, whether it's HR or management, is simply to be conscious about what are the mental constructs that we're using. I quote very extensively in the book Gillian Tett, the editor of the FT, who wrote a book five years ago called *The Silo Effect*, because we are really deeply rooted in cultural silos. One of the ways to get out is simply to become aware of what those mental models are and ask if these are the right mental models going forward. But these mental models are reinforced by educational institutions, certification programs. I'm not being critical of them. I am just raising the question that if we buy the premise that work is actually being disrupted, what are the management disruptions that we want to be driving so that we can most effectively lead and manage.

And one of the things that we're seeing, certainly in businesses today—and it's related to the social disruption we've seen, racial equity in 2020—companies are asking themselves, “If we are going to address racial and social issues, what do we need to do to our management development programs going forward?” And the recognition is that tweaking them is probably not the right answer. And I think the same is true for work disruption. Tweaking the programs that we have may not be the right work disruption. It will be very interesting, if you are developing programs for managers generally or for HR managers, to be asking the question, how are we balancing 20th-century requirements with 21st-century requirements?

### **PANIC OR PIVOT**

Around the country, business leaders were among the first to act during the pandemic. Why the need for so many ventilators? The coronavirus often kills through the lungs as patients develop Covid-19 pneumonia. Ventilators help the sickest patients stay alive by providing extra oxygen to keep their lungs pumping once they fill with fluid. General Motors scrambled to train workers and locate the 700 parts needed to create a prototype ventilator, sourced from about 80 global suppliers. Leaders at the car manufacturer were well-suited to the challenge: Assembling a 700-part ventilator sounds daunting, but cars are typically assembled from about 2,500 parts. Automakers have already demonstrated their ability to mass produce technical equipment quickly. However, the usual pace of production had to spring into overdrive. What normally might take months had to be done in weeks. They had to produce more, faster than ever before. At stake were the lives of acute Covid-19 patients.

Many companies relinquished business-as-usual approaches to tackle a variety of coronavirus-related shortages, including not only vital medical equipment but personal protective equipment (PPE) and hand sanitizer. In New York City, many doctors and nurses improvised, using trash bags to replace medical scrubs and protective gowns. The Gap Inc., parent company of Banana Republic and Old Navy, shifted its factories to create protective

Because I think we're a little too weighted on what has worked in the past and not enough weighted on some of the shift we've been talking about.

The last barrier I'll mention, our workforces and our employees are in many ways more adaptable than our leaders. Whether it's working in teams, working in these adaptive, flexible, hybrid ways, what I've seen over the last year is that the closer you get to the people doing the work, the more adaptable they are. The further you get from the workers, the more these mindsets of "This is the way we've always done it. We need to do it this way" sinks in.

And I don't think it's just generational. I think it's the closer you are to the work, the more adaptable you are. And that's a really positive signal for us, because we've certainly seen in 2020 amazing adaptability among workers and students around the world.

### How will policy have to change to support these disruptions, taking into account things such as business-related tax write-offs and other business regulations?

**JS:** The last third of the book looks at growth. There are three "playbooks" described there. They're mindsets and actions. We start with individuals, because they are, as I've mentioned, the most adaptable. Individuals will have

a disproportionate share of the responsibility to make the changes we need to make happen to thrive in the future of work. The next chapter looks at business and organization leaders. Organizations are adaptable, but not as adaptable as individuals are. And the focus that we look at there is how do business and organization leaders co-design the future, and how do they also make sure that they're looking not just at efficiency and productivity, but at value and the role of teams in making that shift.

The final chapter is about growth and our role as citizens and communities and society. In many ways, society and public institutions are incredibly important, but they are the least adaptable. And that chapter is titled "Reset." Again, if we buy the premise that work is disrupted, that careers are different, that the way people and technology work are different, that the primary employment model is not a full-time employment model—but that half the population relatively soon will be earning a significant amount of their income in what we call in the U.S. the 1099 economy—when the 1099 economy is bigger than the W-2 economy, we need to rethink employment models. We know we need healthcare micropayment and benefit systems. Everyone who works in a fractionalized job in some way should be part of some system, including Social Security and unemployment compensation, that is set up for whether you're working for an hour or a year.

cloth masks, gowns, and scrubs. Fanatics, an online seller of Major League Baseball gear, also started producing masks and gowns. Meanwhile, Pernod Ricard, the alcohol brand, donated pure alcohol for hand sanitizer. French luxury powerhouse LVMH, which owns Louis Vuitton, Bulgari, and other high-end brands, also entered the hand-sanitizer business, using its perfume and makeup factories to produce hydroalcoholic gels.

To keep their doors open and their employees on the payroll, many companies changed direction, navigated red tape, and devised innovative approaches. The ability to pivot rather than panic allowed some people to apply their capabilities in new ways. Small mom-and-pop shops like Essations, started by Stephanie Luster's parents almost 40 years ago, could not stay in the business of shipping hair products to salons. When salons shut their doors, after city after city ordered businesses to close and social distancing rules to take effect, Luster had an idea. She would sell directly to customers who were sheltering but still wanted their hair to look styled for Zoom video calls for work. What if the stylists created home-hair-care videos that featured Essations hair products and then posted them on Facebook? At the end of the tutorial, the stylist could provide a code customers could use to get a discount on the Essations website. Essations would know from the code which stylist had sent the customer, and the

stylist could get a cut of the sale. Many stylists liked the idea and made videos featuring Essations' products, allowing online product sales to increase by 20%.

Some businesses soared during the pandemic. Instacart, the grocery pickup and delivery service, hired more than 300,000 full-time employees in one month to meet the increased demand at the start of the pandemic, with plans to hire 250,000 more. However, a far greater number of businesses and individuals had to change direction to survive. Furloughed hotel call center operators found themselves subcontracted to operate state and city call centers. Uber launched a courier service so that drivers who could no longer transport passengers could continue to work by delivering packages, medicine, and pet supplies. Spiffy, the U.S. on-demand car cleaning company, rolled out a service to sanitize and disinfect facilities and properties.

Innovation and experimentation will continue to be lifelines as we transition to a very different world. Author William Gibson reminded us more than 15 years ago that "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed." An important corollary is that the future comes at us in accelerated bursts. The coronavirus is one such accelerator to the future. We have witnessed similar accelerators in recent years, with the great financial crisis of 2008–2009 and Y2K. The challenge is how we navigate and take advantage of these sudden shifts.

So that is part of the reset. We need to reset the social contract, we need to reset regulation, we need to reset education. Not rebuild entirely, but think about how they are configured. We talk about how to reset assistance around job transitions. Do we need a social safety net? Of course! But if the average person is going to have 12 to 14 jobs in their life, we need to make job transition something that is supported by public and social institutions as well as by the individual and the company.

You mentioned tax policy. I am not going to make recommendations on tax policy, but we need to look at our tax policy and ask, how is it incenting human capital development and how is it incenting physical capital development? How is it incenting investment in IP? And are the incentives that we're putting into the tax code pointing the direction we want to go in how people and technology work together.

And there are a whole set of ethical questions that go with this. One of the ways that we end the book is to ask the question, if we look at the future of work disrupted and management disrupted, it's both about creating economic value and the intersection of economic value with social



Source: WORK DISRUPTED: Opportunity, Resilience, and Growth in the Accelerated Future of Work, Jeff Schwartz, Wiley Publishing 2021

values. And that's certainly something that we've seen accelerated and disrupted in 2020, whether it's social values related to health, social values related to economics, or social values related to racial equity and justice. How do we think as HR and business leaders about the intersection of business and economic value and social values. That is all very much part of the agenda, and I hope it would be part of the curriculum! [AQ](#)

## DEFINING THE FUTURE OF WORK

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, changes in how and where we work were well under way. The future of work refers to the changes that technology (including automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence) along with new employment models (including freelancers, gig workers, and crowds) will bring about in how we work, where we work, who we work with, and the skills and capabilities we need to work.

Predicting the future is hard, especially when technology is involved. Ken Olsen, the founder of Digital Equipment Corp., likely wishes he had not been so confident in 1977 when he said, "There is no reason for any individual to have a computer in his home." Steve Ballmer, the CEO of Microsoft, had low expectations for the iPhone in 2007, when he announced, "There's no chance that the iPhone is going to get any significant market share." And Robert Metcalfe, founder of 3Com and inventor of Ethernet, surely regrets his 1995 prediction that the Internet "will soon go spectacularly supernova and in 1996 catastrophically collapse." These predictions all underestimated the growth and adoption of new technology.

My interest lies not in attempting to predict the future but in providing signposts to help others navigate the new world of work. By understanding these signposts, individuals can feel more

empowered to evolve their current careers or even craft new ones altogether and to develop educational strategies to succeed in the capabilities-based market AI brings. For business leaders seeking to adopt and scale new models of working, these signposts can help explore the opportunities that novel forms of human-machine collaboration bring to the workplace. And for public policy makers, these signposts can spur the reimagining of regulations, laws, and institutional arrangements as new forms of working emerge through alternative workforce arrangements, education and workforce development, work transition programs, and financing to support lifelong learning and reinvention. Though we may not be able to change the impact of AI or future proof against the disruptions ahead, we can change the way we navigate alongside them. We can become smarter in the way we work, think, and live in the world of AI and the open talent economy of multiple forms of employment. And we can change the way we design and think about our work and workplaces of tomorrow.

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# Implications of the 2020 Pandemic: Managing Through Uncertainty

BY HAYWOOD SPANGLER, PHD



**What is the most-used phrase of 2020? Perhaps it is “double-muted,” as in “I can’t hear you; I think you are double-muted.”**

Perhaps it is the acronym VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous), as in “This is a VUCA world we live in today.” This acronym, which developed in military intelligence circles, has circulated since the mid-1980s. But 2020 is likely the year of its widest usage, because it so accurately seems to describe life and work during a pandemic.

Of these four characteristics (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity), uncertainty may be the most challenging to experience. Whereas ambiguity is a difference of interpretation regarding the significance of information, uncertainty means not knowing, not being able to get all the relevant facts, not having the information.

COVID has generated uncertainty: Specialists have not known how exactly the virus spreads or how long immunity can last. Ascertaining these facts requires further research. Consequently, the pandemic has generated organizational uncertainty:

Can we successfully work remotely? For how long? What will happen to teamwork and motivation? When will we return to co-located working?

Research in psychology and anthropology suggests that most of us are very uncomfortable with uncertainty. The anthropologist Geert Hofstede has proposed that every culture has some degree of uncertainty avoidance. The psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman pioneered the study of cognitive biases and heuristics by observing how individuals make decisions under conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty. They have concluded that biases and rules of thumb are methods of importing certainty into situations where it does not actually exist—biases are ways of overcompensating for uncertainty. More recently, a group of neuroscientists have conducted experiments that suggest people may have a biological aversion response

to uncertainty (in their studies, when individuals are shown stimuli that they perceive as uncertain, and then are shown repulsive images, such as a deceased animal by a roadside, the same part of the brain is stimulated).

Since 2020 was a year of pronounced and prolonged uncertainty—and research in social sciences suggests most people are averse to uncertainty—many observers have assumed in recent months that organizations and employees would perform poorly in this pandemic. American Management Association (AMA) recently conducted a survey whose results disprove such prognostications. While almost every organization has been financially impacted by the pandemic, many employees report an increased capacity to manage and direct themselves, an increased ability for creative thinking and innovation, and a sustained sense of connection to their organization and its mission.

In this study, participants were asked to assess their own performance during the pandemic as well as their organization's overall performance in the same period. Participants were both AMA members and individuals who have recently taken AMA seminars. They were widely distributed geographically: 39.6% were from the Northeast; 23% were from the Southeast; 18.5% were from

the Midwest; 16% from the West Coast; and 2.7% from the Mountain West. California was the specific state with the most respondents (13.5%).

### Implications of findings

Given social scientific data suggesting that people have an aversion to uncertainty and often compensate by falling back on biases and rules of thumb, these

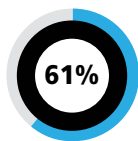
survey results may be surprising. For example, remote work has not had the overwhelmingly negative impact on team cohesion that many had expected in the early months of the pandemic. Rather, teamwork may not have been impacted at all; in some instances, communication among managers, individual contributors, and teams has become more deliberate and has thus improved.

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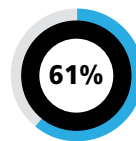
## Key Finding No. 1

### Employees have become more self-directed and self-managing

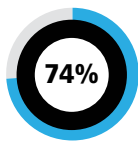
Participants responded to items designed to understand their exercise of autonomy while working remotely. Their responses suggest that employees have quickly and effectively adapted to the need to exercise more initiative regarding their work:



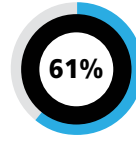
of participants indicated that, since the beginning of the pandemic, they have taken on additional roles and/or responsibilities.



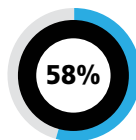
agreed that working remotely has enabled them to be more productive because they can better manage time and workflow.



agreed that they have become more flexible and more agile regarding their work.



agreed that working remotely has been a valuable opportunity to become more self-directed.



agreed that working remotely has provided valuable opportunities to take more initiative.

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## Key Finding No. 2

### Employees are more creative and innovative

When participants were asked about the effect of the pandemic and working remotely on their ability to think creatively and to innovate:



**63%**

agreed that working during the pandemic has inspired them to take more initiative and find innovative solutions to solving problems.



**65%**

agreed that they and their colleagues have become more nimble and agile in the last 9 months.



**67%**

agreed that they and their colleagues have become more innovative during the last 9 months.



## Key Finding No. 3

### Employees feel connected to teams and organizational mission

Participants responded to items designed to understand their exercise of autonomy while working remotely. Their responses suggest that employees have quickly and effectively adapted to the need to exercise more initiative regarding their work:



**37%**

indicated that remote work did not negatively affect their ability to feel connected to colleagues and teams (23.3% of respondents were neutral).



**32%**

indicated that lacking face-to-face interactions with colleagues did not negatively affect their awareness of work across the organization (21.9% of respondents were neutral).



**27%**

indicated that working remotely did not negatively impact their sense of connection to their organization and its mission (28.0% of respondents were neutral).



**36%**

indicated that working remotely *has led to more frequent interactions* among managers, direct reports, and teams (33.4% of respondents were neutral).



**35%**

indicated that working remotely did not reinforce “silos” and other divisions within their organization (37.3% of respondents were neutral).



Likewise, while in recent years the received wisdom has asserted that random, spontaneous in-person encounters and impromptu watercooler conversations are the lifeblood of creativity and innovation, participants in this survey report increased creativity and innovation, although their interactions with colleagues now must be deliberately conducted in writing (emails and texts) or scheduled (phone calls and virtual meetings).

In a similar way, early pandemic concerns about individuals' ability to manage their time and achieve results, without the direct supervision common to much co-located work, are not supported by these results. Such concerns may reflect an assumption that most employees are motivated by what some researchers label a control orientation (meaning employees are motivated by externally reinforced standards). Participant responses suggest that they have developed a greater autonomy orientation during the pandemic (meaning they are motivated by an internal satisfaction with a sense of self-efficacy and achieving results). An inference is that employees feel more empowered to be self-directed, even in the face of the uncertainty generated by the pandemic and resultant economic challenges.

### **A new year, a sequel in uncertainty**

2021 has begun with continued uncertainty. For instance, researchers are still learning how the COVID virus mutates. There is also uncertainty about people's behavior. Even when individuals can be effectively vaccinated against COVID, will they fully return to the consumer choices they were making before the pandemic? Or, will they continue to forego some types of activities, and will some industries, such as those associated with entertainment, be permanently changed?

Questions about behavior change also involve the way individuals work. As these survey results suggest, employees are becoming more self-directed and more autonomous. They are becoming more agile (implicitly



more comfortable experimenting) and are figuring out how to collaborate creatively without the familiar tools and patterns of co-located work.

The behavior changes raise these questions: After an extended period of self-management and self-direction, what will employees need to stay engaged once (or if) they return to the office? What will organizations need to change regarding management styles and supervision? How will organizations shift to a greater focus on results? The behavior changes suggested by this study are largely positive. Will organizations need to be ready to leverage these new strengths in the weeks and months to come?

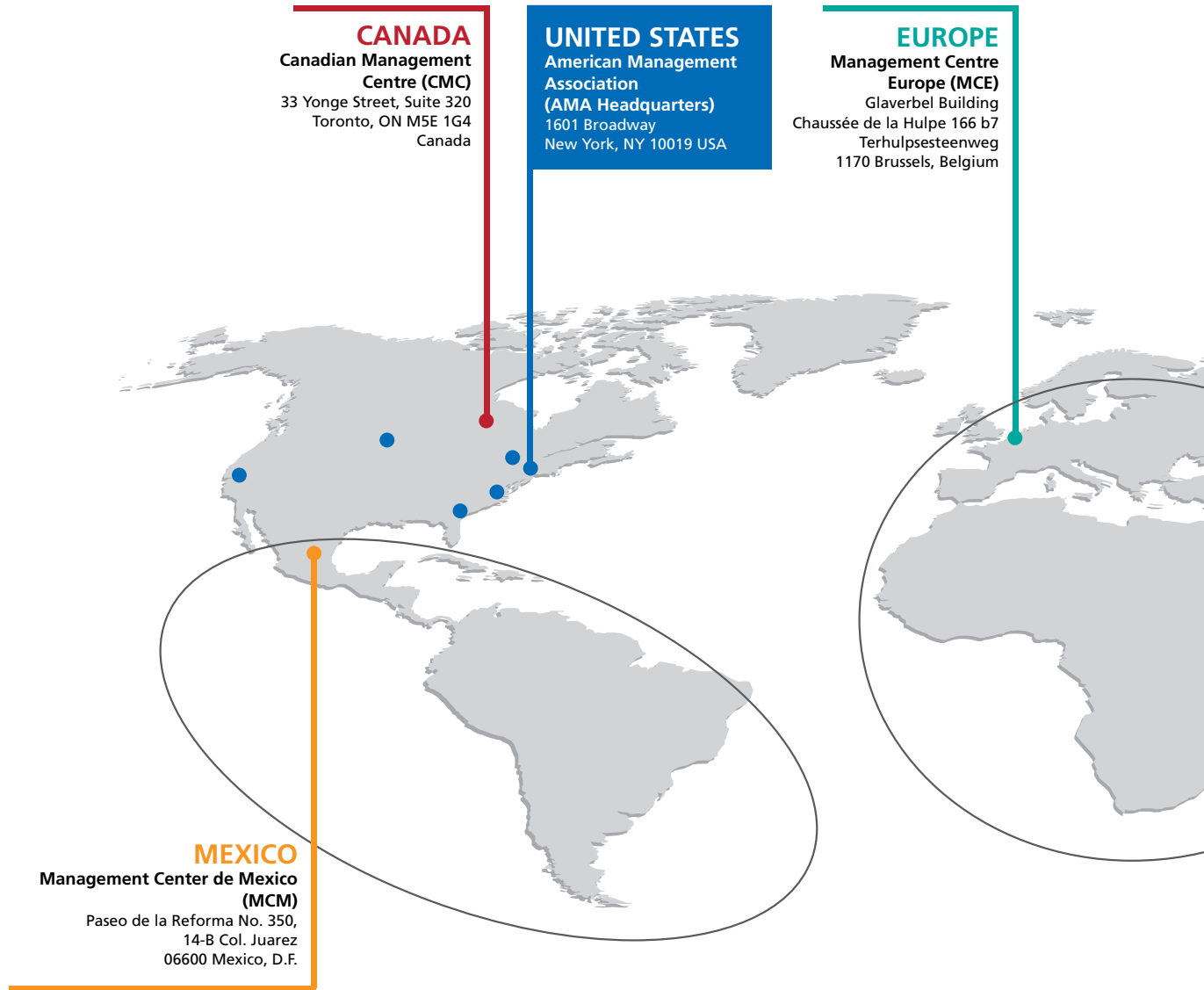
Anticipating organizations' need to leverage these positive changes in employee ability and behavior, AMA asked survey participants to identify the capabilities that are most critical to succeeding in this new

work environment. According to the participants, employees must have a positive approach to managing change; approach new challenges with agility and innovation; build strong relationships; be able to manage a hybrid or remote team; and demonstrate strong project management skills.

AMA is committed to providing opportunities for individuals at all levels of the organization to capitalize on the strengths they have developed during the pandemic and to develop the capabilities and skills essential to thriving in these VUCA times. [AQ](#)

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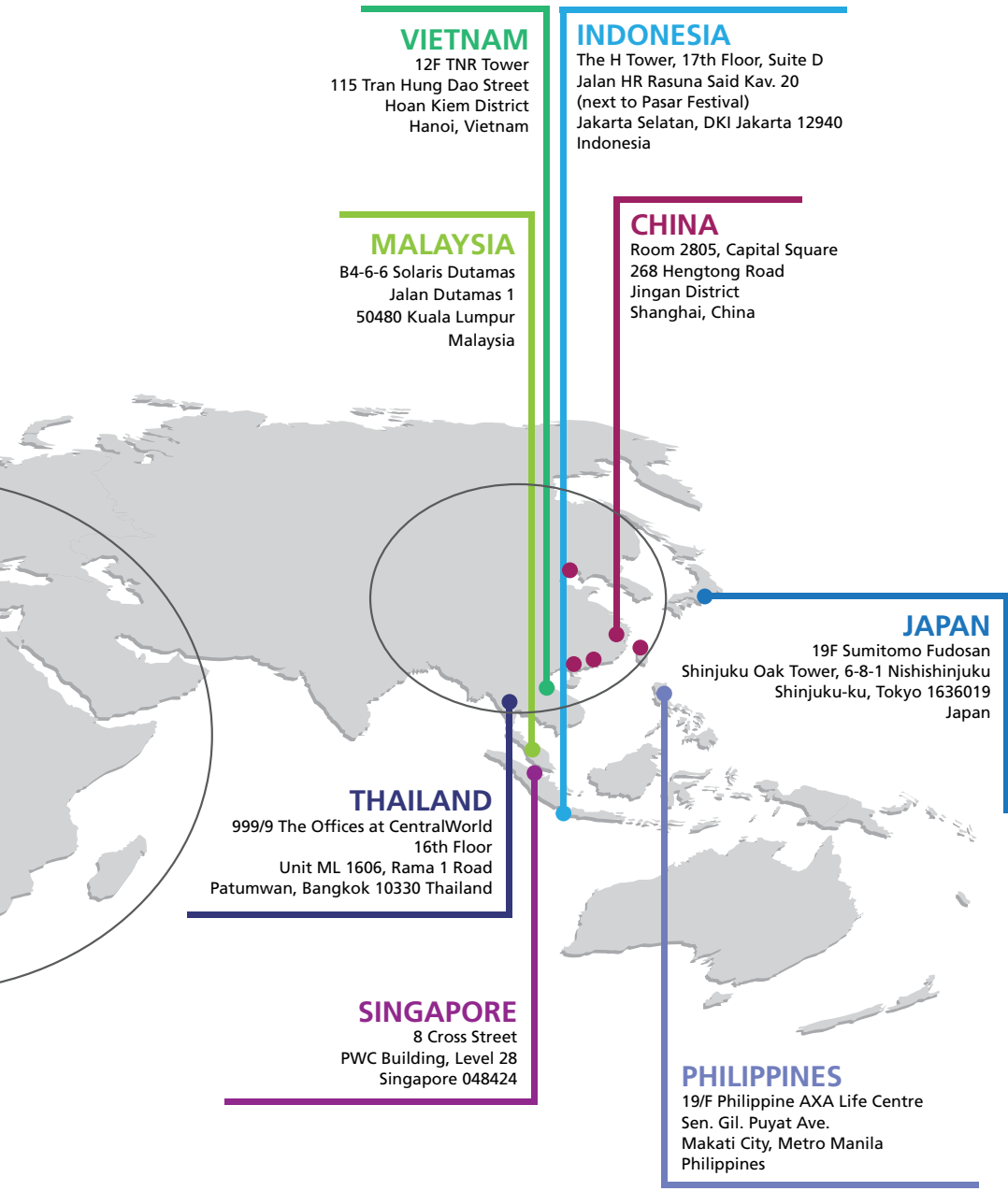
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# The Skills Managers Need to Fix the DIGITAL WORKPLACE

BY LAUREN TREES AND ELISSA TUCKER

The COVID-19 pandemic sparked a sudden and aggressive shift to virtual work.

We all know how big these changes felt within our own organizations, but APQC's research shows how dramatic it truly was. In a survey of more than 800 respondents, APQC found that prior to the onset of COVID-19, 57% of people interacted with co-workers primarily in person. Afterward 84% said their co-worker interactions were primarily virtual.

APQC identified two big remote work problems that managers need to fix. The first is that many employees are frustrated by a lack of guidance and ground rules on virtual collaboration. They've been provided with a bunch of apps and tools that are supposed to make their work easier, but they're not always sure which ones to use when or how to use them effectively. They're fatigued by too many long, unfocused video calls and a constant stream of chat pings that does not stop when the business day ends. Managers need to impose order on this chaos to prevent employee burnout and productivity losses.

The second challenge is larger and more nuanced. As organizations went virtual during the pandemic, most employees and managers simply moved their in-office habits and relationships online. People used virtual collaboration tools to talk to their former cube mates. Meetings moved to a virtual format with the same agendas and attendees as before. In other words, people are working virtually, but they're still relying on the professional networks and workways they built in the office. Few are capitalizing on the capabilities of virtual work tools to seek diverse perspectives, build new relationships, or manage work in a more efficient and transparent manner.

The current state of virtual work is a Wild West in dire need of capable sheriffs. Management must act now to bring order to chaos and guide employees toward a healthier, more sustainable digital culture. As some organizations go all-virtual and others embrace more remote employees and hybrid schedules, teams will increasingly include colleagues who don't know each other from the pre-pandemic office and rarely, if ever, collaborate in person. Managers will have more and more reports that they know *only* virtually. To lead in this new normal, managers will need to leverage their deep knowledge of the business as well as their consultation, communication, and emotional intelligence skills.

## ESTABLISH RULES OF THE ROAD

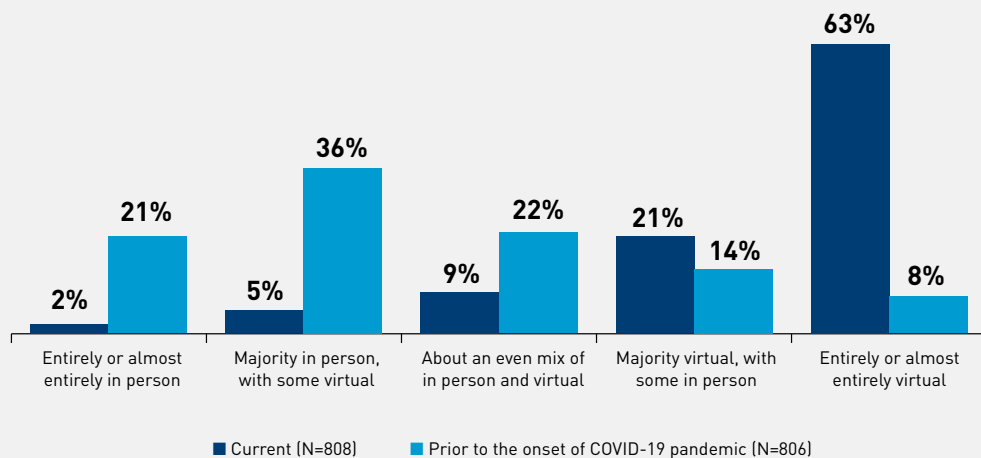
The first imperative is to better regulate the digital workplace through clear and consistent standards. Micromanagement is undesirable, but so is anarchy.

**Get comfortable.** One of the biggest barriers to effective virtual management is a lack of familiarity with virtual work tools. If you don't use these tools, you won't know what problems are brewing, what norms are needed, and what guidelines to provide. Seek training if necessary, then spend some time in the digital workplace using the tools your employees use. Gather employee feedback and make observations about what is and isn't working, then use that context to help establish guidelines and role-model behaviors you want to encourage.

**Take responsibility for your team's virtual work environment.** APQC found that in most organizations,



## Co-worker Interactions Have Gone Virtual



IT is the primary owner of the virtual collaboration strategy. While it is up to IT to ensure that virtual collaboration tools work on a technical level, management should take responsibility for setting the norms around their use. Managers will need to triangulate:

- The demands of the business strategy and goals (what people need to get done)

- The capabilities of the tools and platforms
- The needs and preferences of employees (pain points identified through conversations and observations)

Managers need to ask themselves, “What work needs to be done that is difficult with current platforms and work processes?” and “What problems or roadblocks are

## Top 7 Critical Gaps in Norms and Guidelines



**1** Established criteria for virtual meetings



**5** Allowances to set aside time for solitary deep work



**2** Guidelines to navigate collaboration options



**6** Set hours when collaboration will (and will not) occur



**3** Expectations for turning on video in virtual meetings



**7** Guidelines for document-based collaboration



**4** Expectations for attentiveness in virtual meetings

preventing employees from being as productive as they could be?” In so doing, consider not just the needs of your employees and your team, but also key stakeholders such as other department leads, executives, and customers.

**Create guidelines for which tools to use and what happens where.** Half of APQC’s survey respondents said that their organizations have no guidelines for virtual collaboration or that norms emerge ad hoc as teams work together. When APQC asked about specific guidelines, none was in place among more than 50% of organizations. We’re living in a new normal, but the norms are yet to be established.

APQC identified the top seven critical gaps in virtual collaboration, as seen in the chart above. Our survey respondents said that adding or strengthening these seven guidelines would make virtual collaboration more effective. Ultimately, though, managers need to be active listeners and good internal consultants to identify the best-fit guidelines for their company and team cultures.

It’s relatively easy to set business rules such as “Don’t set a virtual meeting without an agenda” or “You must turn on video for this type of interaction,” but managers—especially line managers—must consistently role-model and communicate to ensure they hold. APQC found that senior leaders are twice as likely as others to say that team guidelines are established, but employees further down the hierarchy tend to say there are no norms. There’s often a gap between what leadership expects and what’s really happening on the ground, and that’s a gap management needs to fill.

**Communicate guidelines.** The good news is that, when norms and guidelines for virtual collaboration *are* in place, employees are relatively consistent about following them.

Seven out of 10 employees say colleagues usually or almost always follow rules once they are understood.

The bad news is that many managers aren’t doing their part. APQC found that most communication about virtual collaboration rules and guidelines is reactive. That is, employees only find out that rules exist when someone breaks one. The research also suggests that, for the most part, employees are taking it upon themselves to self-police the virtual environment. Currently, only 26% of managers proactively monitor and reinforce norms and guidelines. More managers need to start communicating expectations and role-modeling desired behaviors *now*, before employees grow weary of making up the rules as they go.

**Set boundaries.** Managers need the emotional intelligence to understand how virtual collaboration affects different employees’ well-being and establish boundaries accordingly. APQC found that many employees—particularly women, younger workers, and those in more junior positions—want boundaries around when virtual collaboration will and will not occur. It’s up to managers to set expectations for responding to messages (especially those sent outside normal business hours) and give employees permission to set aside time for uninterrupted work.

On the other hand, some employees are tempted to push boundaries in the virtual workplace. Whether they’re watching TV during virtual meetings or sneaking off to run errands during the workday, it’s all easier to do when no one’s watching. That’s why managers must find new ways to make themselves visible. “Managers need to be very present with their employees in a virtual environment, and that can be challenging for managers who are accustomed to being very hands-on people in an in-office environment,” says Ashley White, executive director of human resources at

APQC. “You need to keep up your individual and team check-ins, and maybe even schedule them more frequently than you did before. Lead with empathy, but follow that up with accountability and expectation management.”

## SET THE COURSE FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

There are a lot of upsides to remote work, and it’s clear that many employees and executives want to keep working this way at least some of the time. However, APQC found that some of the benefits of virtual collaboration are a double-edged sword. Two of the top five benefits cited by survey respondents were “I get things done faster” and “It’s easier to multitask.” It’s sometimes OK to work quickly and across tasks, but it’s also a good way to make a huge mistake. APQC’s survey also identified some remote work challenges that are trickier to solve than the current lack of guidance and guardrails. To figure all of this out and set the course for long-term success, managers cannot just apply past experience. They need to be agile thinkers and strategic problem solvers.

**Replace the watercooler.** APQC found that the biggest challenge with virtual collaboration is that it’s hard to have unstructured, serendipitous exchanges. In a physical office, organizations don’t need to do much to facilitate these discussions—they happen every day in the breakroom, across cubicles, and just about everywhere else. When the pandemic hit, organizations tried to replicate these spaces with off-topic chat groups and virtual happy hours. But the best thing about the watercooler was that you often overheard something useful (such as a colleague who’s working on a similar project), and those discussions don’t crop up in “forced fun” chats and events.

Virtual communities of practice and topic-based enterprise social networking groups are more effective replacements for the watercooler. These are fluid networks of people who come together to share, discuss, and learn from one another around a common discipline or topic of interest. They’re a great place for employees to build their networks and participate in unstructured yet focused discussions around work-related topics. They also facilitate the deeper, more complex forms of collaboration required for problem solving and innovation, which APQC identified as a major current-state challenge.

Such groups should be employee-led, but it’s up to management to encourage their creation and provide the resources and structure that allow them to thrive. Managers must make the case to executives that these groups are worth employees’ time, help guide employees in these groups to set business-relevant objectives, and work with other stakeholders (typically, IT) to create space for them in the virtual workplace.

### **Don’t take shortcuts with performance management.**

Traditionally, many managers used “time in chair”—visual observation of employees—as a key input to performance management. When this crutch was taken away during the

pandemic, some people micromanaged employees with a bunch of meetings to make sure they were working, while others undermanaged and put off performance evaluation to the last possible moment. Both approaches are lazy and unfair, and management must do better.

APQC recommends holding frequent check-in meetings to reiterate goals, discuss progress, collect performance feedback, and work through challenges. These meetings should be scheduled with individuals, not the entire team, to allow adequate time for employees to open up and for managers to build trust. “Managers should not short-cycle the performance evaluation process. In a virtual setting, feedback is even more important,” says White. “In 2020, for example, a lot of employees missed their goals due to circumstances beyond their control. But that doesn’t mean managers should just ignore those goals and move on. Instead, talk through how you might hedge against it next time. Employees still want to be held accountable, they still want to advance their careers, and they still want to grow. Don’t take the easy way out.”

## BE PROACTIVE

A lot of managers are hiding under a rock and hoping today’s virtual workplace challenges just go away. This is especially true of certain long-tenured managers who rely on in-person rapport. But the reality is, virtual work is not going away. Employees who have worked from home productively for a year or more are unlikely to accept a mandate to return to the office five days a week. Companies are looking to minimize costs by reducing their physical footprint and hiring in lower-cost markets for key roles.

Managers must adjust to having at least some of their employees remote some of the time. They must adapt how they oversee, support, and evaluate their teams to suit the digital environment. Virtual guidelines are a good place to start, but it’s equally critical to embrace the potential of collaboration platforms. Successfully replicating the creative, complex, and free-form conversations that employees miss from the office will be the difference between merely surviving and thriving in a more digital organization. [AQ](#)

*Lauren Trees is principal research lead, Knowledge Management, and develops and executes APQC’s knowledge management (KM) research agenda. She identifies trends in enterprise knowledge sharing and collaboration, researches cutting-edge ways to improve knowledge flow, and shares the findings with APQC’s members and the knowledge management community at large.*

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# HONING YOUR Pandemic Productivity

BY LORENA PRIME



In the past year, you've developed some new habits, which may or may not be good for you. I facilitate several of AMA's classes focused on virtual effectiveness and have talked with many people. I'm hearing about some common struggles, when it comes to being productive and finding things that give us joy when so many activities have been shut down or put on hold. So it is definitely time for a checkup. Examine your habits and ask yourself, are they helping or hindering you? Sometimes in remote work, our productivity can slip and our organizational skills can get sloppy. Take a few moments to slow down and assess. Ask yourself, "How am I *really* doing?"

The following tips can help you get back on track, if necessary, or reassure yourself that you're doing OK.

**Reevaluate.** Change causes us to reassess our goals, priorities, tasks, schedules, and even friends. Big events (such as a pandemic) remind us of what's important. As we return to normal, don't forget what you've learned. Have you rediscovered cooking and eating meals as a family? Exercise? Facetiming with grandma? Don't lose these valuable lessons as we get back to normal. You don't want to have yet another life-changing event to remind you of what you treasure.

**Find joy.** It can be easy to fall back into the habit of living just to check things off our task lists. We need activities, hobbies, and people that bring happiness and joy. Can you think of one or two things that would make you happy *today*? Would you enjoy reading a book? Taking a bath? Going for a run? Playing with your kids or pets? Plan one of these tasks *today*.

**Brainstorm more.** Notice when you're stuck in an unproductive pattern, and give yourself permission to ask others for ideas. Not every solution will work for you, but it might be just the nugget you need to get unstuck. Resist the urge to shoot down ideas—be very open and listen. Mull over the suggestions and try to see your situation differently.

**Revise routines.** Periodically we need to reassess our schedules and habits, especially when big changes occur. Are you working in-person part of the time now? Are your children going to school three days a week on a hybrid schedule? Did your partner change jobs? All of these events affect your routines. Ask yourself, "What's working well these days? What's not?" Brainstorm on anything that isn't working. See if you, your spouse, your children, or a friend can offer a different solution.

**Rethink Zoom.** We love Zoom. We hate Zoom. It's been a great tool to keep us working and socially connected, but there are downsides. Reconsider all the meetings (whether formal or informal) you've agreed to attend. Examine your calendar—is it packed full of meetings? If so, review each item for the next six weeks and remove *anything* that does not add value. Find another way to get the information. Listen to a recording, get highlights from a colleague, get meeting minutes, send someone in your place, go every other time, or don't worry about it at all. If you truly must attend, then

brainstorm on how to make the meeting more efficient. When I teach AMA's *Leading Effective Virtual Meetings* program, we discuss strategies to make them more valuable. Why suffer? When it comes to your meetings, you always have options. Exercise them!

**Review boundaries.** The line between work and home may no longer be clear. On work-life balance, there are two camps: One believes in blending work and home as long as they have time for both, and the other doesn't want blending. These people want work and home to be clearly separated. Understand which camp you are in. For those in the second camp, you'll need to be firmer with your boundaries because the first camp can cause you to lose boundaries. Think about when you start and finish work. If your boss emails at 9 p.m., do you really need to respond? Discuss your expectations with your boss, and you may find that they don't want you to respond—they were just cleaning out their inbox.

**Assess space.** By now you've found a place to work, but is it working for you? Is your chair comfortable? Do you have enough desk space? Can you leave the "office" and get away? If you are still working at the kitchen table, it's time to find other options. Even if you take over a corner (not in your bedroom!) and erect a big screen or plant, this can create a boundary between work and home. You need to get away from work—literally. If your equipment is uncomfortable or hinders your efficiency, invest in yourself and get something that works. Being irritated every day does not help your productivity.

**Be careful with casual.** One of my biggest challenges is longing to wear my flannel pj's all day because they're so comfortable and warm. To help overcome this habit, I get dressed directly after breakfast as if I were heading into the office. When I'm dressed business casual, I'm much more productive and I feel better about myself. Notice how others are dressed. Are they a bit too casual? It can affect people's impressions. Dress up a little bit and you won't have to worry.

It's time to reassess your organizational skills, productivity, and time management. Use the ideas above to view how you're doing. If something isn't working, then make a change. Even a small tweak can turn things around. If you feel stuck, solicit ideas from family, friends, and colleagues. Remember to be open and listen!

Our work situations may end up being a combination of in-person and remote, so it's good to review your schedule, routines, habits, and irritants. Look for and remove any obstacles that are hindering you. [AQ](#)

*Lorena Prime is the founder of Clearly Organized (clearlyorganizedlife.com), which provides training and consulting services to individuals and groups and helps them become more effective, productive, and organized. Prime, through seminars, individual coaching, and self-study programs, teaches techniques to improve productivity and organization to help people get more out of every day.*

# Leadership Strategies in a VIRTUAL REMADE WORKFORCE

BY KIMBERLY S. REED

The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing corporate leaders around the country to draw on their best skills to become agile, adaptive leaders.

For many, this has challenged their fundamental beliefs that you need your team to work in an office space to maintain efficiency and achieve productivity. In recent months, numerous surveys of corporations have shown that many executives have been pleasantly surprised. According to a survey by Mercer, the large HR consulting firm, 94% of 800 employers said productivity was the same or higher than pre-COVID-19. And a study from Harvard Business School, released in September 2020, says the average workday has been extended by 48.5 minutes during the pandemic.

Over the past year, I've learned that I, too, had to pivot. I've learned a great deal about my own approaches to management. Let me share some ideas that will help you succeed in leading your once in-person teams in a hybrid environment.

## **BUILD TRUST**

The success of the team in remote working is directly tied to your leadership style. That means you have to find a way to adapt your style in a virtual environment. For example, if

you're a classic micromanager, you'll need to incorporate new methods to have your team members track projects through the usual online tools to provide the kinds of detailed updates you need to feel comfortable about the projects that need to get done.

If you're a hands-off type manager, then you need to let your team members know what kind of information you want, when you want it, and how to deliver it: Via a phone call? Videoconference? Email? Special online form? The more clearly you define and express your needs as a leader of your company, the more your fellow C-suite executives, division heads, and employees will know that work has to get done with the same enthusiasm and commitment as when you were working in person.

## **LISTEN**

We all miss the days when we could just drop by someone's office to talk about their work or the day's events. There's an awkwardness that we all feel now. Should I call? Should I send an invite for a videoconference? As a corporate leader,



you should build into your schedule time to meet individually with all of your direct reports on a regular basis—at least weekly. Talk about the work at hand, but more important, allow time to breathe. Feel free to engage in conversation about how you're personally managing life in this new normal as a way to open the door for colleagues to share their insights.

Consider this a judgment-free zone. The information you receive should serve as a sign that you know what is happening now is not normal. Acknowledge that you, as a leader, are struggling in your own way too. At the outset of the pandemic, Alphabet, the parent company of Google, challenged its senior leaders to find out what its junior team members needed. Ruth Porat, Alphabet's CFO, explained to CNBC in November 2020 how the company's G2G—"Google to Google" training—served as an important tool to engage its team members to listen and respond with tools and skills to help people successfully complete their tasks remotely.

## CELEBRATE

Just because you're not working in person doesn't mean you can't celebrate your wins. Share via the corporate intranet, email, or social media the launch of new products and services, and the great work of your employees within the company or within the community.

On your regular daily or weekly meetings—via phone or videoconference—take time to acknowledge the good work of the team or an individual that went above and beyond to get a project or task completed. Then there are the little things

that matter. Remember to recognize a co-worker's birthday or work anniversary. Now more than ever, those moments could make a huge difference in a person's life to know that as busy as you are, you see them.

## EXPRESS GRATITUDE

Too often, particularly now, corporate leaders are so focused on keeping the business moving forward and making sure they generate ROI that they forget to say "thank you" to the people around them who are working harder than ever. Express that gratitude in words and actions. Say the words to the team and individuals during those phone calls or video meetings. Show your gratitude by offering an employee a gift card to their favorite store or a local restaurant.

The little things do matter now more than ever. By showing gratitude, you will feel good, but you also will make others feel they are worthy, valued, and contributing to your organization's success. Helping team members feel grateful is infectious. There's no better way to improve morale than having team members who are happy in the work they do because their boss has recognized them. Some CEOs are doing daily check-ins via videoconference with their team members just to say "thank you" for the day's work and to let employees exhale after another intense day. [AQ](#)

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# Managing TEAM PERFORMANCE Remotely

BY DAVID BURKUS

Managing performance is one of the core elements of a manager's job. After all, that's why they're called "managers."

When it comes to managing performance remotely, it can look—at first glance—like remote leaders would have a difficult time. It's hard to replicate what often has been labeled "managing" when you're not in an office setting.

For co-located teams, managers could often manage by walking around, which in a best-case scenario meant checking in regularly on people, and in a worst-case scenario meant monitoring employees' movements to track when they were at their desks. While the concept was well-intentioned when Robert Waterman and Tom Peters introduced it in 1982, the "management by walking around" method led many managers to focus on activity and not necessarily outcomes. It led many leaders to assume that presence equaled productivity.

And sadly, that assumption carried over into the world of remote work. When the "Great Work-From-Home Experiment" of 2020 began, many companies had to make a quick transition to remote work and sought to manage performance by focusing on the wrong thing: They looked for a technology solution to track and manage employees. And that even led many companies to install spy software on their employees' computers, just like a worst-case manager at the office. This spy software meant each company-issued computer was tracking which applications employees were

using and for how long. And even in the companies that did not monitor employees, too many managers focused on increasing the amount of camera-on meeting time than would be optimal for a remote environment. Digital presence, in the form of seemingly endless videoconferences, became the new proxy for productivity.

Instead of spy software or constant meetings, any performance management plan for a remote team must be built on a foundation of trust and autonomy. You're not there in the office with the team each day, so you have to trust them to figure out how they're going to get the tasks assigned to them done. Over the past year, many of them have been working on adjusted schedules to better integrate work and life, and scheduling all those conference calls becomes even more difficult. The focus on trust and autonomy is a good thing, because for decades now, organizational psychologists have proven that autonomy at work makes workers more motivated, more productive, and more engaged. And that bodes well for remote work, since the remoteness has wrested a lot of the control out of managers' hands already.

In place of control—or the ability to dictate how an employee does a task—autonomy requires remote-team leaders to provide extra feedback and coaching. This is the ability to



guide autonomous workers toward discoveries that help them improve performance.

## SETTING UP REMOTE MANAGING PRINCIPLES

Here are five ways to shift that focus when managing performance remotely:

**Set objectives mutually.** When you want to increase people's sense of autonomy, it's important that whatever objectives you set come out of a conversation about what is needed and what is realistic. In a remote work environment, many employees feel distant enough from their co-workers and their manager (more on that later). Receiving direct orders about how and when to complete every assignment only adds to that feeling of distance and insignificance or, worse, increases the feeling that even from afar they're being micromanaged.

You don't want your people to feel like you've just handed them a random set of goals with no consideration of their circumstances or the time frame. If people don't feel that a goal is feasible, they exert very little effort toward it. And the best way to make objectives seem achievable is to co-create them during a mutual discussion. Guide the whole team through the objectives, projects, and/or deliverables the team is tasked with completing and then co-create specific assignments and deadlines. Stay as flexible as possible when it comes to scheduling, as every member of the team will be

integrating their work and life together in different ways to make remote work actually work for them. Your job is to help, not hinder, that process from happening.

**Shorten the time frame.** At the same time that we're co-creating objectives and adding flexibility to schedules, we also want to make the time frame for those objectives shorter than many knowledge workers are used to. We've known for a while now that annual performance reviews don't meaningfully affect performance, because the timeline is just too broad to provide real feedback. But it turns out that managing according to the annual objectives, or even the quarterly objectives, similarly fails to have a motivating effect.

Research suggests that when people are faced with distant deadlines for tasks, they perceive the tasks to be harder than they really are and procrastinate longer than they should. This doesn't mean asking people to do the same work in less time. Instead, it means that it's best to identify the long-term objectives and work backward to create one-week or two-week work sprints with milestones to measure progress at the end of every period. Shortening the time frame has the added benefit of ensuring that any project pivots or roadblocks have minimal impact on other members of the team, since they'll see that sooner and respond accordingly.

**Teach the team to "work out loud."** If you don't already have one developed, your team needs a system where

“Teammates may be working alone, but in order to work best they need to ‘work out loud’ so that all team members know what each other is working on. It means building a regular team check-in.”



teammates can provide regular updates on their progress. They may be working alone, but in order to work best they need to “work out loud” so that all team members know what each other is working on. That doesn’t mean everyone on the team needs to do all their work on a group video chat all day long. But it does mean building a regular team check-in where teammates outline what work they’ve finished, what they’re working on next, and where they might need assistance.

Working out loud boosts performance for several reasons. The first is that it helps you and the team ensure that all the necessary tasks are covered and that no one is accidentally duplicating effort. The second is that it gives space to the team to make requests for help, something that’s normally much harder in a remote environment. Third, and perhaps most important, is that it reminds the team that they’re on a team. They’re working remotely—but they’re not alone.

**Check in with different people differently.** In addition to helping the team work out loud, increase the frequency of your one-on-one time with every team member. These aren’t formal performance reviews, so there isn’t any need to keep them standardized among people on the team. Ideally, you’re checking in with everyone equally—but equally doesn’t mean the same. Some people will prefer weekly or even daily check-ins (especially those starting out on the team), while others will feel this frequency interrupts them too often and would rather chat every other week.

In addition, the way you do that check-in might vary. Some people prefer a scheduled video call that lets them discuss a wide range of things, while others on your team will want to send you a quick email with updates and questions. As you get to know each person on your team better, you can adjust accordingly. But if you don’t know, default to increased frequency and scale back as you get a feel for what works. The goal is to make sure every team member knows they’re not alone, but also doesn’t think they’re being micromanaged.

**Make feedback a true conversation.** If you’ve been a leader for longer than a few minutes, you know that people tend to be happiest and most productive when they feel like they can contribute freely—and that includes contributing to the conversation about their own performance. This isn’t just letting them list off “excuses.” Even before going into check-ins or feedback sessions, you’ll want to have a sense of where they might be underperforming and what might be causing it.

You especially want to seek to separate people problems, where performance issues are internal to the team member, from process problems, where the cause is something in the organization or some breakdown of workflow. To learn this best, be sure to take plenty of time to listen as well as talk. Listen as a means to understand employees’ feelings, emotions, and frustrations as they try to perform. That will make it much easier to decide on a proper plan of action to improve performance. The best way to know you’re listening enough is track how many questions you’re asking versus how many statements you’re making. If you’re just talking at them, then you’re delivering a monologue—not having a conversation.

## FOCUSING YOUR ROLE AS MANAGER

This isn’t an exhaustive list of the things remote managers need to master, but it’s a great place to get started. By setting objectives mutually, shortening the time frame, teaching the team to work out loud, checking in frequently but differently, and making feedback a conversation, you help focus your role as a manager on the outcomes your team is trying to produce, instead of just the activity they’re doing every day. And it makes it much more likely that your whole team continues to work at their best—from wherever they work. [AQ](#)

*David Burkus is an organizational psychologist and author of *Leading from Anywhere: The Essential Guide to Managing Remote Teams* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021), from which the ideas in this article are based. Learn more at [davidburkus.com](http://davidburkus.com)*



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# CHAOS NEEDS A PLAN

BY BRIAN PORTER

One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been positives and negatives, but managers still need to plan for continued uncertainty.

So, here we are, about one year after a “limited” global shutdown caused governments around the world to close borders, companies to consider their risk profiles, and the Tokyo 2020 games to be shifted to the Tokyo 2021 games. At the time of this writing, the games are still planned for this coming summer.

Let’s consider some of the major changes that have come about in everyday life because of COVID-19 responses:

- Masks required in many or most public places
- Physical distancing recommendations outside the home
- Limited number of people at gatherings
- Videoconferences rather than “in-person” now the norm
- Reduced travel for business and personal purposes
- Less time with extended families
- Delayed weddings, funerals, and other special events
- Soaring and then dropping unemployment, which remains above historic lows
- Significant decline in math and reading skills for children
- Mandated curfews in some cities
- Significantly increased domestic violence numbers

- Increase in suicidal thoughts, especially in younger generations

It’s not all bad, though. We have also seen several beneficial aspects to the 2020 isolation period:

- Less business travel, which is good for the individual and families but not for airlines
- Lower fuel prices for those who do have to travel
- Increased focus on health and exercise for some
- Increase in baking, which is good for those who like eating!

When the pandemic restrictions first hit the workplace about a year ago, a general feeling of helplessness seemed to permeate just about every person. The chaos of disrupted business required a varied approach to doing jobs, including WFH (work from home), alternating schedules, and modification of normal processes. So many individuals, employees, and managers took the initial two-week shutdown as a vacation rather than a way to consider risk and improve ways of getting things done.

However, some of the best managers and executives saw an opportunity to modify and thrive, rather than sit back and wait. The rest were confused and didn’t have a clue how to move forward. You may have determined who you were in





spring 2020. More important, it's up to you to decide who *you* will be during spring 2021 and moving forward. How will *you* address the unknown in the future?

**PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOLS CAN HELP**  
**“Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”**  
 —General Dwight D. Eisenhower

Organizations, whether for-profit, nonprofit, or government, just need to plan. There may be those who are on one side or the other of the “predictive” or “agile” argument. Neither approach is correct by itself, especially in a time of chaos. It takes a balance of short-term responses and long-term adjustments, which will require both agile and predictive methods to assess and respond with better results.

Just to be clear, here’s an analogy for understanding how the two methods would be used when taking a trip from New York to California:

- If a 100% predictive method is used, the project manager will focus on details from the very start to the very finish using the IPERC (initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling, and closing) process groups. They will outline each turn and every stop and calculate estimated fuel efficiency for the entire journey.

- If a 100% agile method is used, the team will only consider the direction they are heading and estimate how far they might travel in a day. Each morning, the team will consider what the plan for the day should be. To this team, an agile daily stand-up meeting includes yesterday’s accomplishments, goals for today, and the challenges blocking these goals.

Both methods require planning, but one assumes a known end and that all details can be calculated. The other addresses the short term with more flexibility.

Let’s use both methods and address this the AMA way!

- Analyze the situation
- Make a plan
- Adapt as needed

**ANALYZE THE SITUATION—DON’T FLINCH!**

All too often, managers flinch at sudden changes in the market, employee resignations or, in 2020, a pandemic. Those that “flinched” canceled life for two weeks and then came back without a plan. Instead, when faced with a business or personal situation that causes great change, you should pause and consider the situation. Observe all ways the organization, employees, and you as an individual will be affected.

“Project managers are a lot like NFL football coaches. We spend the majority of our week in planning and just a small portion performing the execution component.”



I recall a disaster movie where people saw a meteor coming at them and started to panic, shouting and running in every direction. One “leader” got on a megaphone and yelled “Stop,” causing everyone to look at him. He shouted, “Look where it’s heading!” After a moment they all noted the direction and ran to the side, avoiding running *into* the peril. They stopped for a moment and decided how to respond.

When chaos or disaster strikes business, you may need to tell yourself “Stop” for a moment and figure out where things are heading, instead of responding by panicking. Consider all the elements that need to be addressed:

**Policy.** Consider newly instituted local, state, and federal restrictions. How might some of these restrictions threaten business, but also open opportunities?

**Product.** There will be changes in demand for products or services provided by the organization. This could mean a significant drop or a significant increase. Perhaps a portion of the organization will see a drop and the other portion will see a gain.

**Process.** There are external forces that can invalidate your current processes. Perhaps you have performed business only in a face-to-face modality for years, but now you have changed to digital or physical delivery. What other factors might force change to your existing processes?

**People.** Your employees will have fears and concerns. Unemployment is a big concern, but for others during the 2020 pandemic, the fear was not of losing their job but determining how to do the job effectively with children studying at home.

Sometimes, a proposed change itself is enough to cause panic and fear. Judging the level of anxiety will help a manager determine *urgency* for a change versus *importance* of the change.

## MAKE A PLAN, OR START PLANNING?

After completing a thorough analysis of the situation, the manager can now use some project management tools to focus on planning. I’ve noted that project managers are a lot like NFL football coaches. We spend the majority of our week in planning and just a small portion performing the execution component. Here are some specific ways to help staff and the organization through times of chaos, starting with the people:

### For Yourself

- **Get your bearings.** Just as airlines instruct passengers to put the oxygen mask on themselves first, before helping others, you need to make sure *you* are ready to face the issue head-on. This means you need to clarify the scope of your efforts. Whether they are projects or process (operations), you need to ensure that you are clear on the scope and vision of your efforts.
- **Sleep right.** Without sleep, you will not be focused enough to make good decisions.
- **Eat right.** Eating or drinking excessively will only hamper your health.
- **Exercise right.** Make sure to take a few minutes every morning to get the circulation flowing and metabolism started. Even a few sit-ups and some jogging in place can really help a person’s mood and metabolic rate.

- **Add tools.** Consider what you need to monitor the business and marketplace within logical constraints, not emotional triggers. Resource management is one of the 10 knowledge areas in project management, and it gets less attention than scope, schedule, or cost (budget) management. Don't ignore it! Determine the resources required to be successful, such as a computer, headphones, technology, and so on.

## For Employees

- **Team meetings.** Regular team meetings, including agile daily stand-ups, will help keep people on track and connected. During any "chaos" event, a feeling of helplessness and loneliness is the enemy. Remove the fears and help the team.
- **One-on-one check-in.** Make sure to have individual conversations, not just group discussions. Certain employees may feel left out because they are too shy to speak up in the group setting. Pay attention to their needs as well.
- **Team "fun" exercises.** The intent is to build camaraderie beyond the basic interactions while working. Find a way to team build. A few ideas include Dave and Buster events and virtual happy hours (everybody has their own snacks and drinks but shares time chatting with one another).
- **Technology needs.** During any upset in business, the first thing some managers do is to cut back on resources to avoid unnecessary costs. However, updating technology and looking forward may provide efficiencies and confidence needed to make it through the disaster. More, not less!

## For the Organization

Once you have a plan for yourself and employees, now think of the business:

- **Policy.** What changes to policy will be required? The pandemic changed a lot of company practices requiring individuals to work at the office or onsite. Overnight, something that was prohibited became not only the norm but a requirement. During the next "chaos" event, what policies might be revisited? Even if it is a weather-related or a financial, competitive, health, or other unknown event that causes the change, evaluate and be willing to drop or modify policies for the new reality.
- **Product.** Perhaps competition is adamant and aggressive about new products, and they disrupt what has been a comfortable position for your organization. Cities replaced rural and agricultural living in the 1870s. Digital media displaced newspapers in the 1990s. Online banking has displaced much of "personal banking" over the past 30 years. Electric cars have and will continue to displace fossil-fuel vehicles in the years to come.

- **Process.** Consider how many small and large food chains had to change from dine-in to pick-up or delivery modalities during 2020 within a few weeks' time. Manufacturing lines had to space employees out rather than "maximize" space usage. For some, shortcuts were taken, but that's not recommended. Instead, re-envision a new process that meets the chaos situation.

## ADAPT AS NEEDED

Recognize that every plan needs to be flexible. Whether short-term or long-term planning has occurred, we need to be open to further unexpected surprises. This is where the battle between agile and predictive project management tools can instead be a helpful selection process.

*A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, Seventh Edition, or PMBOK® 7, is scheduled to be released in late March 2021 and is intended to focus on outcomes. Project managers should use the correct tools from any methodology that is appropriate for their project. This means that some managers will need a lot of adaptive or agile tools upfront, but also should think long-term predictive tools for when things settle.*

Think of it this way: When you have an emergency, you use an ambulance. If there is no emergency, you use your regular vehicle.

In the short term after "chaos" hits, consider using agile tools because it means that you will get through the day or week providing some form of value. Use 15-minute daily stand-up meetings to get feedback on what has been completed, what will be completed, and roadblocks for each team member. Approach the plan for only a week or two to make sure that every effort is worth the time. If something is *not* going to bring value in the next couple of weeks, then delay or eliminate that activity.

Once things begin to settle down, you can make the long-term plans such as formal six-month, one-year, two-year, and five-year strategies for operational and project modifications. Use predictive tools such as formal calendars and resource scheduling tools. Proper sequencing will keep you from wasting precious resources during tough times.

Whether the disaster you face is temporary or permanent does not matter. If it is a condition related to financial, resource, scheduling, communication, or scope elements, it does not matter. You can tailor your response to the situation at hand by using AMA: Analyze, Make a Plan, Adapt! [AQ](#)

*Brian Porter is an adjunct instructor at American Management Association. Porter has handled all aspects of product development and project management, including ideation, development, testing, documentation, NRTL listing, field testing, patent preparation, market rollouts, training, litigation support, and every other aspect of bringing a product to market.*

# Leadership in the POST-COVID WORLD

BY CYNDI WINEINGER



# Our journey of leading through COVID-19 has been a case study in change management. We've seen our teams all go to their most primary responses.

When humans are confronted with change, we move quickly to self-protection. The brain rapidly sends out the signal to its "team" of chemicals to alert it that something unexpected is happening. The chemicals begin to kick into gear without much conscious thought by the owner of this brain. We then go to our preferred stance in the fight-flight-freeze response and hunker down until we know if we are safe or in danger. I think of the birds in my yard. When a hawk comes near, all the birds will quickly chirp alerts to their family and friends, only to go completely silent a few seconds later. We might say that even a bird brain knows how to detect that change can mean danger.

During the pandemic, we've been forced into self-protection mode. I asked a team to list with me all the changes they had experienced this last year. From feeling isolated and eating at home to being clumsy drivers and commanding new social technology skills, the list was extensive.

## PREDICTING WHAT HAPPENS IN YEAR TWO AND BEYOND

As we enter into the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we all have adjusted our daily habits and left the alert phase. But what lies ahead for us in our work patterns? Will employers require nonessential workers to come back to an office? Will employees require ongoing flexibility? Will we stay virtual? Be hybrid?

Only time will tell, but if any of us had to guess, we would certainly plan on some hybrid scenario for most companies. The self-protecting brains of our team members have become accustomed to the new normal. We humans don't like to be given freedom and then have it revoked.

Remote work provides freedom, but it is a juxtaposition of easy and hard. While it's easy to make it from the bed to the computer, it's hard to manage the needs of family and deal with a lack of appropriate workspace. Remote work makes it easy to save money and time on gas and the commute, but for many people isolated in their home offices, it's hard to self-manage, connect, and build relationships.

## WHAT THE DATA IS TELLING US

As with all things in life, many people will want both worlds: the ability to see others and connect, but also the option of being able to throw a load of laundry in, have peace and quiet from the office drop-ins, and stay focused without distractions. Companies will be forced to be agile in managing the output of this work system.

According to a Pew Research report from December 2020, a majority of workers are saying they don't want to go back to the office full time. It is important to see that number in context. Pew experts say 20% of workers worked from home before the outbreak, 71% are currently working from home, and 54% would want to work from home after it is safe to return to work.

Pew also reports that there is a significant difference in who does the type of work that can be done from home. Of workers with a bachelor's degree or more education, 62% say their work can be done from home, while only 23% without a four-year degree can do their work from home. The research also shows who is having the most difficulties with remote work: Those under 50 are missing the connections to others, and working moms are struggling to manage having children at home.

## COMPANIES NEED NEW STRATEGIES FOR PHYSICAL SPACE

Leaders of organizations will be called on to set policies and procedures to ensure maximized performance. They will need to establish clear expectations about what should be the specific output from employees and to broaden their thinking about how work can appropriately get done. This will require clear directives and policies about not only what work people accomplish but also where they get the work done.

Companies have been facing these changes for longer than COVID-19 has been with us—the pandemic just accelerated the discussion. Businesses will need to continue to navigate this ever-changing world and provide consistent guidelines. As an example, I have a friend and colleague working for a large international organization who was just given the choice between working from home or the office. If her choice is to work at home, she can reserve in-office space through a hotel-like system to use as needed. Plus, there is a lucrative \$2,500 initial bonus to set up her home office. Her organization ran the numbers and realized the savings to it for not keeping an office for her or others who chose not to return.

I have another friend who has been told he can work anytime from anywhere as long as all objectives are completed. He is enjoying a workday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day and admits that he often works well past 8 p.m. because he is motivated and more productive on this new time frame.

Another colleague remembers when his company gave everyone a choice about eight years ago. He told me that

“We will be challenged to adapt our leadership styles from the convenience of physical proximity and oversight to having performance measurements be our true measure of success. It will require us to rethink how we build relationships and inspire the work of our people.”



many people opted for the work-from-home choice because they did not want to keep regimented office hours. But then it became a normal pattern for remote workers to come to the office early each day to commandeer their same desk space. Apparently, the company got smart to it and only provided standing desks on rollers, requiring that workers keep these desks occupied while at the office. He said employees nicknamed the desk the “puppies” because they had to be walked to every meeting. Ultimately, the company learned just how much people need freedom and connection.

We also can't forget there are people who need to come into the office and work in a common space—customer interface, logistics, and manufacturing, among others. We certainly will see more job descriptions that include a clear alignment of in-office, optional workspace, hybrid, remote, or really remote. Hello, Costa Rica!

### LEADING FOR MAXIMIZED PERFORMANCE

Regardless of the location for any team member, it is important that we revisit the basics of our field—talent maximization through management and leadership. We will be challenged to adapt our leadership styles from the convenience of physical proximity and oversight to having performance measurements be our true measure of success. It will require us to rethink how we build relationships and inspire the work of our people.

We must go back to the very basics of employment—work for pay. What work have I assigned this person? Is it clear how

they can succeed? Are they motivated to learn in defined areas of their knowledge and ability gaps? Have they delivered the defined results?

If the manager can't physically see a team member doing their work, can the team member be engaged enough to lean in and ask for help because they trust the leader and are inspired to succeed?

While management is the oldest profession in the book, humans are inarguably consistent in why we work. Reward is key. While this obviously includes financial gain, it also encompasses much more. Does the employee feel celebrated? Can they be recognized for accomplishing this work? Can the work they do be maximized in conjunction with this team or company, or under this manager/leader? Managers will need to get much better at celebrating wins.

Having a sense of meaning touches our innermost human needs. Clearly, we need to have safety and security to reach for meaning. But we all want to see a bigger picture in what we do. Vince Lombardi reportedly gave his team and support staff the same speech each year: “This is a football.” He was reminding everyone that their job was to get that piece of pigskin across the goal line. To him, whether the person was in charge of the water bottles or was the quarterback, they had meaning in that game.

Leaders need to look at employee engagement. Do their employees feel connected to this work? Do they feel that they have a part of the success of the team? Are they excited about their contribution? In a hybrid work world, there is no way a

“Studies have measured our need for casual interactions each day. Small interactions we have with our manager/leader or with others on the team reinforce our belonging and security.”



manager is going to be able to see what is happening with people. Team members will need to be engaged with one another and trained to give feedback at all times. Teammates will have to step up to play mentor and coach roles with the desire to spur one another on in growth and accomplishment. Feedback cannot only come from a level above. Teams must be fully equipped to understand with clarity what the members do, how they are interdependent, and how they can safely and effectively give one another feedback.

Leaders must also keep in mind the importance of maintaining relationships. Studies have measured our need for casual interactions each day. We innately understand that the small interactions we have with our manager/leader or with others on the team reinforce our belonging and security. After any disagreement or reprimand, we look for those small touchpoints to reestablish our safety. Remote working makes this very challenging. We will need to encourage friendships and connections with others. People don't just quit bosses. They leave when they don't feel like they have close relationships at work.

### THE NEW LEADERSHIP FOR A NEW WORLD

Cynthia McCauley and Charles Palus at the Center for Creative Leadership, in their 2020 essay “Developing the Theory and Practice of Leadership Development: A Relational View,” do an excellent job summing up what lies ahead for us: “Among the most disruptive ideas that could drive a leap in leadership development is that leaders are not the fundamental source of leadership, but that leadership is an emergent property of interactions among people working together.” This perspective is described by the authors as a “relational view of leadership.” This view democratizes leadership, making them active participants in leadership and not “containers” of leadership. The focus of leadership development is then not on the individual leaders, but on the team, work groups, and organization.

According to this definition, management needs to be a conduit of people working together effectively. The best leaders will be able to choose inspiration over authority in supporting their people. They will be connectors and coaches who measure output in order to support and celebrate team members. They will be masters at selecting the right player for the right role and then openly planning for how the person can grow.

### WHAT IS REQUIRED OF YOU?

As the leader in your organization, you will need to teach the basics of communication, with self-awareness, listening skills, empowered conversations, high-performance team dynamics, and reading body language being mandatory. Managers trained to give feedback based on organizational values will be able to train people to make their own decisions. Teaching team members to give peer-to-peer feedback will be necessary. Managers must operate as coaches who want to support the stated goals of the team member. Conversational feedback on a weekly or biweekly basis, whether called out as a one-to-one discussion or just a caring connection, will normalize feedback loops. Lastly, team members will need a clear understanding that if you can't see their work, you can't offer feedback. They will need to seek you out for coaching and support.

My prediction? The opportunities are thrilling. The pandemic and the remote work it has engendered do have a silver lining for managers—they can hand back the excitement of a job to the employee and become leaders of their success, not managers of their time, energy, and work product. [AQ](#)

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# 6 STEPS TO ACHIEVING THE NEW LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

BY PAUL ECCHER

There is growing uncertainty about what a post-pandemic workforce will look like. Who will return to the office and how? How will work space be addressed or restructured? What new policies must be put into place to ensure safety, productivity, and accountability?

Faced with more questions than answers, managers must reimagine the employee experience. Amid this cultural transformation, new skills are needed to manage an entirely remote or hybrid workforce. One thing is for certain: Managers must commit to developing and engaging emerging leadership talent to ensure continued business growth and competitiveness.

## REIMAGINE THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

As the return to work will perhaps never be a return to “normal,” today’s leaders struggle with how to transition employees accustomed to the freedom of working from home (WFH) back to a centralized office environment. That’s of course assuming that there will remain a

physical office to bring workers back to—or that they will even want it. Recent studies, as highlighted by the *Wall Street Journal* on January 2, 2021 in “Is a Home Office Actually More Productive? Some Workers Think So,” suggest that 80% of employees prefer to continue working remotely for three or more days a week once the pandemic is over.

But whether or not there’s a live office setting, there’s an even bigger issue. How do we continue to develop talent to ensure that the leadership bench is strong? During the past year, many businesses put leadership development programs on hold in light of other priorities reshuffled by the pandemic’s impact. A recent Vaya Vision survey of more than 1,000 professionals reported that 64% of employees believe





that leadership development either stalled or was hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These programs may have suffered a setback, but that's no excuse to let them languish. Going forward, we need to adapt to our new reality. The focus must be on maintaining and improving company culture, and that means that leadership development cannot be treated as an afterthought. It must be engrained in the company culture, and it's up to today's

managers to reinforce their commitment to employee growth—whenever and wherever.

But how can we develop emerging leaders remotely? Here are six steps that organizations can follow to take their leadership development imperative to the next level:

**1. Lighten your touch.** First, leaders can no longer use a heavy-handed, micro-managerial approach to developing others. The helicopter model of monitoring employees

## Top 3 Investments to Make This Year

The three biggest investments that managers must make to uphold a leadership-focused culture are:

**People.** Ensure that your employees know they're valued so they don't leave. Commit to an objective assessment to identify emerging HiPo leaders from a diverse group early in their career.

**Equipment.** Provide a "just-in-time" online leadership training platform that accommodates employees wherever they are, at home or in an office location.

**Infrastructure.** Balance the need to support a returning workforce while continuing to sustain WFH employees with the right technology, individual accountability, and manager involvement.



# Establishing Accountability for All... Even from Afar

This is a story we hear all too often. Josh and Maria went through their company's HiPo development program. Both colleagues were equally driven and ambitious and demonstrated strong leadership potential. They had an identical desire to improve personally and to grow professionally. Josh is now ready to be promoted, but Maria just handed in her resignation.

What happened? Josh's manager supported him and gave him room to grow, but Maria's manager had a narrower vision and kept refocusing her on the immediate tasks at hand. How could Maria's situation have been handled differently to position her for success?

**Secure manager commitment.** Make sure the employee's manager is invested in the development process and understands their role and expectations throughout the program. They should make a point to frequently check in with the individual on their

progress, offer mentorship, and provide helpful feedback to help their skills progress.

**Allow HiPos to practice new skills.** Learning new skills is one thing, but putting them into practice in a real-world environment is where they evolve into positive, lifelong habits. Even virtually, emerging leaders can test new skills such as team collaboration, problem solving, and customer relationship development. Don't let location hinder valuable learning opportunities.

**Communicate expectations throughout.** Finally, leadership program participants need to take charge and "own" their development. This means letting HiPos know how long they have to complete the program, what tools and resources they can access to enhance their skill sets, and how to track their overall progress.

simply isn't effective. In fact, it can actually make problems worse. As revealed by the *Harvard Business Review* on July 30, 2020 in "Remote Managers Are Having Trust Issues," nearly half (49%) of employees recently surveyed reported severe anxiety when subjected to stringent monitoring by remote managers.

As informal lines of communication and access are now more limited, leaders must rethink their management style. The new hybrid work environment impacts how they build rapport, coach, and develop others, work as a team more effectively, offer feedback, and even have difficult conversations. More than ever, managers need to set clear goals and expectations, provide enough direction, and empower employees to take more ownership of their professional development.

**2. Emphasize soft skills.** Now that the workforce is going more remote, many of the skills that once required in-person contact (i.e., live, face-to-face meetings) need to be applied virtually. Developing tomorrow's leaders requires a new emphasis on soft skills. The three Cs—communication, compassion, and collaboration—must be cultivated. Keeping high-potential (HiPo) leaders engaged and motivated is key.

A WFH setting reinforces an "I can just do it myself" mentality because it's easier for managers and their direct reports to detach and not be present. Taking a

softer approach by nurturing relationships and focusing on building connections can offset the effects of isolation.

**3. Cultivate talent diversity.** Just as important is the need to identify strong performers earlier in the pipeline. Managers need to look deeper than just surface attributes of those who show promise and are willing to assume broader leadership responsibilities. In the past, nominating emerging leaders was based on "looks like me, sounds like me, acts like me" criteria—usually by an employee's own manager or boss's boss. Not anymore. Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that we're building a more diverse and inclusive leadership bench. Today's leadership development training should be accessible to women, people of color, and others who have historically been underserved. Achieving D&I in future leadership depends on making a conscious effort to embrace it earlier rather than later.

**4. Assess HiPos objectively.** How can we ensure that the selection of emerging leaders is completely objective? By recognizing that HiPo talent requires an unbiased assessment—optimally performed by a neutral party. It should be designed and validated to ensure that it eliminates gender, ethnicity, age, and other biases, as well as to highlight leadership capabilities—not just technical performance. While skills such as aptitude and proficiency are important, soft skills and other measures of leadership potential are



equally worthy of recognition and development. Given the emerging hybrid workforce, there are now leadership assessment services that can be conducted virtually with the same rigor and detailed insights as those done in person.

**5. Keep employees engaged.** Once the assessment process is complete, now what? It's one thing to identify and place HiPos into a leadership development program; it's another to ensure that they're making measurable progress. This is especially challenging in a remote setting. Provide emerging talent with a learning experience that engages them in a purposeful, personalized manner. Leadership training should be available as a virtual platform that offers on-demand access and allows employees to practice their skills in real-world scenarios. To keep talent actively involved, managers must mentor and support individual development remotely throughout the program. This manager involvement, coupled with coaching and peer-to-peer interaction, will help keep employees engaged, motivated, and accountable.

**6. Train and retain.** Highly engaged employees not only evolve as leaders, they tend to stay much longer at companies that are committed to developing their skills. Not surprisingly, according to Gallup in June 2016, 87% of Millennials rate "professional or career growth and development opportunities" as important to them in a job. After all, your people are the backbone of your business—and your most

competitive asset. Without the right minds powering the road ahead, your company is ill-prepared to seize new opportunities and leapfrog the competition. That's why investing in your emerging leaders by committing to their growth invariably leads to higher employee loyalty and retention.

## FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

Accelerating the development of leadership in emerging HiPos helps organizations to remain competitive during this time of massive change. While the perception may be that skill building is more challenging in a remote arena, it doesn't have to be. With the right tools and manager involvement, your WFH and hybrid employees can learn the skills, habits, and behaviors that will prepare them to become great leaders.

As we move forward into the new decade, we'll see that the most valued leadership qualities focus on inclusion, agility, and a growth mindset. These behaviors must be cultivated now to reap the benefits of the future—and they must start from the top. [AQ](#)

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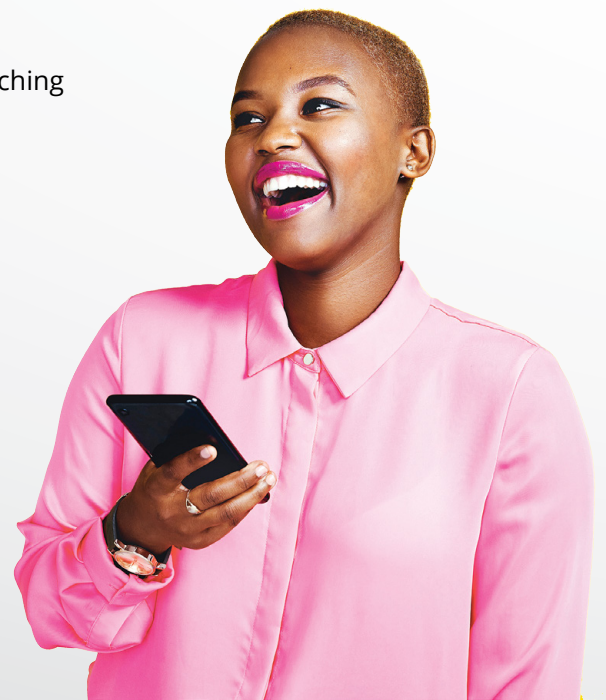
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