

# The future work-place – 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020

## Webinar minutes

*Thank you very much again for attending our webinar on the 24<sup>th</sup> June.*

*Please find hereby a succinct summary of the presentation and main points and outcomes discussed (both in the discussion and on the chat during the event). To be faithful to all contributors, chat comments are reported *in blue* below.*

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For this presentation, we've chosen to summarise the results of our recent survey in three pain key findings:

- Change is here, it is happening and needed, at both company and individual levels.
- Small organisations stood out of the crisis with their ability to adapt and adjust fast. Their characteristics (human and organisational) are best suited to face such disruptive times.
- The HR and leadership teams have here a great opportunity to take on a greater leadership role.

To put our survey results into context, clarifying the timeframe of the consultation was important: we launched the survey on the 29<sup>th</sup> April and collected the results on the 27<sup>th</sup> May.

Generally, people are not comfortable dealing with ambiguity, they like clarity and defined responsibilities. The pandemic crisis has been an opportunity for many to learn about their own capacity to react to changes and their need to become more adaptable and adjust, become more responsible as employees. It's been a **great learning** for many.

**Is agility a generational issue?** You would expect more established people to know more of their boundaries; was there signs for differences through generations of their respective capabilities to adapt? Not necessarily in terms of capabilities though more around their individual situations and constraints which also proved to be a different level of challenge to work around when working remotely. This also needs to be taken into account by HR leaders and management teams.

*“May be some organization with a regional and global exposure adapted quicker to the new way to work remotely as this was already happening.” “On the subject of adaptability, at first the company tried to keep the same routine, just remotely. But it exhausted people. It is now more flexible and people are encouraged to take breaks to jog, spend time with family, etc. Important for physical and mental health.”*

*“Obviously these questions are relevant within the company but also in interactions with customers.”  
“Indeed. It is likely that the expectations of customers will evolve and considering their new needs will be a critical piece of setting the "New Normal"”.*

The importance of **mental health management** among teams has been one of the critical findings of our study. “There is softness that needs to be brought in, together with a high amount of trust. Will there be more training needed on that front by HR professionals and leaders within the companies? It is clearly an expectation from employees to be looked after more carefully and for their wellbeing to be managed differently in the future.” “We are noticing a change in priorities and an appreciation of empathetic leadership.”

“Many people have gone in work overdrive (e.g. working too many hours) and are burning out.”

Employees will be more vigilant to their company’s **values** and the way they align with their own. This will contribute to **the level of trust within teams, that is becoming increasingly important** to strengthen both sides of the (working) fence. With remote working, trust and engagement correlate even more than before, and with it comes the ability for all parties to adjust their style of management and communication but also employees’ changing expectations. “**Purpose and trust** are the ingredients to have a work relationship. When you manage it across the organisation, and enable for people’s voice to be heard, it will grow employee’s trust into the organisation, who in turn, will then be better prepared to face crisis.” “Trust is also linked to recognition. In the old model, recognition was very much linked to visibility (in image and sound), and this is how « talents » manifested themselves and were also recognized. The lack of « visibility » now is unsettling for both those talents and for management. Direct link to trust, indeed.”

“Trust/guilt balance has been very important. Our management team is spread across multiple locations (UK, Europe, US) so a lot of the home working communication has been an extension of the norm.”

The shortcomings of virtual connection and communication are real; the atmosphere created by physical connection is missing. The attention to **remote communication styles and skills** will need to be addressed by organisations. “Self-accountability will remain a critical behaviour. In a way behaviour will become more and more important to leaders as well as employees working in a project mode.”

“Leading a business is not only decision making; ensuring a strong social fabric is also critical for success which is sometimes more challenging if only done over the phone or Zoom.”

“How to find the right mix between F2F interactions (more adapted to engagement) and virtual meetings?” “I suspect the answer will differ from company to company, but there needs to be a balance between F2F and virtual communication.” “Agree with the need for a mix/balance. And that this will differ both between individuals and companies. The mistake would be to go from one imposed system (no remote) to another imposed system (remote, in a fixed mix).” “I think a lot of the success of communications during this period depends on the maturity of the interactions before CV-19. For those that worked well as a team beforehand, it’s likely been easier to adapt. I think it’s much harder to build trust/empathy via Zoom/WebEx/ Teams with someone you’ve not met previously.”

From Viridis’ perspective and experience, digital on boarding for new hire can be successful if roles and responsibilities are well defined and people well trained. Maybe that would be less easy for more junior people who need more support and in-person mentoring.

### Culture and remote working

“The other issue I worry about is culture. How to maintain and continue building the core cultural principles...especially for newer Biotech/PE companies.”

“Connecting in person allows the development of a team with a common purpose and direction. A shared culture and vision. This is not easy to build from a distance.” “Embedding the culture is more challenging. I don't have a real answer to that. You can keep a culture for some time while working remotely, but it is more difficult to integrate new people into the organizations culture.”

**The role of HR is critical**, though, in many instances, they have not necessarily taken the lead as a function during the crisis. **HR in the broader sense, meaning top leaders and general managers** have taken a great supporting role to address the multiple challenges of this time. For some, HR have taken a role of counsellor and guide on the regulations and rules in regards to health and safety, and quality of work; some are setting workshops on “how do we want to work together in the future?”. In certain cases, it was an opportunity for the HR Leaders to grow a closer collaboration with the management team and the HR department became the “person to go to” for personal issues and take care of them. It varies a lot from one company to the next.

Can we dislocate leadership from people skills? Are HR executives in a position to develop into a greater role? This time is certainly for them to do so.

“I do believe that not « function » can ever replace the personal empathy of the line manager and colleagues.”

**Is it the end of the big office buildings?** There is a lot of ongoing discussions within the industry around remote working and on the need of big offices, going forward. Working from home has been often more effective. It is not the end of office work, rather an expansion of remote working for expanded periods.

In some cases, return to work (office-based) is progressive and will reach 65% of the teams in the office at a time, and the policy will be to wait for a vaccine to be available before coming back to a 100% level of home-office.

“For us, the environment has changed a lot as we went to home office. Now there are many in the organization who are asking to return to the office, but not full time. Once or twice a week. We are now moving to that here in Berlin.” “I see us working from home about half time moving into the future. Important to keep the contacts in the company, but also lots of advantages to working from home - also for the environment. In Germany, people are noticing less traffic, etc. and like that. Our company is small, only 120 people worldwide, so it is a different scale than larger companies.”

“My company (n= 22700) is now progressively being back people to the Big Office model.”

Another example, is a smaller biotech currently building their teams, will save on large offices by promoting remote working but will set up regular teams' seminars where development strategies and operations will be discussed.

“This is a great experiment. In the past, management has been afraid that without seeing what people are doing, they will be less productive. WFH will either show it can work or not.”

**“What are we trying to achieve** should remain the central question, which will dictate how to do it. The culture and purpose are harder to embed digitally.”

An interesting case study, is a Scottish biotech’s management team who saw the crisis as an opportunity to reflect on what worked well and what didn’t work so well in the working relationships to create new best practices.

### **Conclusion...**

The challenge comes also from the many recent experiences which have been skewed by the pandemic, which makes it more difficult to foresee how new work modalities, relationships and practices will translate into future longer-term reality.

“Wondering what the "real" outlook is if we take away the specific Covid situation. The experience we all have right now is one of 2 or 3 months. It may be a very different experience when you have been working from home for 2 years. Also, the responses are given with a clear bias from their current experience.”

“We did run a survey yesterday asking people if they prefer 1 or 2 home office days on average per week, and how this would work (e.g. fixed days, number of home days per month, trimester or year). The question was not asked if employees would like more than 2 days per week on average, which indicates that the priority/majority of the time is still the pre-COVID Big Office model.”

**To be continued....**