



Covid-19: Leaders  
need to Take Time  
to Accelerate the  
Future of Work

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# Covid-19: Leaders need to Take Time to Accelerate the Future of Work

As we progress deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, leadership and organisational transformation practitioners are being asked to speak and share thinking on how organisations, skills and the world of work will evolve in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Linked to this ask there has always been a level of anxiety based on the continuous and increasing pace of change, with the potential for significant disruption. As 2020 dawned no one could quite have anticipated the form, speed and rate at which that disruption would occur. We have watched leaders across the world deal with the unfolding new reality and the shock and trauma of the impact on many aspects of life and our economy. Who could not have anticipated that the next significant disruption “social distancing” would have had such a direct impact on a key construct that has shaped economies and the world of work so directly i.e. where work is done. This impact has accelerated a deeper reliance on technology in the world of work, to remain productive, stay connected, what skills are needed and ultimately how work is done. The necessity to adapt has accelerated many organisations into adopting new digital platforms, tools and technologies, ultimately shifting their thinking on how we do work.

## **Make time to Think Ahead**

The time is now for business leaders to begin to make time to effectively process the change and the impact on themselves, their families, their careers, their organisations and the broader ecosystems within which they live and operate. The request from clients to share practical solutions to future of work problems has accelerated through this process. We have found this to be an enormous privilege as it has provided us with the opportunity to

focus on the crisis and reflect, but most importantly provided multiple data points on how the change is being experienced and impacting businesses, their people and their leaders. As we learn, adapt and evolve our ways of working and the work we do, we have begun to identify some key learnings that may be valuable to share, as we continue to learn and evolve our thinking.

## **Acknowledge the Change and Manage the Uncertainty**

Perhaps the starkest realisation is how different people manage and cope with the change, particularly when mapping it to the well-known stages of the many versions of the change curve from Denial to Acceptance and all the steps in between. It is key to normalise and understand that people are managing a significant and traumatic change which is being faced with an event which puts into question key beliefs that have provided the “certainty” on which we have anchored our life choices, and key business decisions. Now we live in a world where there is significant uncertainty, and being able to find new, but potentially less rigid “anchor beliefs” becomes a key step. However, before we can do this we need to acknowledge the change. To do this requires significant reflection to assess the new reality – what has really changed through all of the dimensions personal to work. Depending on one’s circumstances some things will be viewed as uncomfortable, catastrophic, detrimental and then some as positive. “Taking inventory” aims to provide us with a reality check, rather than being stuck in conjecture, rumour and concern, and is a key strategy developed by positive psychologists in supporting people to deal with situations of sustained stress.

### Shift Mindset to a New and More Productive World of Work

Acknowledging the change opens the doorway to changing mindsets around the way we do work as well as the role technology will play in shaping the work we do to drive greater efficiencies and optimise for enhanced productivity. A key reflection from many of our clients particularly in more “traditional” businesses, where they have been able to sustain their businesses through remote working is that one can actually be more productive, notwithstanding that they have often found the processes of adapting to be stressful. We are learning at pace many of the new ways of working, using technology that has the potential to make us more productive. Examples of a key initial learning has been the time and money saved when not commuting, or recognising that a core component of your workforce does not have to work from an office. Ultimately the biggest opportunity is that “necessity is the mother of invention” and this time, because of necessity to do things differently we can drive faster adoption of the new ways of working. More importantly we need to begin to see how this can be leveraged more strategically in how we shape more efficient and effective organisational operating models, team structure, roles and some of our key business and people processes and policies.

### Challenge the Way you Work

A practical step for those that are pioneering in this process is being able to challenge some of the key assumptions around “how we do work”. Often the first thought is to implement a new technology or digital platform, however it is only when we start to do things differently, that we begin to realise the value. This has been a key previous lesson in digital transformation which is now being amplified based on current restrictions. Begin by asking practical questions around when, who and how we should meet, or who can do this work, what work needs to be done where, who needs to know what, and how do we share information effectively. This questioning very quickly starts developing a host of opportunities to re-design a more productive team, project and ultimately organisational working environment. As this process unfolds it triggers us to challenge a host of other pre-existing organisational constructs, like: does our process really support this, which policies might we need to change and what other technologies could we leverage to enhance or enable the way we need to work going forward.

### Design Outside In

In conclusion perhaps the most important aspect of this current crisis with regard to the world of work, is that it has forced us into an outside in design paradigm. As we all are experiencing the challenges of working remotely first-hand we have deep empathy and, more importantly, experience of what it feels like, and what is required to make this work. This is a unique opportunity to tap into the real experience of people when re-designing the way we work and the work we do and through this create faster adoption.

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