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# How to create and embed a people-first culture in your organisation during Covid-19

## We have been catapulted into the future of work.

As we move into an increasingly VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) environment and adopt this as our new normal, the need for adaptability and collaboration has never been greater. And, in many ways, this global pandemic is causing a positive reassessment of our purpose and value that will remain with employer and employee long into the future.

It's clear that workforces will never return to the old norms, and that expectations and priorities will be different for both employee and employer. But one thing in particular will remain central to organisations in the future – the focus on people and their integral role in a company's success or failure.

Our perception of what skills are valuable is already changing, with creativity, innovation and empathy fundamental to surviving in these times. Fostering a strong people-first culture which encourages collaboration, supports autonomy and rewards a growth mindset is key to success and **according to Josh Bersin**, organisations with a strong learning culture enjoy 37% greater employee productivity and 58% more prepared to meet future demand.

With more than **42% of people in the UK now working from home** all the time, and another 12% now working from home some of the time, how do we efficiently use online communication channels and make best use of the time we have available? The answer is, of course, not to start pushing training courses at our workforce

and treating them like learners, but starting to create a culture where change is embraced, learning from mistakes is encouraged and curiosity is rewarded.

Reskilling and upskilling have been areas which, although often discussed, are commonly pushed down the prioritisation list for organisations. With the 'future of work' formerly an elusive and distant concept, there had been little urgency to upskill workforces for unknown roles. The current times have forced reskilling and upskilling upon us but we use these learnings to plan better for the future.

Whilst we work remotely, there are some simple yet key changes that can help set the foundations of this people-first culture:

## Embrace authenticity

We are often very different people while in the workplace compared to at home but research shows that being ourselves is not only beneficial to us but also to others. Dr. Brené Brown's **studies on vulnerability** show that risk-taking invites valuable lessons, saying that "true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance." Leaders who can show their human side on video calls by introducing their children or acknowledging their loud dog in the background puts everyone at ease and sets the tone that everyone is in the same boat. Curiosity is central to a learning culture and it comes from building genuine relationships with employees and understanding their interests and motivations.

## Encourage coaching and mentoring

Encourage your team to help and support other teams where possible as there may be a shortage of resource in certain areas which can benefit from transferable skills. Not only will both teams learn and benefit, but these learnings can be shared much wider, allowing teams to pass on their learnings to others to continue the cycle. **In our recent research**, we found that 92% of workers acknowledge the need to acquire new skills and are excited by the prospect of doing so, citing increased learning as the biggest benefit of working as part of a hybrid workforce.

## Reward sharing information and collaboration

Set up communication channels where information can be easily shared and generate conversation. Microsoft Teams and Yammer are good examples of this – encouraging sharing of interesting articles, videos and thoughts is central to creating a curious and open culture. When Freud was asked to define happiness, he gave a simple answer: “Work and love.” We all want to be happy at work because this creates a sense of fulfilment for us which not only fuels our professional achievements but also contributes to our personal motivations and growth. Praising and rewarding team members for sharing and collaborating is key to improving engagement and fulfilment.

## Assess current skills

Use this time to understand what skills exist across the workforce. This can be done through a basic self-assessment collating top 5 skills or a more formal process, where skills are verified by line managers along with previous performance and learning. And most importantly, communicate with the value of adding to your team's skillsets. Describe the ease of knowing where to upskill for future roles and how to be approached for job opportunities. Understanding current skillsets is key to knowing how and where to focus upskilling and reskilling efforts moving forward.

## Ask for feedback

To truly adopt a growth mindset and improve, we need to understand where and how we can improve. Asking for comments on a presentation, report or meeting contribution are all ways to invite some constructive feedback and encourage others to ask for feedback too. Most importantly, ask your team and colleagues for feedback via surveys on communication techniques, available training and other key areas so that you can start making improvements.

During these uncertain times, focussing on our culture and employee experience is not only important, but crucial for an organisation's longevity in an increasingly unpredictable world.

In the words of Eric Hoffer, social philosopher and author, “In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the others find themselves equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”

Having a culture that is adaptable to change and eager to innovate not only improves business performance, but fosters uniquely human qualities which, in this increasingly uncertain technology led world, is a remarkable and powerful strategy.