

MAINTAINING PRODUCTIVITY & ENGAGEMENT

Initially, when we were all responding to the crisis, the challenges around maintaining productivity and engagement were primarily concerning operational transitions to working remotely, access to systems, and adapting to virtual ways of working. Now, as organizations have addressed initial adaptations to remote working, leaders are needing to address productivity through ongoing remote working.

So just how do you maintain productivity and engagement levels in a world of social distancing? Through working with leaders across the globe, we have found five key things that most distinguish productive teams...

1 DON'T STAY DOWN

Many leaders are reporting being pulled down into tactical operational matters that they normally would not get involved in, limiting their ability to look up and ahead to more strategic matters. In fact, most leaders experienced this to some extent when the crisis first hit, as there was an urgent need to focus on operational crisis issues. In this sense, the step down into tactical matters has been thoroughly appropriate. However, what we heard from a lot of leaders was just how hard it has been to then step back up into more strategic matters. Some leaders have had less resources at their disposal, with employees self-isolating, and so have had to pick up some of the slack. Others have spoken openly about wanting to show their people that they are in the trenches with them. Again, these may be good reasons to step down into the detail of operations, but they are not good reasons to stay there. So, rule 1 of being productive is to make sure you don't stay down too long in tactical matters. Review your priorities. Make sure you have a plan to transition to a new phase of working and as ever, delegate and empower wherever you can.

2 GET EVERYONE TOGETHER

The second thing productive teams do is to meet online at least once a week and importantly to do so via video conference. This seems to create a greater sense of team plus some peer pressure to be productive, as people hear what their colleagues are up to.

3 TALK MORE ABOUT LIFE

Having more conversations than normal about non-work things also seems to be related to greater levels of productivity. For example, giving everyone in the team space in the regular video conferences to share their experiences of working at home, or asking everyone to share tips for how to keep kids occupied, or sharing tips for a good Netflix series to watch. Or even just using WhatsApp groups to share funny pictures and videos about life in lockdown. It may seem off-purpose, especially to the more introverted and task-focused of us, but the activity of doing this pulls people together and creates a greater sense of everybody being in this together.

4 LAYING OUT THE CHALLENGE

Leaders with the most productive teams do not just support people, they also lay out the challenge ahead in no uncertain terms- and therefore the opportunities. Most commonly, they make it clear that crises and recessions produce clear winners and losers – at the organizational, team and individual levels. That it is these moments when businesses and their people show their true colors, and that they need to put everything they have got into ensuring they are one of the winners.

5 MAKE SURE EVERYONE FEELS USEFUL

Even if people do not have access to business systems, it is important that everyone has something to do and that no one is left feeling that they are on a holiday, overlooked or undervalued. It is important for morale and engagement, and for ensuring people feel that they have a fair chance to contribute. It is important for ensuring that momentum is not lost to the extent that it takes people longer to get back up to full productivity when they do return to work. Ways in which leaders can do this include:

- Ensuring that they distribute work evenly (the risk of leaders operating mainly through favourites is likely to be exacerbated in the current);
- Asking all team members to identify one thing in their daily routine or span of control where they can improve efficiency or quality;
- Asking people to do a piece of market or technical research;
- Asking people to identify one thing that they have been meaning to do for a while and to then go and do it;
- Asking people to look at their customers, review which ones are best placed to recover most quickly, and then have a plan for what they need to be doing now with these customers to ensure that they can pick up their business as soon as the recovery hits;
- Asking people to do a piece of self-development – for instance, read a book and then come back and do a brief presentation on what they learned and how they could apply it at work.

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