



## **Organisational Overhaul: *Post-pandemic Lessons***

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Although catastrophic for some, the pandemic has created an opportunity for all organisations to reassess, reappraise and revise the way that they are working. By focusing on particular areas to prioritise, this has also created a window for positive growth and development. To explore this further, I will focus on priorities for organisations through the lens of ABC - our three basic psychological needs as humans, which are **Autonomy, Belongingness and Competence**.

**Autonomy** means freedom, influence and control over where, how and when we work. It is one of the most important factors predicting wellbeing and productivity at work. The pandemic has enabled employees to gain that autonomy and research by IES (IES, 2020) conducted during lockdown, found that for 67% of employees this was of real value. Organisations have seen the benefit of enabling control to employees in creativity, innovation and decision-making.

Pre-pandemic, the desire for flexible working from employees was not matched by organisations offering it. Post-pandemic the organisational response to flexible working will need to be reframed: it can no longer be seen as a perk afforded to some, but rather a viable option for many – and more than that, an important tool for sustainable business. Employers should develop clearer policies and processes around flexible working, and actively provide both line managers and employees with frameworks to enable it. Employees need to have access to the right technology and the right equipment, line managers need to set clear expectations and identify times for the team to come together, and organisations need to invest in infrastructure that facilitates remote operations.

**Belonging** is a fundamental need for humans; meaning feeling connected, valued and supported by others. Research has consistently shown that both technology and frequent homeworking has a deleterious effect upon social isolation and loneliness. Indeed a Nespresso survey in 2019 found that 20% of employees associated flexible working with loneliness, and nearly 50% felt that technology hampered social connections with colleagues.

Despite this, during the pandemic there has been a focus and energy on relationships. Many have seen relationships with colleagues deepen, despite conversations being conducted almost entirely through technology. And there has been a realisation that social connections are ‘the glue’ that keep workplaces together.

Meaningful relationships within and across organisations will create pathways for more open, social, reciprocal and connected organisational cultures, designs and ways of working in the future. For organisations, the importance of social interaction will need to be recognised at a strategic level so that it is both prioritised and woven across the organisational culture, processes and practices. Practices could range from introducing buddying and mentoring systems, developing more staff network groups, greater levels of cross-functional working and problem solving, and increasing employee voice and representation.

It may also be that office spaces will need repurposing or redesigning to encourage interaction in more open spaces to allow for social distancing. This strategic focus could also extend outside of the organisation, with more formalised shared partnerships with external organisations, and with an enhanced CSR strategy to position the organisation in a more meaningful way within the community.

**Competence** refers to this feeling that we can achieve goals and get things done. So much has been accomplished during the pandemic. Organisations have rolled out major changes in days or weeks that would previously have taken months or years. Employees have been both productive and innovative, developing new collaborations and ways of working, despite incredible challenges and distractions.

Where gains have been most significant, it is where there has been good leadership, where a clear vision has been communicated, where leaders have trusted and empowered employees within their roles, focusing on outcomes rather than processes, where leaders have recognised and understood the intersection of home and work life with empathy and compassion.

There is the opportunity for the pandemic to create a real change in how leadership is enacted in organisations; towards people management being seen as a core strategic objective; and therefore where the health and wellbeing of employees is part of day to day organisational functioning.

Organisations will need to foster a more outcome focused culture, articulating these in reward and recognition processes, through targets, objectives and monitoring processes. This review should focus upon their current development and succession processes for managers and leaders, looking at equipping managers with higher level people management skills focusing on empowerment, authenticity and empathy. A culture of recognition should be developed, whereby examples of great leadership and employee accomplishments are shared across the organisation.