

Lessons From Crisis: What To Bring Forward And What To Leave Behind

[Rachel Bolsu](#)

Senior Content Marketing Manager, Culture Amp

After nearly a year responding to the COVID-19 crisis, we invite you to pause and reflect on lessons you've taken from the experience.

What about your new workstyle has worked well? What hasn't? What do you want to continue doing? What have you found ineffective?

Some people love working from home, and others are itching to get back to the office. While individual preferences will naturally differ, there are larger lessons about integrating work and life that we can learn from this experience and bring forward with us.

This article covers what we've seen work (and not work) during the COVID-19 crisis and explores ways to leverage our learnings as we reimagine the future workplace.

Early workplace trends

In the aftermath of such rapid change, many organizations looked for a better understanding of their team's experiences to identify a path forward. Culture Amp's COVID-19 survey revealed that [85% of respondents](#) believe their team or department would benefit from some degree of continued remote work in the future.

Further, while 73% of respondents feel equipped to manage both personal and professional demands, only 56% feel able to switch off from work to make time for rest effectively, and 62% can accomplish all they need to during normal work hours.

Beyond this, top research firms have been releasing predictions for the future of work. A Gartner survey found that [64% of HR leaders are prioritizing employee experience](#) more highly now than before the coronavirus outbreak.

This only scratches the surface compared to the [multitude of qualitative learnings](#) we've discovered from organization leaders. These learnings all suggest increased value on the human element in the workplace. Diverse and inclusive teams, compassion in management, two-way conversations about the employee experience, and work-life blend are just a few themes that are top of mind as leaders envision a path forward.

Embracing the evolution of the workplace

The power is in our hands to shape the future of work. In the wake of the pandemic and mass uncertainty, it's an all-hands-on-deck effort to determine what happens next. To spark your creativity, we've shared themes and perspectives from people leaders thinking critically about the future of work.

You can't know if you don't ask

"As a company, we're leaning into remote work and embracing a culture of innovation and adaptability. Communication is key. We surveyed 1,200 workers and found that the majority enjoy working from home (84%) and would continue to work from home regularly if given the opportunity

(92%). We can't predict what the future holds, but we can listen to what our employees want and need from us," says Alex Hattingh, Chief People Officer at [Employment Hero](#).

Be clear on the purpose and flexible on the process

"As teams around the world transition to remote work, we've seen how adaptable organizations can be and that it's possible to get work done as a distributed team. Without the shortcuts we all once relied on – grabbing five people and huddling in a conference room, doing desk drive-bys to check on project status, or stopping people in the hallways to debrief on an email – we've unlocked new ways to become more efficient, productive and organized during this period.

"We know that teams do their best, most creative work when they have clarity of purpose, plan, and responsibility. The success of distributed teams proves that teams that have clarity know what needs to be done by when, even when they're not working in the same location," says Anna Binder, Head of People Operations at [Asana](#).

Prioritize learning and development

"We've seen a huge surge in demand for online learning from individuals, corporate customers, and government entities. While the surge of online learning has been accelerated globally by the COVID-19 pandemic, we predict a fundamental shift that will be sustained over time. Continuous learning will provide us with a path forward in this new world of work and will serve as a core muscle to build organizational resilience," says Shelley Osborne, VP of Learning at [Udemy](#).

Call on new voices

"As a leader, now is the time to look around your organization for the people you don't normally call on. You'll be amazed by all the hidden talent and ideas within your organization – and what they can do when given permission to try. This is especially important for employees whose jobs have been reduced or changed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There is no one-size-fits-all playbook for navigating these times, it's up to each of us to create this with our entire organization so we can make our way through this together," says Cameron Welter, Principal at [Kotter](#).

Make space for vulnerability

"Your openness gives others permission to share – responsibly sharing what you feel (without putting it on the team to hold) creates a safe space for others to express worries, uncertainty, hopes, challenges, and ideas and allows for safety, connection, and innovation.

"Breathe, respond to the nonverbal cues and energy of people you're communicating with. Don't just march through meetings – show your humanity and empathy rather than getting rigid. Acknowledge emotions that bubble up for you," says Laura Gale, Facilitator and Coach at [ThinkHuman](#).

Nurture psychological safety

"It's now culturally becoming more okay to say, 'Hey, I'm not okay,' which in the past really wasn't as socially acceptable in workplaces. It's also not uncommon for a two-year-old to climb up during a board meeting. Recognizing that you are a [whole person](#) is becoming more ever-present in our working world. It will be interesting to see how that changes the way we work because we know from research that psychological safety is one of the greatest predictors of high-performing teams. And in

order to have psychological safety, you need trust, you need authenticity. And in many ways, this has forced us to be more authentic,” says Claire Clark, Community Manager at [Calm](#).

Support individual responsibilities

“Supporting working parents has never been more important. Parents need their own ‘tribe.’ Creating a community for parents within the organization is a very powerful initiative. In times like these, they need it more than ever because we are all figuring out how best to proceed, and sometimes the best answers come from within. This doesn’t have to be a massive undertaking – a simple way to start would be starting a chat group for parents for them to get acquainted and start a conversation.

“Organizations should focus on investing in training managers to better support their staff. This includes managing flexible working requests, having more inclusive operational setups for employees with different caregiving responsibilities, and leading remote working teams,” says Jodi Geddes, Co-founder and Director of [Circle In](#).

Model self-care

“Any leader that wants the people working for them to focus on self-care and taking care of themselves has to model it themselves. It’s a powerful thing for leaders to say, ‘here’s how I’ve made sure that I’m sleeping enough and eating three meals a day. I’m exercising. I’m in therapy. Here’s how I’m taking care of myself.’ Because people don’t do what you say, people do what you do. So you have to start with yourself first.

I hope companies understand that it’s not just supporting the mental health of people right now. Mental and emotional wellness are something we should always be paying attention to. And the more we’re working on it, the stronger our resilience muscles become to handle things while they’re happening and also to recover from them quickly to heal and keep moving after the fact,” says Dr. Emily Anhalt, CoFounder and Chief Clinical Officer at [Coa](#).

Flexibility will be a must-have

“As we look to the future, whether it’s working virtually or fully needing to come back, we need to think about how to support people who – despite feeling more trapped than ever – actually become accustomed to having control over their schedule. We’re seeing people take breaks with their kids in the middle of the day, doing a workout between meetings and blocking off their calendars so they can take a quick break. When you’re in an office setting, there’s a level of scrutiny where people don’t feel like they can workout in the middle of the day or have their kids sitting next to them in a conference call.

“Employers are going to have to think about how to continue to support those things that people aren’t going to be willing to sacrifice, especially after we made it through something so traumatic and impactful on our lives,” says Kaleana Quibell, Wellbeing Director at Sequoia.

The path forward

As with any world-altering event, much is still unknown about the path forward. However, we all play an instrumental role in forging this path and can use our learnings as a guide. Every voice matters, so don’t be afraid to speak up and share creative ideas within your organization and community. If you’re in a position of power, make space for ideas from non-traditional sources and amplify unique voices. Now is the time to draw from unconventional sources to find new and better approaches. There is an opportunity for a better world of work, but we have to work together to build it.