



Leading People Remotely

Rapid technological change has often been cited as an expensive disruption to how we work. In recent months, we have learnt just how badly a global pandemic can also disrupt mankind and institutions on a global scale – immediately reshaping our way of living, interacting, working, and how we do business. The world as we know it, pre-COVID-19 pandemic, has indeed changed in profound ways.

Since the announcement of Malaysia's first Movement Control Order (MCO) on 16 March 2020 to flatten the COVID-19 infection curve, working remotely, which used to be just a growing phenomenon, turned into a business necessity overnight. In a matter of days, the majority of our workforce are untethered from their office desks – a new normal for businesses and employees alike.

As employees are adapting to their new workplace amid anxieties and uncertainties created by the global pandemic, business leaders find themselves needing to be equipped with a different set of skills and knowledge to inspire, provide confidence and lead their team virtually. Besides managing their own deliverables, leaders must learn to be even more attuned to employees' physical and emotional well-being while they struggle with weighty decisions to keep business operations going.

A new study of more than 3,000 workers around the world illustrates the substantial differences in how managers and employees respond to working remotely:

- 75% of managers are confident they fully understand how their teams are feeling amidst the current COVID-19 pandemic. However, only 32% of employees say their managers have specifically asked them how they are feeling.
- In a time in which managers should be increasing communication, 48% of managers admit they have reduced the frequency of their one-on-one catch ups since transitioning to remote work.
- Many employees were under the impression that COVID-19 had increased their managers' workloads and drastically reduced their availability. However, 44% of managers say their workloads have actually decreased due to COVID-19.
- 61% of managers say their teams are less productive when working remotely, with almost 63% believing they have to be physically present in order to get the best out of their team. However, almost 50% of employees surveyed said they feel equally – if not more – engaged and productive when working from home.
- 54% of respondents want to continue working remotely in some capacity while 40% prefer an office environment. A mixture of remote and in-office work may be the way of the future.

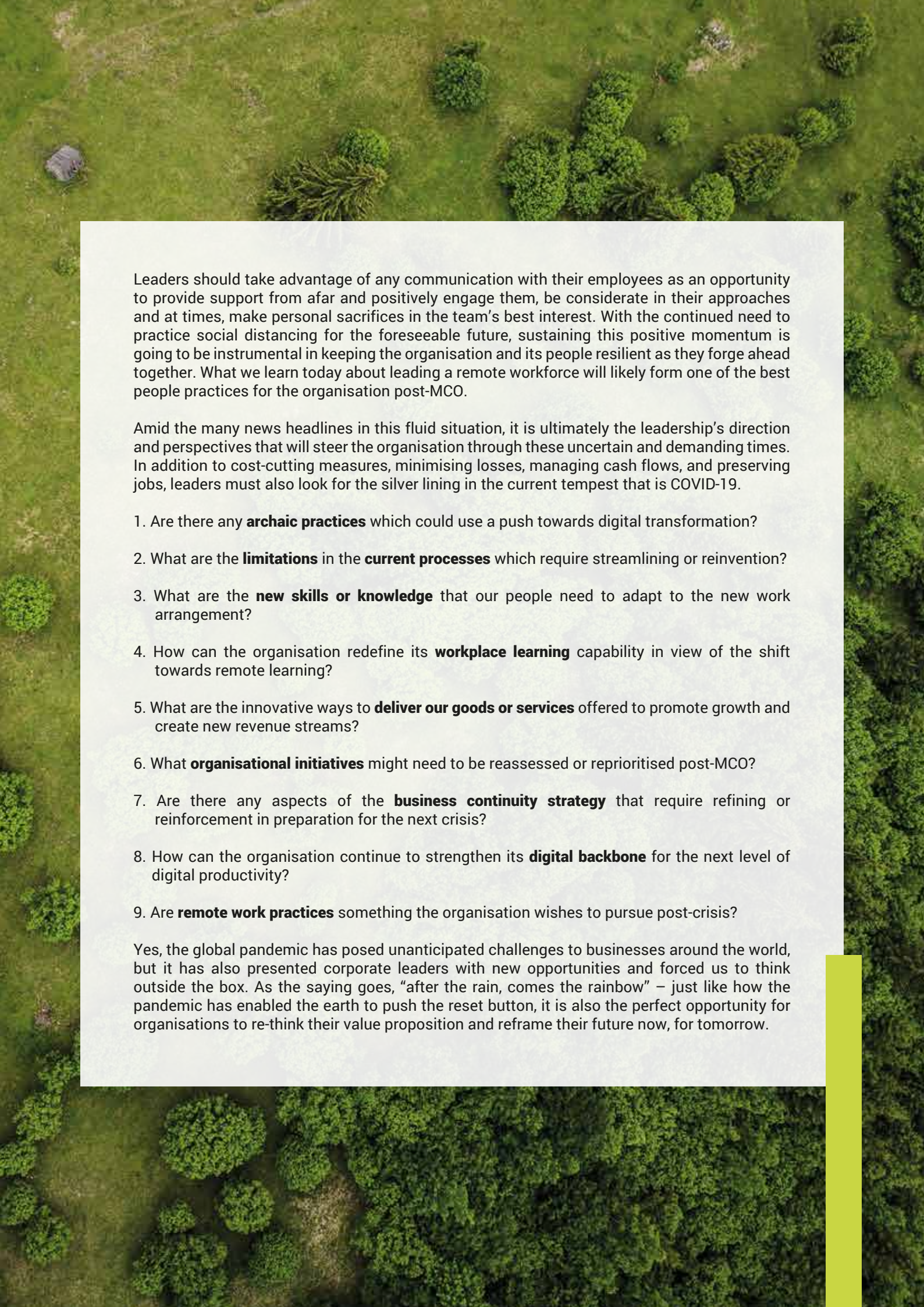
Source: Research and survey conducted by Enboarder

To address some of the issues identified above, here are some essential tips to assist leaders in managing their remote employees more effectively:

What Leaders Can Do Right Now

- **Lead** with **empathy** and **courage**. Be of service to others.
- **Communicate** often and communicate clearly.
- Schedule time into your day to **check in** with your team.
- Avoid a one-size fits all approach with team members – everyone needs to be treated in a way that is unique to them, ask them.
- Set clear and reasonable **goals** – discuss regularly.
- Create a culture of **safety**. Let the world be uncertain, but let your organisation be a safe place. Approach every situation and concern from a place of empathy.
- Focus on the **positives**. Celebrate the **successes** and inject **fun** into team meetings.
- Stay **connected** with your whole team and encourage them to stay connected with each other.

Source: Baker Tilly Staple Rhodes (<https://bakertillysr.nz/news/leading-people-remotely>)



Leaders should take advantage of any communication with their employees as an opportunity to provide support from afar and positively engage them, be considerate in their approaches and at times, make personal sacrifices in the team's best interest. With the continued need to practice social distancing for the foreseeable future, sustaining this positive momentum is going to be instrumental in keeping the organisation and its people resilient as they forge ahead together. What we learn today about leading a remote workforce will likely form one of the best people practices for the organisation post-MCO.

Amid the many news headlines in this fluid situation, it is ultimately the leadership's direction and perspectives that will steer the organisation through these uncertain and demanding times. In addition to cost-cutting measures, minimising losses, managing cash flows, and preserving jobs, leaders must also look for the silver lining in the current tempest that is COVID-19.

1. Are there any **archaic practices** which could use a push towards digital transformation?
2. What are the **limitations** in the **current processes** which require streamlining or reinvention?
3. What are the **new skills or knowledge** that our people need to adapt to the new work arrangement?
4. How can the organisation redefine its **workplace learning** capability in view of the shift towards remote learning?
5. What are the innovative ways to **deliver our goods or services** offered to promote growth and create new revenue streams?
6. What **organisational initiatives** might need to be reassessed or reprioritised post-MCO?
7. Are there any aspects of the **business continuity strategy** that require refining or reinforcement in preparation for the next crisis?
8. How can the organisation continue to strengthen its **digital backbone** for the next level of digital productivity?
9. Are **remote work practices** something the organisation wishes to pursue post-crisis?

Yes, the global pandemic has posed unanticipated challenges to businesses around the world, but it has also presented corporate leaders with new opportunities and forced us to think outside the box. As the saying goes, "after the rain, comes the rainbow" – just like how the pandemic has enabled the earth to push the reset button, it is also the perfect opportunity for organisations to re-think their value proposition and reframe their future now, for tomorrow.

Author Background



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Carmen graduated with a Bachelor in Management (Human Resources) from Universiti Sains Malaysia.

With more than 14 years of work experience in the spectrum of human resources and working with talents, Carmen's strength lies in the development of progressive human resources initiatives to streamline processes and capitalise on organisational growth opportunities as well as utilise pertinent data to provide insights to leadership in driving people agenda across the firm.

Carmen is passionate about meeting new talents and professionals, working with people and delivering value-added services to whom she connects with. She is also an active volunteer for various charitable causes.

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