

Now What?

8 team exercises to move forward



2020

Marjio Bos is a facilitator and designer of custom positive leadership learning experiences with organizations and individual leaders. Her purpose is to inspire leaders to care more and find comfort with the uncomfortable. Explore the global programs at www.bosadvisors.com.

You got through the first half of 2020. Now what?

To gauge how peers across the globe are considering that question, we recently engaged [Dreyfus Advisors, LLC](#), a market research & strategy consultancy based in metro-New York City, serving firms experiencing digital disruption across categories and industries. Under the direction of their founder, Rachel Dreyfus, they surveyed more than 75 senior executives in a wide range of industries and functions across North America, Europe and Asia.

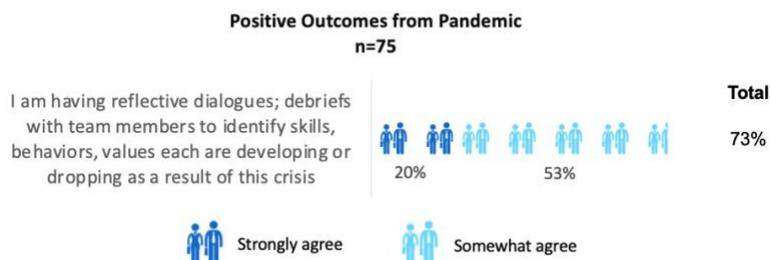
The insights are also based on open comments from director to C-suite leaders, as well as commentary gained through dozens of client conversations with Bos Advisors.

Assuredly, the crisis was an accelerator to positive shifts. Leaders adapted and leveraged new ways of getting things done in a high-stress environment. Here's what triggered higher levels of engagement through the pandemic:

1. **Better teamwork and communications, despite the transition to a remote work environment.**
2. **Agility and lean operations as leaders focus on clarity and purpose, leaving distractions behind.**
3. **Smarter work protocols emerged as established assumptions were quickly challenged.**
4. **Inclusive practices materialized as a differentiating and inspiring value for everyone. This included more compassionate, "human-centric" connections. (see follow-on article)**

As we reviewed those survey results, we were inspired to craft numerous suggestions on how to **Activate the Learning** across your teams post pandemic.

Since our research indicates that only one leader in five would strongly agree that they have begun to implement reflective debriefs on positive leadership changes, now is the time to do so, making them part of your organization's DNA.



With that in mind, let's unpack those survey outcomes.

Better Teamwork and Communications

This was the big surprise for many leaders. They learned that literally everyone on their administrative teams could work from home – saving time and money as they stayed safe.

The suspicion around remote working and accountability was replaced with trust and appreciation as we witnessed the commitment of people to deliver quality work ... from wherever they were. Kitchen tables and bedroom desks emerged as healthy work environments: situations that provided more flexibility and autonomy.

One eye-opener: remote work has actually improved communications – with more frequent “catch ups” and more levels and teams included. Does this mean that team members are more loyal and committed as a result of the new working environment?

Our interpretation is that people thrive and perform better when they are included and trusted with more information—even if it’s uncertain and incomplete. Team members realize that remote work is a privilege and a responsibility.

That said, many leaders question if it can be sustained long-term, while continuing to maintain high levels of motivation.

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The implications of virtual working environments urge organizations to consider the following:

- a) How do companies ensure the virtual workspace is sufficiently connected, secure and ergonomically and psychologically healthy? Who is the CHO – the chief health officer of work-life settings – at your company?
- b) How do you best ground your company with an optimal balance of a hybrid of rotating virtual and in-office presence? As long as communicable disease is an issue, this will require repurposed office space and logistics planning – steps to ensure ongoing efficiency and social connectivity.

Is your organization leveraging real estate and technology experts to sort through your options? [WOW rooms](#) are one possibility. Many urban areas also include recently vacated large retail spaces – ripe for repurpose as socially distance-able gathering spots. These inclusive, interactive settings enable innovation and collaboration amongst teams.



The Power of Purpose

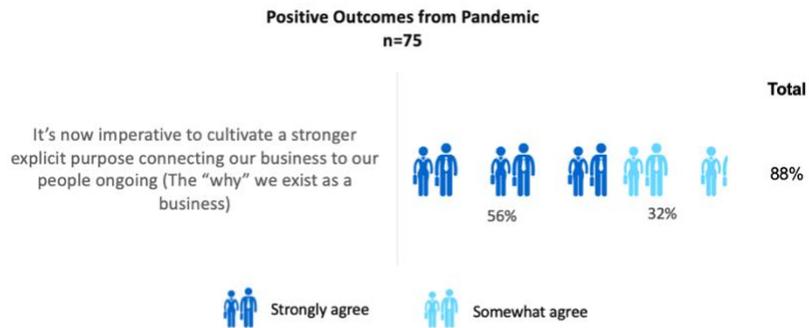
In our survey, leaders reported that, as the weeks unfolded, teams discovered renewed emphasis on principles and values. This resulted in a heightened awareness of the importance of purpose as the bedrock of communication, inspiration and engagement.

More than 50% of the respondents strongly agreed that the WHY we do business must be emphasized and pronounced. This may not be surprising, but it’s often overlooked as we get back to business “as usual”.

Working toward an urgent and common goal pulled teams together and helped them stay focused on objectives and outcomes over features or products. We learned that leaders reprioritized their activities as they focused on what was important and put aside the distractions, less urgent tasks. It was a momentous exercise in staying in the present in order to survive for the future.

Let’s delve a bit deeper. Here’s a look at statements that had the strongest agreement in our survey:

Nearly 90% of respondents believe ***purpose*** is imperative going forward – explicitly linking the “what” we do to “why” we do it.



“This time has helped us to reflect more on the Why of the business. It has helped to prioritize what is really important and to not spend time on what’s not important. It has helped to make better decisions both for the business and customers.”

“The importance of explaining to my colleagues and our members and stakeholders our objectives and how they contribute to society’s wellbeing.”

“It has helped to accelerate digital capabilities both in our company and our customers. It has brought more simplicity to the way we work. Plus, the personal benefit of spending more time with the family...”

“This situation is a great opportunity to reshape how we work in the future”

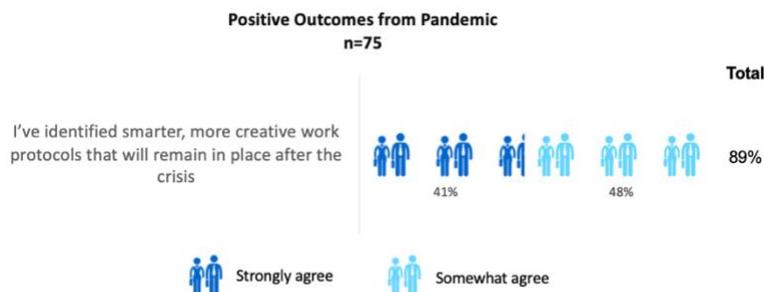
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The key takeaway here is to:

- a) Do more extensive exploration and inquiry around individual purpose (how each person contributes or shows up in an original yet consistent way, no matter the setting). This work requires rigorous self-awareness, courageous candor around vulnerability, resilience, strengths building and the collaborative creation of a personal narrative.
- b) Link unique individual [purpose](#) to the purpose of your business - the WHY you exist as a business.

Smarter Work Protocols

The emergence of smarter protocols – ways of getting things done – has improved in the midst of uncertainty. Nine in ten senior leaders in our study agree they have identified smarter, more creative work protocols that will remain in place. What’s remarkable is the speed with which leaders were able to challenge established assumptions.



One respondent noted that the pandemic was, “... accelerating initiatives we had tried to put in place for years ... they are now done in weeks.” As the remote work environment was succeeding, leaders were accelerating digital technology to enable this shift. Our survey comments included mentions increased use of project management tools (e.g., Slack) and information symmetry across teams.

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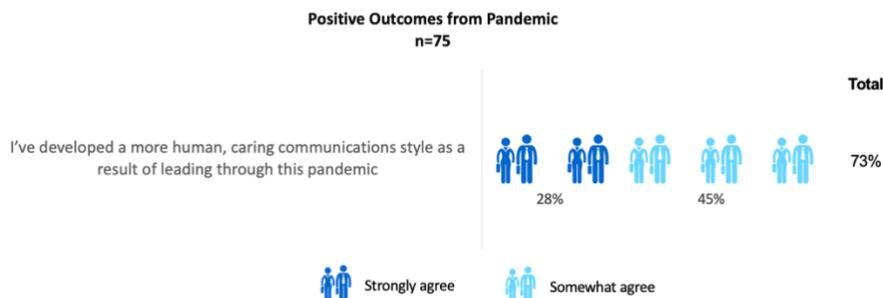
- Leverage [Reflective Shift Questions](#) to capture the comprehensive learnings. Nominate colleagues who initiated a notable high-impact shift to facilitate reflective discussions on acquired, altered or eliminated work processes, interpersonal values, new partnerships, new ways of thinking, communicating, or connecting. Dialogue on what should be adopted into daily business practices; AND how each shift more positively serves the team and the business. Do this in 4-5 person breakouts using a virtual white boarding tool to capture and share back in the larger group before the memories fade.
- Cultivate the “Age of the Amateur or Beginners Mindset” – the pandemic turned everything upside down resulting in new ways of thinking and doing. Keep the fluid thinking alive by asking leaders every 6 months to create hypothetical life-changing scenarios beyond the pandemic and then to imagine how they might prepare and respond as a leader.

Clear Communication Shifts – More Open and Intentionally Optimistic

We noticed a clear theme in leaders adapting their communications frequency, substance and style through the pandemic crisis. More than 8 in 10 agree with the statement, “I am now more deliberate in building an optimistic outlook for my team.” We also saw similar scores for, “Through the early stages of the crisis I urged my team to strengthen relationships across the business”



The responses and comments around communication clearly indicate a strong desire to continue the open, caring and inclusive communications that extend to employee well-being, beyond the work itself. This augmented communication style strengthened teams and led to deeper listening skills – valuing individuality. We learned that leaders see this as crucial to advancing professional development and team-building.



The pandemic-related challenges required more frequent and inclusive “catch ups” welcoming more levels and remote teams in the conversations. Our interpretation is that employees thrive and perform better when they are privy to more information, even if it's incomplete.

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- Round table feed-forward plus peer to peer coaching triads.* Members of a team are asked to share specific ways they saw each of their colleagues step up to the challenge, shift specific leadership behaviors, values, interpersonal relations through the pandemic. What are the shifts that they would like to see continued, see more or less of going forward? Share in triads. Switch groups so everyone can give peer and supervisor feedback. Each leader openly commits to the leadership shifts they will make permanent. This is the start to personal responsibility around habit-hacking.

- b) *Create daily practices to intentionally boost positive emotions in your work setting. Celebrate the best part of each week as you close virtual team meetings by asking each person to share a 30 second story. Ask each team member to acknowledge the positive impact a colleague had on him/her that week. These are just a few ways to encourage an upward spiral of positive emotions.*

“Carpe Diem” and Intentionally Activating Leadership Shifts

Many, if not all, of our assumptions have been challenged by COVID-19: how to best operate our businesses, serve our customers, employees, communities and our planet while achieving profits. We were not at all surprised that nearly every shift and comment shared by leaders connects back to positive communications skills. Effective communication in widely differing circumstances is often taken for granted; the pandemic is a reminder that it should not be.

How do we ensure the positive shifts in individual and team practices and businesses protocols are long-lasting and yet we as leaders are agile enough for future adjustments? As leaders are experiencing increased efficiency, accountability and engagement of their employees in a virtual setting, they are asking how to nurture and maintain these improvements over the next two, four, six months. Employees actively coordinate their households in the midst of their workspace or work in solitude with little social stimulation. Will the privilege of working have long lasting benefits?

Getting the positive shifts to stick requires **intention**.

If the strongest company cultures are conscious of cultivating, developing and strengthening leadership capabilities, how must organizations adjust executive growth and assessment based on a hybrid physical and virtual leadership world? We are now coaching on personal presence, inclusive practices, innovation and influence in a combined physical and virtual work world.

Relationship-building across a business is a highlighted priority in the face of this pandemic, and yet the way we do this has shifted. We are challenging old assumptions ... aligning all goals with business purpose ... embracing improved processes and protocols without fear and ... identifying and leaving behind all distractions.

These are all key ingredients of **agile leadership**.

Attention, intention and practice are the operative words when it comes to long-lasting leadership shifts. The opportunity to carry forward smarter ways of delegating, motivating, connecting, communicating, caring, processing, coaching and leading has never been greater.

Carpe diem. Carpe diem. Carpe diem!



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