

Now. Bridge. Reboot. Thought Paper Series

Leading through the chasm and into the future economy

There's nothing
virtual about
leadership



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Eight months ago, who knew we would be telling staff they can work at home "forever"?

Many organizations are realizing that office space isn't critical. That approach doesn't work for all, and there always be a need for in-person contact. But as we divest ourselves of bricks and mortar, how do we invest in teams and leadership in an increasingly virtual world?

In some respects, nothing changes. The traits of good leadership — vision, focus, resilience, honesty, empathy, accountability, communication, the ability to build consensus and to be self-aware — remain critical. But here's some thoughts on how these traits translate to virtual environments.

Laying the foundations

Regroup! The pandemic has been a shock. Perhaps the team vision for what success looks like needs revision. Or if not — you have the team's attention like never before. Speak to the vision with excitement and determination for success. Then supply the tools for success. Lock in budgets, delegations, presentations and clear goals.

Serve and be served

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individuals as well as the broader team. A face-to-face environment gives us a reminder to talk. Virtual world leadership calls for dedicated 1:1 time with all team members. Casual calling is also useful. Work on your emotional intelligence. It's critical to take us to a better world — especially a virtual one. Make sure your team takes a break from the screen, and you do too. Listen. And ask how you can help and deliver on the suggestions.

Innovate and include

There are always people who dominate meetings. How you engage less vocal members requires thought beyond "any comments?" Share the responsibility to

About this paper

This paper is an outcome of the GFCC Now. Bridge. Reboot. conversation series (conversations.thegfcc.org), which featured business, research, policy and thought leaders from 30 countries in eight live dialogues on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis and the trends emerging for the future economy.

We invited the participants of this dialogues series to reflect on the challenges and issues associated with leadership during the current crisis and in the world that we are seeing emerge out of it.

Learn more about the GFCC Now. Bridge. Reboot. conversation series at conversations.thegfcc.org.

Watch the conversation

Paul Levins participated in the "Turning knowledge into impact" conversation May 27. Watch the session on the [GFCC YouTube channel](#).

lead the call and shape the agenda. Every week, ask someone on the team to speak about a solution from a different industry that could solve a problem in yours. Maybe you're in the food and beverage industry. There could be a technology you need in industries as diverse as automotive, semi-conductors or pharmacology. It's something that even [the biggest and best R&D teams routinely do](#). You know that problem you haven't been able to solve for years? You may have been asking the wrong questions. Ask one of the team to lead a problem redefinition session or get someone in to facilitate. Invite diverse external speakers to speak. Seek out difference in age, race, sex, socio-economics, geography, religion, philosophy. [Diversity directly improves performance](#). Most people want to provide advice and knowledge so your team ask and learn from them. And if you have team members in different locations, know the time zones. Nothing says "I don't care" like scheduling a call at someone's 2:00 a.m. Learn what's happening internationally, because a virtual world can take you anywhere.

Use the technology

Perhaps counter intuitively, virtual teams are all about personal communication. If you can't meet regularly, or even if you can, short recorded videos are great personal way to report back ("Hi – we closed the deal!"; "Remember, we have a guest speaker this Monday"). Use breakout rooms on your meeting platform to get people together in small groups. Learn all the platform's features. Invest in the technology and the training to use it. We have changed the way we work, and it will keep getting better. [Broadband will become ubiquitous, faster and cheaper](#).

Sweat the small stuff and be generous with people's time

Make sure you talk about the small things in life – what you did overnight, a photo, a new movie, how you're feeling. Allow vulnerability / be vulnerable. These things are what it is to be human. Don't be negative. Be flexible. If someone wants to

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work at 9:00 p.m. and have two hours off in the daylight, and it's not time sensitive, why do you care? Give people responsibility for their own time management, and they will behave responsibly.

The map is not the territory, and the perfect is the enemy of the good

COVID-19 changed the landscape. Yet, some still use the same map for success they used before the pandemic. Organization charts and corporate strategies are maps. But the terrain – what's actually happening – should be trusted more than the map. If the world around you is changing, what needs to change to deliver success, and how will your team innovate? In uncertain times, we crave confidence that things will be OK. Confidence comes from trust and certainty. Leaders need to build trust by providing transparency, inclusive accountability, and bottom-up participation. Make sure roles are clear (the map) but flexible to change based on what happens (the terrain). On-board new staff (even the most junior) by letting them shadow you for a day or two so they can see things working. On-boarding should show the plan and the territory. In changing times, remember that a good result is a good result. [The perfect solution is often the enemy of the good](#) solution, so don't hold another virtual meeting when an actionable and good solution is in front of the team. We need a bias for action, espe-

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cially in a virtual environment, to ensure our measure of success is not just how many times we met and to learn what worked and what didn't in delivery.

How am I driving?

Seek feedback from the team. Maybe you have the meeting cadence all wrong; maybe someone has a better idea. If so, then change. As our work becomes more virtual, the need to innovate, fail, learn and innovate again is critical. The opportunities in what lies ahead exceed what we leave behind. Asking for feedback also is an occasion where you can respond with confidence about the future. Confidence lifts everyone, everywhere. Have confidence in your team to deliver because they are empowered, and have confidence in yourself as a leader because you empowered them.

The pandemic has caused all of us to ask how to cope with the crisis, but also how to find the opportunity. Virtual world leadership necessarily means more interaction, not less. The traditional skills of leadership are needed like never before and can in fact be amplified using the virtual tools at our disposal. The marriage of the skills and the technology should lead us to try new things and innovate. It's critical because in addition to the growing trend to work remotely, there are likely to be more black swan events like pandemics that will force us to rely even more on virtual interaction. The leaders that grasp that will create a strategic advantage which produces growth, engagement and opportunity.

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