



Adapt, Trust and Thrive - The Big Reset

At ema consultancy, we know it's not been an easy time for you and your teams. Many clients have been handling sad news around family, friends and clients, combined with an immediate and sharp change in how and where we operate.

I want to take the opportunity to say a personal thank you to those clients who have supported us during this time, and I hope you've found us a source of support too.

When you've 15 years of running a consultancy under your belt, you could begin to think you've seen it all. These past few weeks have proved that's not the case, so here's some thoughts on what we're working on now, and what the new normal might look like.

Now and Next

In recent weeks we've seen a continuation of recruitment, with nimble, proactive clients responding to video conferencing interviewing and virtual papers with relish. The focus on ongoing health, safety and wellbeing of clients', staff has also been key in getting to grips with the relatively new practice of furloughing of staff and different working practices and establishing effective team and individual communication during this lockdown period.

With lockdown announced for a minimum of another three weeks, that attention will continue, but we can also see clients giving some early thought to how employees will return to their normal place of work when the lockdown eases. Now we've had to think and work outside the box; are we ready to return to the past is a key question for organisational development.

Another question HR teams should be asking themselves is how they can support colleagues when the restrictions are lifted. Many will still be shielding, some will know they've had the virus and others strongly suspect they had, and should we return by function, health, geography, or other measure? The need to continue equality of opportunity and income in that mix is vital. It could be that staff are experiencing trauma as a consequence of COVID-19 and how is this addressed.

The Big Reset

Beyond the immediate practical logistics, there are also some emerging ideas what the work environment might be like come 2021. The barriers resisting change collapsed quickly, and employees have proved they are just as productive at home (in some cases!). Is an office space required and what structure is needed to support the jobs for the future?

Our pay and reward survey results have seen a growing wish by employees for more flexible working over the years – pension packages as incentives are quickly being replaced on the wish-list by annualised hour arrangements, sports memberships and flexible leave.

Some other specifics I can see down the line are:

- Personal specifications for executive roles changing to put a greater emphasis on a different style of leader. Testing for trust, ethical decision making and two-way communications may be at the heart of the recruitment process.
- Structure reviews – what services did we discover weren't valued by customers? What wasn't missed and which teams went quiet very quickly? With the need to redraw budgets, ensuring the reduced income is used to best impact will be required quickly.
- Duty of care – a review of health and wellbeing policies to ensure they are fit for purpose is something we're already seeing. Online health talks, wellbeing benefits and lines of communication to replace those moments where you spot across the room that someone is stressed will be key. Staff wellbeing is no longer just a nice to have.
- Coaching remotely – what does it take to be a good leader at a distance is something which organisations are trying to define. The skills to listen and motivate over the phone or video conference differ considerably to face-to-face interaction. The ability to coach for resilience and support people to thrive will be critical.
- Recession management – for those of us who have lived through other significant (if not lesser) economic change, it is those leaders that can see opportunity as well as risk that fare the best.
- Consultation conundrum - overnight thousands of people had their terms and conditions amended (even if it was just their place of work – or, for those furloughed, the fact they had to work at all). The consultation period was swept aside, as the charge curve accelerated. Some people have embraced that pace, so knowing what structure to reinstate, what to relax and what is no longer fit for purpose, will be interesting over the coming months. Anticipating impatience from those colleagues already minded towards grabbing change will be important for all execs and non-exec.

As time passes, it's likely this list will grow. We'll look to share our learning from remote interviews over the next few weeks. If you are an HR lead looking to understand what others are doing, you are welcome to join our LinkedIn Group. Otherwise, our website www.emaconsultancy.org.uk continues to have our latest executive and non-executive opportunities and is where we'll place our tips on remote interviews, distance recruitment and emerging wellbeing practice.