



6 Ways to Move From Disruption to Success

Risk-free, affordable access to hard-hitting HR superstars who will help your business to scale rapidly, increase profits, and hit financial targets faster. We take away the 'people' stress and allow you to focus on what you do best.

It has become increasingly clear that work (and life) is going to be significantly disrupted over the next six months due to COVID. At the time of writing this, we are advised to 'work from home where we can', so those that can't are still able to work as usual, with full COVID precautions. Most businesses will therefore have completely different geography and rhythm to this time last year.

We put our team of 50 of the UK's most experienced HR Directors together last week to carve out a framework for success through these disruptive times. Here are 6 areas of challenge from our team about how to tackle this disruption head-on, not only making the best of it but learning and transforming from it as well.

1. Change up the rhythms to increase productivity

Consider reviewing your business rhythms, and think about learning from what has worked, and changing what hasn't, either individually or with your team.

Many of us need ongoing stimulation and challenge to do our best work. A new rhythm is needed to make it work remotely.

The rhythms of office life: meetings, social interaction, even to the point of lunch and coffee breaks segment our working days, weeks and months. It gives us deadlines and focus, whether we are selfstarters or driven by deadlines.

For many businesses, those rhythms have been completely turned on their head by COVID, and the new ways of working that were rapidly introduced during the first lockdown may or may not have worked.

One CEO was complaining last week that their less experienced salespeople didn't have enough structure or training to work from home. We suggested a twice-daily check-in (not catch-up, as the two suggest a different purpose) first thing and after lunch, to agree exactly what was going to be delivered in each half-day of work. It gives the option to ask for help, request training, and stay focussed which can come naturally from sitting next to your manager. It may mean more management time initially, but in the end will lead to better-trained team members and fewer rabbit holes.

2. Having a successfully functioning SLT has to be a priority

For many mid-tier businesses, building a strong senior team is one of the biggest challenges. Salaries are large, and it is expensive to get wrong.

Yet a highly functioning senior team has perhaps the biggest impact on whether an organisation is successful.

One of the concerns we have been hearing about is whether the Senior Team is up to the job of guiding the business through the COVID rollercoaster. Without seeing each other face to face, the job is much harder. A whole day meeting in the office was manageable. A whole day on zoom is hard work for anyone.



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Strengthening a senior team usually means a few key spotlights:

- Agree or refine the business's core purpose and vision to identify the skills and capabilities you'll need,
- Make sure the right people are on the team, and if they aren't, get expert advice to make some changes,
- Ensure your SLT meetings are productive and hitting at a strategic and operational level and actually solving the issues
- If you have a new team or are recharging the existing one go through a process to ensure you are working well together (we recommend a programme called the Five Behaviours of a Team, based on Patrick Lencioni's bestselling book).

3. Connecting, leading, managing, training remotely. How?

Now is the time to analyse what has been working, and spend some time thinking and planning. Keep trying new things, and above all, ensure your leaders are trained and supported to lead their teams through the next period of working from home.

When the first lockdown happened, many businesses were little prepared to facilitate widespread homeworking. Because this is the second time we have been advised to work from home, many are more comfortable with the realities.

But the practicalities of learning to work better on zoom or dial into the company systems have little to do with the challenges of leading, managing, training or developing our teams virtually. And these contribute significantly to how effective and successful our people and our businesses are.

For those businesses that have hired new staff in 2020, much of their recruitment, induction and training has been delivered remotely. For those without much previous work experience, they are learning how to behave in the working world, learning a new organisation's practices and developing on-the-job skills, all at the same time.

There is no quick answer to how to do this well! There is simply a new challenge – to help each individual learn their craft, receive honest feedback, and improve – from a distance. Then there is the second level of work support: around motivation, encouragement, team dynamics and organisation culture. This takes more thought and effort than sitting in the same room.

At People Puzzles, we brought forward the introduction of an online learning system and have moved our two-day face-to-face induction programme online. It is now spread over a couple of weeks, with regular discussion sessions, run with a cohort so everyone has an induction buddy.

Zoom and Microsoft Teams have taken the place of face-to-face communication, and it is surprisingly comforting for colleagues to actually answer video calls for quick conversations, when previously they were often out of the office.

4. Address Survivor Sickness

Whether restructuring has taken place to facilitate new growth or redundancies have been made to address a change in demand, there is still the potential of survivor sickness – otherwise known as guilt for still having a job when colleagues and friends have lost theirs.

Most organisations have had to adapt to cope with the implications of COVID and the economic backlash. Consider what you can do to support your team, whether that is offering some confidential counselling or mental health support, even through to setting up a hardship fund for people who have left. It is important to rebuild trust with your new team, giving them confidence in your leadership and the new direction will help you to bring the team back together to face the next set of challenges ahead.

In a growing economy people often walk into a new job quickly. At the moment, that is much harder.

5. Enable individual productivity to drive performance

Where business performance is about inspirational leadership and enablement, team performance is about the sum of the parts being greater than the whole, and individual is about effort multiplied by the impact. Using these levers to lead into a productivity review from a business perspective, whilst helping individuals at home to do their best work, allows approaching the productivity challenge from both sides.

But enabling individual productivity at the expense of business collaboration, problem-solving and efficiency cannot do us any favours in the long term. Many businesses are relishing working from home, and some say they will never go back. However, in the longer term it begs the question: will the business suffer from the lack of interaction due to home working – not just whether an individual employee is more or less productive.

It is interesting to look back at some past stories:

Bringing people back to the office

In 2013, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer was behind HR's direction which ended working from home, saying: "to become the absolute best place to work, communication and collaboration will be important, so we need to be working side-by-side. That is why it is critical that we are all present in our offices."

"Some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussions, meeting new people, and impromptu team meetings," it says. "Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home."^[1]



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What is worth face to face?

As the founder of People Puzzles, an almost virtual business, we have always celebrated key events by getting people together, specifically for planning meetings, strategy, learning events, induction, and opportunities to socialise as a team.

But this misses out opportunities to collaborate or casual information sharing, which now take effort to pre-plan rather than just naturally occurring. People have always moved around departments to get promoted, and it cross-fertilises our businesses, adding tremendous value when this happens. So often this is a result of relationships, casual conversation and unplanned opportunity.

After all, the office environment gives a number of advantages over working from home, including learning and development, the potential for coaching, socialisation, escaping the home, a change of routine, spontaneous thinking, catching up and laughing with colleagues.

Personal productivity vs collaboration efficiency

If your job requires you to work alone, studies suggest remote working can increase productivity if people can choose how and when they do it. But if your role requires you to collaborate, efficiency is impacted by distance and it is done quickest face to face. However good your broadband, teleconferencing or messenger system, face to face beats distance communication every time. And it is strange that the more we see each other, the more we communicate:

“Waber, working alongside researchers from IBM, found that workers in the same office traded an average of 38 communications about each potential trouble spot they confronted, versus roughly eight communications between workers in different locations.”^[ii] By knowing this, we can do something about it: we can find new ways to encourage and reward our team for communicating and solving problems together.

Top concerns of Managers

Although this is from the US, this image from pre-COVID provides some useful intel on the concerns of managers of remote teams: ^[iii]



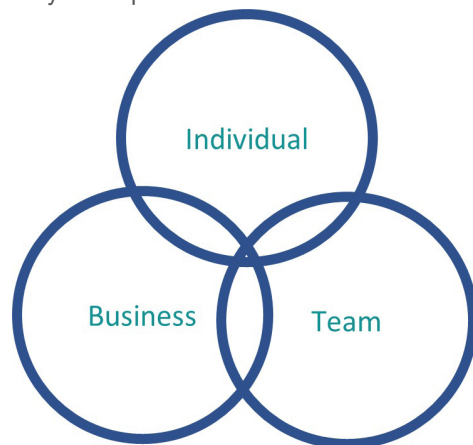
And all of these continue to apply today, probably amongst additional concerns over wellness and mental health.

So what next?

With most things that you want to improve, having a metric to measure where you are now and a goal for where you want to be will help. With productivity that is no different.

Productivity can be calculated as the output divided by input. Crudely, that can be calculated as turnover divided by salary cost or hours of work. Alternatively, you could measure it through surveys of both managers and individuals.

There are three factors at play that relate to performance, where business performance is about inspirational leadership and enablement, team performance is about the sum of the parts being greater than the whole, and individual is about effort multiplied by the impact.



Use these levers to lead into a productivity review from a business perspective, helping individuals at home to do their best work allows approaching the productivity challenge from both sides.

But enabling individual productivity at the expense of business collaboration, problem-solving and efficiency cannot do us any favours in the long term.

6. The practicalities of long-term work from home

According to many reports, many employees have enjoyed working from home so much that they want to continue for the long term. As the pandemic continues, we are going to cycle through safe working in the office to greater encouragement to work from home. We need to make the most of both.

We've already explored the personal and organisational productivity angle above, and whilst we have government guidance suggesting home working it is right to stick to that. But bigger picture, is it right to let our teams choose their work location, and could it cause problems later?

Long term WFH implications

Contracts of employment should state a place of work. Currently, that is likely to be the office unless your team are already home or field-based. As such, your team will fund their own transport to and from the office or work location. If you decide to make them home workers contractually, you may wish to write regular office visits into the contract. It is worth taking advice on this so that you don't end up with liability for travel expenses to the office when they do come in (which may also have tax implications).

Health and Safety considerations

You have a legal responsibility to provide a safe workspace for your employees, which includes any home-office set up. During COVID, this wasn't anyone's primary consideration, but as things become more normal, and people work from home for longer, it is going to become an increasing issue. If your team have bad backs or other health issues from working from home, it is likely to become your problem at some point.

You may wish to set up a survey for your team, asking them about the equipment they currently have, encouraging them to work through a health and safety assessment of their home working station, and then identifying what is missing, and what they need to make it comfortable. Some of our team members may not have a suitable location to work in their homes, and I doubt any of us want to get into funding their ability to rent a larger home to make a better desk space. This does

then potentially cause friction between those who can work comfortably at home, perhaps because they are a different age bracket, than those who can't, and therefore you don't think it is safe for them to do so.

Potential cost challenges and savings

There are various cost implications to work through around allowing a move to working from home. There is the matter of additional equipment, and perhaps a working from home allowance to cover heating and lighting in the home (currently you can pay £6 per week tax-free towards these expenses among other HMRC schemes [iv]).

However, there may be some very interesting savings potentially available. Firstly, if you have been used to paying a big city allowance (eg London Weighting) to encourage people to work in an expensive area, this may not be necessary on a long-term home working contract. Of course, you would need to consult about any salary change, follow the correct process, and ensure buy-in from your team members. It also means that the work could be done anywhere in the country (or in the world), so you could advertise any future roles to do similar work in an area where salaries are generally lower. You also may need less office space, but that does depend on the ability to move to a smaller work location.

Establish a lasting impact

There may well be merit in both allowing more home working and flexibility in the future, and ensuring there are still opportunities to get together for collaboration, to further develop the company culture, ensure great training and onboarding, and generally stay in close relationship with our teams.

Setting a pattern and a rhythm for your teams will avoid the issue where the extroverts dash back to the office and the introverts find any reason to work from home for as long as possible. The impact on your business of having one type of voice present for face to face discussion and decisions could have a lasting impact that would not benefit your business.

Extend the trial

Rather than agree to any long-term changes with your team, we encourage you to really engage with what is going to work well for the business, for teams and for individuals. Take your time, speak with your people and trial.

Continue to bring people back into the workplace where you need to for purposeful, safe meetings. Stay in close contact with the team so that you can revert to full office working in the future, if that is what is best for business collaboration. Continuing with as much



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People Puzzles: Part Time HR Directors

We have a wonderful team of 60 highly experienced board-level HR Directors ready to support you. If you'd like to arrange an initial no-commitment conversation about home working, productivity or rebuilding post-COVID, email us on hello@peoplepuzzles.co.uk or call **0203 239 3307**.

“Having a strategic HR capability in our business has freed the Directors up to work on the business, not in it. In the last 20 months, I have shifted my views of HR and a people strategy completely – I now completely get the benefit of investing in my people in all senses – emotionally connecting with them, helping them to be their best, setting out career paths and making every day WoW for them.”

Gavin Pooley - Managing Director, Liquidline

flexibility as you can to aid individual productivity for those tasks which are best done quietly at home.

Set clear KPIs within a framework to drive collaboration and productivity

However, and wherever your team are working, nothing escapes the need for clarity of roles, aligned organisations, well-trained people and a great focus on individual productivity and KPIs. We know from recent research that top talent requires two things; an environment in which they can continuously learn and grow, and the opportunity to collaborate with other top talent which provides stimulation and challenge. Our top performers are likely to want flexible working rather than home working, as they will see the benefit in being in the right place for meaningful interaction. The business, teams and individuals all need to be focused on delivering the right work for an efficient and successful company.

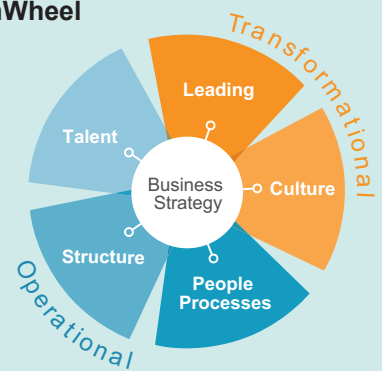
At both a corporate and individual level, we need meaningful KPIs to track performance, so that we can be data-driven and not subjective in how we manage.

At People Puzzles, we know that improving productivity across a business, particularly one spread across spare bedrooms, living rooms and kitchens, is not easy. It is not a single activity, but a programme of change.

We love supporting businesses to improve their productivity and get fit for another winter of home or hybrid working. Every business is unique and has a different challenge to get the most out of the team.

The People Puzzles PinWheel

Our 'People Puzzles PinWheel' quickly captures what we believe are the essential elements of a healthy organisation's HR function, driven by your business strategy.



Take our online HealthCheck for your free personalised business report:

www.peoplepuzzles.co.uk/our-approach/health-check

People Puzzles: Part Time HR Directors

At People Puzzles, we provide part-time HR Directors to ambitious businesses; owner-managed, family run or corporate. Our clients typically have a turnover of £5-50m with employee numbers of 50-500, and do not have a truly strategic in-house HR resource that can deliver high-performing and engaged teams.

Most mid-tier businesses don't want, don't need or can't afford a full-time HR Director. Motivating and managing people tends to slide down the priorities. However, no business can get ahead without effective, happy and well-trained staff.

Our HR Directors work at Board level, overseeing all the people-based activity within the organisation. They are strategic and tactical, enabling the business to deliver its vision and business plan. We work flexibly as part of your team, usually onsite for 3-8 days per month, to find straight forward solutions to your people puzzles for a fraction of the cost of a full-time employee.

[i] <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/feb/25/yahoo-chief-bans-working-home#:~:text=Surfing%20the%20web%20from%20at,to%20Yahoo's%20thousands%20of%20staff.>

[ii] <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/11/when-working-from-home-doesnt-work/540660/>

[iii] <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/how-people-and-companies-feel-about-working-remotely/>

[iv] <https://www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-homeworking/whats-exempt>



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