



## COVID-19: REGROUP, REVITALISE, RECOVER

### Reboot your culture with these tips

1. Draft a purpose statement with relevant colleagues. Go for 5 or 6 short sentences that capture who you are, what you stand for and what you do.
2. Communicate widely and often the core behaviours that capture your identity.
3. Clarify expectations and priorities.
4. Align each person's personal career goals with team goals and organisational objectives.
5. Focus on what matters most and measure how you're going.
6. Ensure everyone has a voice.
7. Consistently demonstrate that you're listening.
8. Establish a lively speak-up culture that allows challenge and disagreement.
9. Acknowledge and genuinely value people's contributions.
10. Give warm and constructive feedback that encourages improvement.
11. Celebrate initiative, innovation and experimentation.
12. Conduct regular reviews and reflection to promote learning.
13. Recognise and thank colleagues personally and often.

### *Shifting from fragmented to focused*

Like all our clients, you've probably been challenged in all sorts of ways by these unprecedented times of pandemic and crisis. You've had to manage an unplanned move to remote working. You've also had to adjust almost every business goal you set at the end of 2019. Now it's clear there won't be any quick 'snap-back' to normal. The tectonic plates have moved and they won't move back. Whatever a post-COVID world looks like, you can be sure it will be different – though some of it may prove positive.

This briefing examines three things you can do that will help you shift from fragmented to focused. They concern revitalising your culture at a time when you most need it to be resilient. These three pillars are based on solid research findings. In that sense, we're not suggesting anything radical. That's as it should be. Now is not the time for fads and fashions – and we'd argue it never is! It's a time for revisiting your core strengths and recovering your unique advantages, but refreshed to suit this new context.

Organisations with strong cultures will successfully navigate economic and social turbulence. This isn't magic and it isn't impossible. It's about a particular set of policies, relationships and skills that underpin a high performance culture. A strong culture is your best protection and your most important resource. You'll find that it's the accumulation of small, carefully-chosen and consistently-repeated actions that will shift you from fragmented to focused.

### *Regroup – promote purpose*

When a business landscape is characterised by complexity and uncertainty, you need every person to be able to make a steady stream of small and large decisions. There isn't time to defer 'up the line', convene a committee or write a white paper. This means there needs to be a shared reference point that will help people orient towards your organisation's 'true north', much as a compass helps you find your way in a dense forest. The reference point for this alignment of effort is a shared sense of purpose. People need to be clear about what they're working towards and what the priorities are.

Successful teams and organisations remind each other often about what they stand for, where they are now and where they want to go. They envision the next adjacent, small steps towards a reachable goal and they allow for obstacles along the way. Each person sees themselves as an empowered member of a decision network, where initiative and 'safe-to-fail' experiments are celebrated. What about where you work? Is there a shared sense of purpose that uplifts and energises you? Are there clear priorities that support alignment of effort? The box at the side can function as a review or as tips to get you started.

### *Revitalise – boost belonging*

Next you need to create the conditions known to boost belonging. UGM research shows that, when people feel they belong, they willingly contribute their best work. This in turn cements their sense of belonging, making them want to contribute even more – a positive, upward spiral. But human beings have evolved to be highly sensitive to danger and threat. This 'negativity bias' kept our ancestors alive. Thus 'belonging,' as a vital attribute of your business culture, has to be continually refreshed and reinforced, never simply assumed.

This isn't about trying to make your workplace constantly full of fun and laughter! Fundamentally, it's about the impact of lots of small actions that effectively signal, "You belong here. You're connected and cared about. We're in this together and you matter." This is what energises people to tackle problems together. The frequency and quality of communication underpins belonging. Input is invited. Challenge is encouraged. Disagreement is acceptable. If you boost belonging, you'll revitalise engagement and effort.

### *Recover – cultivate cooperation*

Having one person telling lots of others what to do is not a reliable way to make good decisions, especially in times like this where the context changes almost daily. How do you create the conditions where that doesn't happen, where questions are asked and issues looked at objectively by all, without deference to authority or over-reliance on previous practices? The answer is to cultivate cooperation and cohesion. Cultivating cooperation in work teams is like strengthening a muscle. It takes repetition and effort. Communicate expectations and priorities. Listen with attention. Promote frankness but outlaw put-downs. Be a great mentor and promote peer mentoring skills within the team.

Teams characterised by high levels of cooperation regularly review and replay what's just happened, in order to identify insights and learning that can be applied to the very next matter at hand. Sharing experiences and mistakes helps teams self-organise and deal better with emerging problems. Tomorrow might be different from today but better processes and sharper mental models can keep chaos at bay and reframe what seems at first sight to be chaotic, as complex and thus more manageable. This needs a habit of questions that connect people and open possibilities. Support, praise, gratitude, nudges, acknowledgement, challenge, and fair criticism – all have their place in your repertoire as well.

The impact of these three action domains - promoting a shared purpose, boosting belonging and cultivating cooperation - will help you tackle the future with renewed energy!