

Delivering High Performance and Making an Impact in a Work-from-Home World



Just as we thought life had taken a turn towards returning to some version of normalcy, the UK was plunged into 'Lockdown 2' and the return to the office was once again on ice. Remote and/or hybrid work remains as the standard for business in 2020 and looks increasingly likely to be widespread in 2021.

In the first full month of lockdown in April, 46.6% of employed people worked from home in some capacity. Recent research suggests that we may continue working remotely to some degree even after the pandemic ends, with only 12% of workers surveyed wanting to return to full-time office work and 72% wanting a hybrid model moving forward. Leadership appears to concur, with a survey of just under 1,000 firms showing that 74% plan on maintaining the home working model post-pandemic.

Working from home supported by key technologies has allowed business to continue during lockdown, but many organisations are finding that this way of working is simply keeping them afloat rather than propelling them forward. This new format has created barriers to communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation that many leadership teams are unsure how to address. Given the circumstances, how can you continue to make impact, keep performing, and keep growing? What does high performance look like in the new normal, and how do you get there?

THE ANATOMY OF TRANSFORMATIONAL OR GAME CHANGING TEAMS

We've known for some time that high-performing teams know how to work together with optimum impact. They know exactly which role each member plays in the success of the team, and they hold one another accountable without hostility or accusation. They communicate clearly and effectively, and possess an understanding of each other's unique contributions and perspectives.

Two key attributes which can make all the difference in a high-performing team are diversity of opinion and diversity of impact. Learning how to create impactful collaborations even in the face of occasional conflicts or disagreements can create stronger and more positive outcomes. These disagreements allow teammates to share their perspectives and can often lead to productive discussions and more balanced outlooks. With diverse high-performing teams, these 'tiffs' can be heated, but are not contentious and are dealt with respectfully. That is often because the leaders of these teams create safe spaces where all employees know their value and can be heard, which encourages open communication. The rapport and unity of the team itself are also critical components.

High-performing teams do not just create impact as a unit, but also at an individual level. A team is a sum of its parts, and for the group to succeed each individual member must understand and play their part. Once everyone knows their role and responsibilities, they can be held accountable for their own contribution and equally understand each individual member's contributions, encouraging shared outcomes and impact.

Communication and collaboration underly each of these elements of success. But how do you create these connections between teammates and build this rapport when working remotely, one of the challenges of the pandemic?



COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES IN THE COVID-19 AGE

Cast your mind back to the many conversations you used to have in the office each day that were not at all related to work. On an average day, you might have asked your office neighbour about their weekend, sang 'Happy Birthday' to a teammate, chatted to another colleague as you made your morning coffee, or said a quick "hello" to people you passed in the corridors. We may not think much of them as they are happening, but these small, casual interactions build team rapport, strengthen organisational unity, and improve engagement.

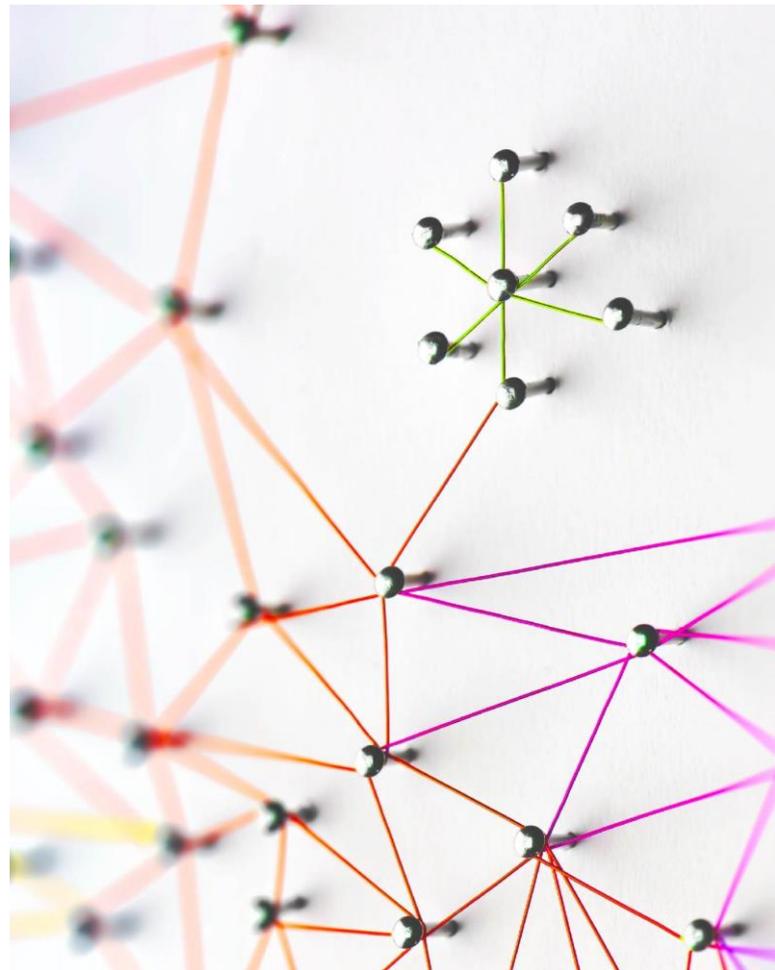
Spending five days a week in the same location as colleagues provides invaluable insight into their modus operandi. We gradually come to understand each other's talents and areas of expertise, discover what motivates them, learn how to communicate, know exactly what impacts and outputs those around us are delivering, and build trust and respect for one another. Leaders and peers are more in-tune and have a feel for each individual's working style and motivations. While they may not necessarily become friends outside of the workplace, these teams possess an inherent understanding of their colleagues and each other's perspectives which shapes the impact they are able to make. Furthermore, when disagreements arise, it's easier for these teams to remain constructive.

Remote working makes it challenging for teams to connect and forge these valuable relationships. Communication primarily happens on an as-needed basis through calls, email, Slack, WhatsApp or other internal platforms. Although video conferencing platforms like Zoom and Teams allow for visual contact, there is something rather impersonal about face-to-face communication that happens through a screen. Cues are missed or never seen. There are no coffee break moments in the canteen, team pub trips, or casual chats in the corridor. There is also a lot less transparency about what impact each individual team member is delivering when you cannot see what they are doing, so how do they shine or progress on their career path?

This presents a massive leadership and management challenge. How can you bring everyone together when they are geographically dispersed? How do you keep abreast of the impact employees make, ensure employees feel valued as a team member while also encouraging growth and transformational performance? In an office environment, it's easy to keep track of where each employee stands, who is struggling to understand their place/fit, and who is excelling. That's not to say that teams are not performing well remotely. It is also not fair to assert that working in an office environment is a cure-all that ensures high-performance and maximum impact from every single employee. In fact, a number of these hurdles existed pre-COVID but weren't necessarily felt as strongly. Now leaders are in a position of having no choice but to face and overcome them in order to strike the right balance and ensure their teams know how to add value and keep delivering.

For many organisations and professionals, this pandemic will have been the first time that working remotely was even an option. That adjustment alone is a hurdle. Staff are having to adapt to an entirely new way of working and communicating, and leaders are having to adjust their approach and management style in order to facilitate this. Additionally, working from home can feel isolating, and make the bigger picture harder to see when it comes to tackling organisational goals and creating impact. This has had a massive impact on productivity for some organisations struggling to engage individuals' hearts and minds.

However, it appears that remote working in some form is here to stay for the COVID-19 age and beyond. Leaders have the opportunity to learn how to overcome these challenges in order to get the most from themselves and their teams to generate maximum impact.





GENERATING IMPACT AT EVERY LEVEL

At Rialto, we advise our clients to think of generating impact as a three-tiered “Me, We, Company” approach, starting at the individual level.

Now more than ever, individual employees need to understand what they are expected to contribute to the team and customers, and who they need to collaborate with in order to deliver business value. This requires stepping up to address key challenges and not being afraid to engage in constructive debates. Now that staff are working remotely, employees have an increased level of accountability and are wholly responsible for their productivity during the day. Behaviours and actions need to reflect the organisation’s brand both internally and externally.

At this level, it’s essential for team leaders to check in with each individual member of staff to find out what’s working and what’s not. Managers should be ready to help with goal setting and troubleshooting to ensure staff understand the purpose and meaning of what they are contributing to and where and how they fit in. It’s important to understand that without this, adjustment may be difficult for some and may negatively impact their motivation and productivity levels. Those in a leadership role need to provide support and encouragement to help staff maintain confidence and a sense of belonging to engage in constructive discourse and deliver high-quality outputs.

Strong individual performance leads to solid team performance. Only when every member is collaborating, pulling their weight, and meeting their individual goals can the team generate value and drive the business forward. It’s essential that managers continue to provide a safe forum for constructive and open discussions, even though these may be harder to navigate virtually. Create a plan for structuring these conversations, with guidelines that allow everyone a chance to voice their opinions without hostility, judgement, or interruption. Open up the lines of communication and transparency and keep the team informed about the impacts each of their peers are making.

When teams thrive, organisations thrive. An organisation is not defined by its office space, but this shared environment helps to encourage interdepartmental mingling and build the foundations of organisational unity and company culture. While working remotely, it’s likely that your team’s daily interaction will be limited only to those they work with directly, so it’s important to ensure they feel as though they are still a part of something bigger even when working from home. Help them understand that their day-to-day contributions play a part in the overall success of the business. Be clear when communicating goals and expectations.

Working from home was a huge adjustment for many business leaders and their teams. With many settling into this change and planning to implement remote or hybrid work formats long term, the ways in which teams connect, communicate, and collaborate must also evolve. It’s essential for leaders to work with their staff at both the individual and team level in order to maximise impact, continue growing the business, and deliver to customers.

If you are interested in learning about your own or your team’s impact and how you can enable more impactful collaborations that lead to a higher-performing team, book an assessment with our Leadership Development team.