



WHITE PAPER

Organisational Strategies for Overcoming Crisis: Remote solutions for leadership and mental fitness

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Strengthening leadership skills and attending to mental health are key to withstanding the disruptions caused by our current global crisis. Fortunately, remote tools designed for the demands of social distancing are available to support both leaders and the workforce at large during the pandemic and in the aftermath.

Disruption on an unprecedented scale

The current global pandemic is the ultimate disruptor. In addition to the countless personal tragedies around the globe, no industry or sector of the economy has been spared. Millions of people worldwide are experiencing disruptions on multiple levels as the virus affects not only our physical health, but nearly every facet of modern life. It has undermined both global markets and household budgets, impacted businesses and individual careers, forced whole countries, communities and families to restructure and reorganise. As each of us looks to do our part to help the world weather the storm, there are ways companies can support employees during the crisis and at the same time set the stage for a more resilient organisation once the worst is over.

The past weeks and months have illustrated vividly the importance of capable leadership. The most successful leaders are those able both to respond deftly to dangerous and dynamic conditions and to inspire the trust of their citizens. Indeed, trust is a stabilizing force, invaluable in times of crisis to organisations of all shapes and sizes—countries and cities, health care systems and schools, and of course, companies. Building it and maintaining it should be a priority for anyone in a leadership position.

Even in the midst of a crisis, organisations can work to cultivate trust. Leaders can start by developing awareness about the stressors their team is experiencing. Depending on the industry and division, employees may now be fearful about contracting and spreading the virus in the course of their duties. They may be adjusting to longer or irregular shifts while juggling childcare or the needs of elderly parents. If they are working from home, they may suffer from isolation or crowding or feel at loose ends, unmoored from their usual schedule. They may fear for their jobs and incomes as the crisis drags on. Leaders who foster strong connections with employees and practice active listening are in a better position to learn how their team is being affected and therefore have an opportunity to counter the stress with flexible solutions, good will, care and compassion.

Care and compassion, in fact, are also essential ingredients in relationships built on trust, and spreading good will through your organisation is like the brain releasing dopamine into the body—it feels great and can work wonders. Especially in a crisis, people will appreciate deposits into their emotional bank accounts, so leaders should make an effort to express gratitude, recognise good work, acknowledge sacrifices and compromises. Let people know they are

valued. Companies may have to ask for more from employees in times like these, and it will be given more willingly in an atmosphere of trust and appreciation.

Since for many of us this is a slow-moving (but no less damaging) crisis, leaders might also have time to reflect on their performance. Asking thoughtful questions is one technique. Are you practicing what you preach? If you encourage your staff to prioritise health and family, for example, are you modelling that behaviour? If not, what you say will ring hollow. What are your blind spots? This requires advanced skills in self-reflection, since blind spots are by definition hard to see. Check your stated values against your actions. Authentic leaders will maintain and strengthen the connection with their team in a crisis and be in a stronger position on the other end.

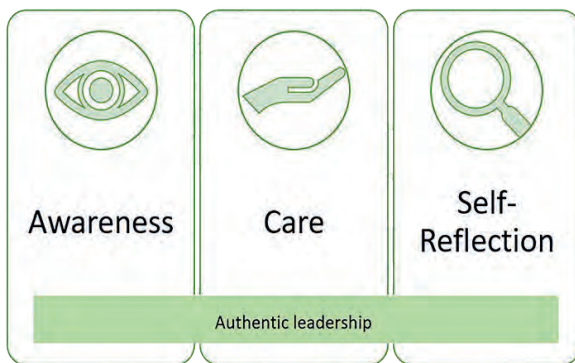


Fig. 1: Three pillars for authentic leadership to cultivate trust in times of crisis

Fitness in Body and Mind

In a pandemic, our first concern is for our physical health. The best way to protect ourselves and our societies from the virus is to follow public health experts' recommendations, and that professional advice currently emphasises 'social distancing.' As a result, many workplaces are undergoing a seismic shift, instituting home office, restructuring working hours, reorganizing workspaces and processes, placing workers on furlough...the adaptations vary from company to company. What they have in common is abrupt change accompanied by stress, whether it arises from the difficulties of managing a new set of circumstances or from the uncertainty about what the future holds. People who have never suffered from anxiety or depression before may begin to experience problems sleeping, poor concentration, irritability and other symptoms. Those who have existing mental health conditions that are generally well-managed may find that the loss of a predictable schedule or the added emotional energy required to master round the clock childcare plays havoc with their mental state.

This, then, is a time to pay attention to mental fitness as well as physical health. Companies concerned for the wellbeing of their workforce should recognise the risks implicit in our current reality and take steps to counteract issues ranging from feelings of

isolation and hopelessness to anger management. The first step is to destigmatise the problem and open the lines of communication by initiating the conversation. By encouraging employees to self-assess and become more aware of what they are feeling, employers can begin to head off problems before they escalate. A mental fitness initiative might include training in mindfulness and breathwork, stress management strategies and techniques to understand and evaluate default coping mechanisms so that healthier substitutions can be made. A mentally fit workforce is motivated, creative and resilient and will be prepared to return to full capacity once the danger has passed.

Since most companies are fighting on several fronts during this pandemic, their primary focus may not be on leadership and mental fitness issues. Moreover, internal expertise in these areas may be lacking. Fortunately, external support is available in a form especially suited to our socially distanced reality. The experts at DEKRA are harnessing the combined knowledge of specialists in these areas and drawing on extensive industry experience to offer a fully remote suite of assessment, training, and coaching solutions to help their partners through the crisis stronger than ever.



Fig. 2: Steps to foster mental fitness of employees

Starting with an online survey, the service makes a baseline assessment of leadership and mental health across the workforce. After analysing the results, DEKRA's consultants present customised recommendations for improvements that could include live webinars on leadership or mental fitness topics or remote coaching in these areas for individuals or small groups. The mixture of remote solutions is tailored to the needs of each company and the specific set of circumstances it is experiencing during the pandemic. The aim is to support organisations in the midst of this upheaval so that they and their employees emerge on the other side ready to engage fully and creatively in rebuilding and restarting. In the world of process safety, there are many specialist items of equipment that require specialist servicing, maintenance and repairs (failure to adhere to these schedules adversely impacts the reliability of the equipment). Identify safety critical equipment that requires support from an external resource. Make contact with the external resource as early as possible in order to understand the services that may be provided and develop a contingency plan with their input.

DEKRA Organisational & Process Safety

DEKRA Organisational and Process Safety are a behavioural change and process safety consultancy company. Working in collaboration with our clients, our approach is to assess the process safety and influence the safety culture with the aim of 'making a difference'.

In terms of behavioural change, we deliver the skills, methods, and motivation to change leadership attitudes, behaviours and decision-making among employees; supporting our clients in creating a culture of care and measurable sustainable improvement of safety outcomes is our goal.

The breadth and depth of expertise in process safety makes us globally recognised specialists and trusted advisors. We help our clients to understand and evaluate their risks, and work together to develop pragmatic solutions. Our value-adding and practical approach integrates specialist process safety management, engineering and testing. We seek to educate and grow client competence to provide sustainable performance improvement; partnering with our clients we combine technical expertise with a passion for life preservation, harm reduction and asset protection.

We are a service unit of DEKRA SE, a global leader in safety since 1925 with over 45,000 employees in 60 countries and 5 continent. As a part of the world's leading expert organisation DEKRA, we are the global partner for a safe world.

We have offices throughout North America, Europe, and Asia.

For more information, visit www.dekra-uk.co.uk/en/dekra-organisational-and-process-safety/

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