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COVID-19 Special Edition

 enboarder

# State of Employee Experience Report

Original market research on  
the global impact of COVID-19  
on employee experience



# About The Report

**The ongoing development of COVID-19 is driving unprecedented amounts of change and uncertainty for businesses, employees and managers.**

As more and more organizations make the abrupt shift to remote work for the foreseeable future, we're entering into a period that will be known as the world's greatest work from home experiment.

With the combination of employees establishing new work routines while balancing family commitments and an uncertain future, and managers having to quickly adapt to new ways of working, alignment, feedback and communication need to be stronger than ever before.

But we can't move forward successfully without understanding the way COVID-19 is impacting our workforce.

**We surveyed 3,000 employees and managers across the world, all aged 18 years and above, to provide multi-generational and regional insights into the current workforce.**

# Here's What You'll Learn

1

How often employees are connecting with their manager and whether they're satisfied with the current level of communication

2

Whether managers really know how their staff are feeling or if they're just assuming

3

The major emotional disconnect between directors and employees

4

How each generation are coping with the abrupt shift to remote work and their unique new challenges

5

The number one challenge organizations are facing and easy-to-implement solutions

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# Participant Snapshot

3,000



- Managers
- Employees

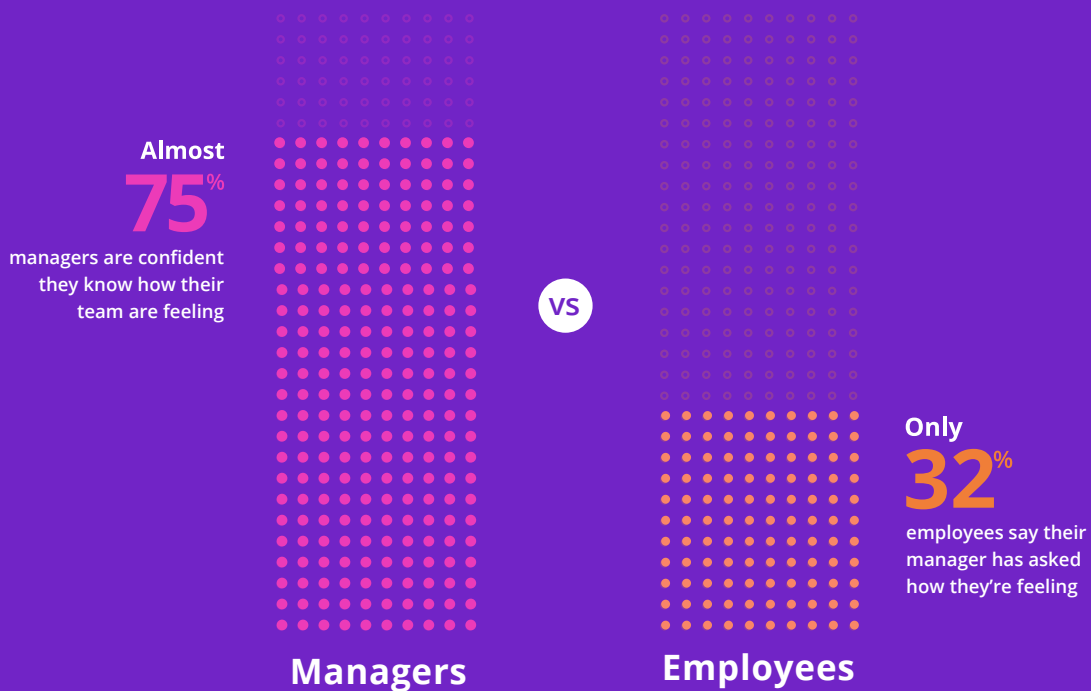
3,000 global participants, all aged 18 years and above, were surveyed for this report, with an even split of employees and managers, across a diverse range of organization size and industries.

# The Disconnect Between Directors, Managers & Employees



# Overconfident Managers Are Missing The Mark

Managers are assuming, rather than asking.



While 63% of managers admit remote work has made it more difficult for them to gauge how their teams feel, the overwhelming majority (75%) are currently confident they know exactly how their teams are feeling.

Despite this confidence from managers, a staggering 68% of employees say they haven't been asked how they're feeling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Employee & Manager Communication Breakdown

**22%**  
of employees are worried about what the future holds but are afraid to voice these concerns to their manager



# Major Emotional Disconnect Between Directors & Employees

## So, how exactly are employees feeling?

When asked what word best describes how they feel during the COVID-19 pandemic the majority flagged negative feelings such as anxious, uncertain and fearful.

While these negative feelings are prominent in low and mid level employees, it appears senior staff are experiencing completely different emotions.

Director-level employees are more likely to be feeling positive with 25% rating hopeful as the best word to describe their current

emotions. In comparison, only 4% of non-managerial staff said they were feeling hopeful.

### Lack Of Transparency

This major disconnect could be due to lack of information transparency. While directors are privy to the company's decisions, roadmap and financial situation – which is likely why they're feeling a little more secure and largely more positive, it would appear this information is not being filtered to the rest of the business.

## Workers feel anxious, uncertain and fearful



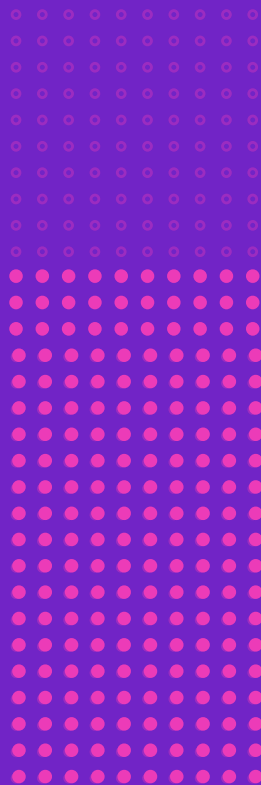
# Communication Is The #1 Challenge



# Everyone Agrees Communicating Remotely is More Difficult

The one thing managers and employees see eye-to-eye on is that communicating remotely is much more difficult than in person

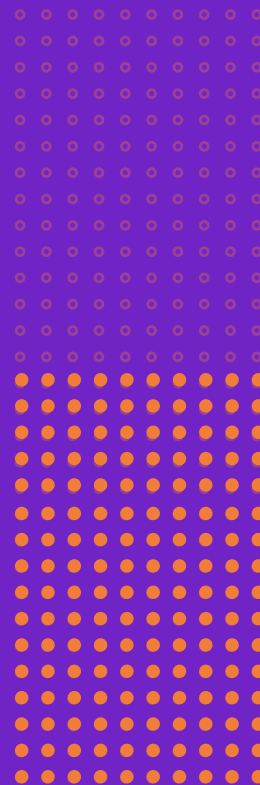
**61%**  
managers find it more difficult to communicate with their team



**MANAGERS**

VS

**56%**  
employees find it harder to communicate with their manager



**EMPLOYEES**

# Top Reasons Why



## Timing

"We have to schedule catch ups now and it's too awkward"



## Manager is too busy

"My manager is very busy"

"Only communication is over the phone which can lead to misunderstandings"

"We can't find the time to catch up"



## Missing watercooler chats

"It's hard to ask smaller questions"

# Despite the Need for More Communication, Managers are Reducing Individual Catch Ups

Communication is essential in a remote work environment, but statistics show managers are reducing and even cancelling one-on-one meetings.

## Has the frequency of your one-on-ones changed since COVID-19?



▼ 48% DECREASED

▲ 30% INCREASED

— 22% STAYED THE SAME

# Employees Struggling To Get Time With Their Managers

**18%**

of employees say they never have 1-on-1s

**24%**

only when *they* request them

**6%**

usually have a regular one-on-one but it has been cancelled since working remotely

## Employees say:

My manager is stressed out so I don't like bothering her.

We usually have a weekly one-on-one meeting but now we just have a fortnightly zoom meeting.

# Is Productivity Declining?



# Employees Think Their Managers Are Busier...But They're Not

Many employees are under the impression that COVID-19 has increased their managers' workloads and therefore has reduced their availability for one-on-one meetings. But a staggering number of managers admitted their workloads have actually decreased.

## Employees say:

I feel like my upper management are too busy in meetings to figure out what's happening instead of checking up on us.

I find it hard to be able to speak to my manager because he is so busy.

I'm guessing she is attending more meetings and has a lot to deal with.

It's often difficult to get in touch with my manager right now.



# When Managers Were Asked How Their Workloads Have Changed Since COVID-19...



▼ **45%**  
DECREASED

▲ **30%**  
INCREASED

— **25%**  
STAYED THE SAME

# Managers Think Productivity is Dropping

When rating the current productivity levels of their team compared to a normal week before COVID-19, most managers believed their teams were on the decline. However, the majority of employees are adamant their output has remained the same or increased.

## Is Productivity Dropping? Managers Think So.



# Are Managers Underestimating Their Teams?



# Do Managers Need to be Physically Present?

Majority of managers believe they have to be physically present in order to get the best out of their team.

**63%**

of managers believe they need to be physically present

## Employees Disagree

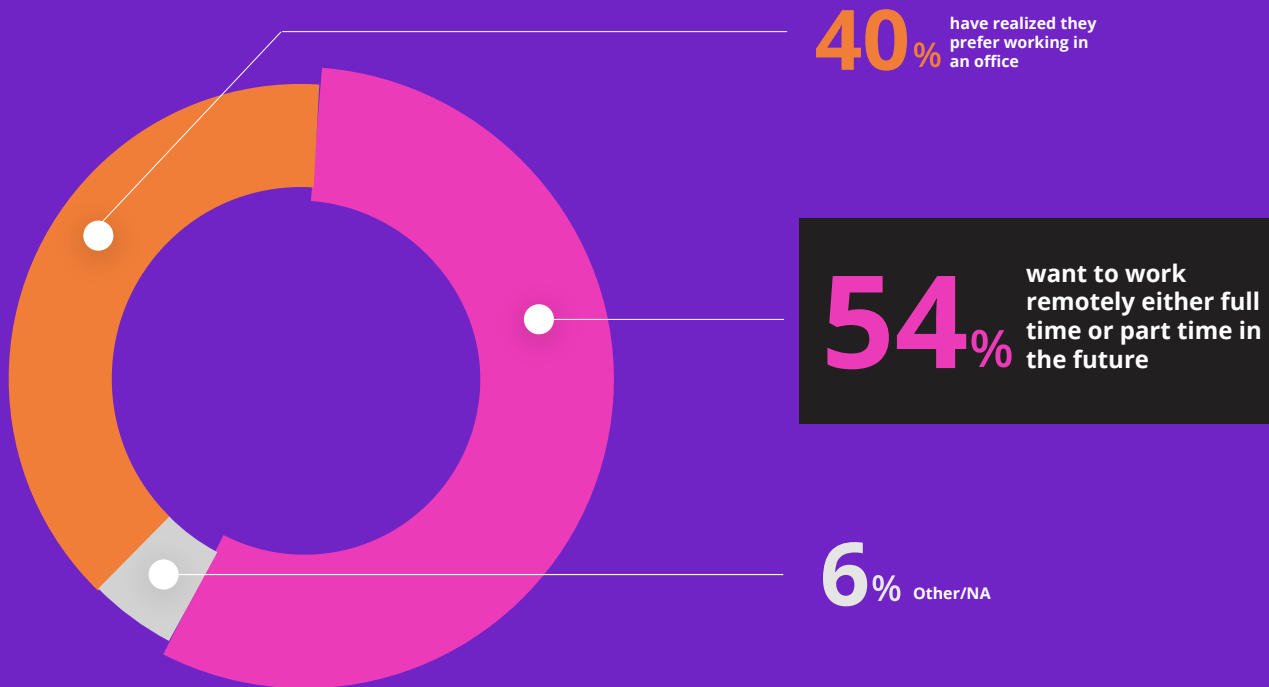
Data shows some employees are thriving without the physical presence of their managers. Almost half of employees say they are equally, if not more, engaged and productive when working from home.

**47%**

of employees say they're equally (or more!) engaged and productive when working remotely

# The Future of Work Needs to be a Mix of Remote and In-Office

For organizations who want to attract and retain the best talent, it appears offering flexible work arrangements will be even more key moving forward.



## C-Suite Employees Want More Flexibility

Senior level participants displayed a stronger desire to work from home. **63% of C-suite level participants want to work remotely in some capacity compared to only 49% of non-managerial participants.**

# Generations are Responding Differently

A one-size-fits-all approach won't suffice in today's new climate. Each generation is facing their own unique set of challenges



# Baby Boomers Want Face-to-Face Interactions

Almost half admit they're struggling to remain as engaged and productive as they are in the office. The main reason? They're used to in-person meetings and they're finding this separation challenging.

Normally I can just pop into my manager's office when I have an issue.

It's very difficult to get in touch with my manager now.

I am unable to have informal chats.

47%

struggle to stay engaged and productive

# Gen X: The Stoic Age Group

This demographic appeared to be much more reluctant to open up to their managers than any other generation. Many participants in this age group highlighted the challenges of having children at home disrupting their schedules.

Nothing my manager could say would change the way I feel.

I wouldn't want my manager to know how I'm feeling.

It's difficult to communicate with my manager. We both have children at home so there's often a time lapse between responses.

The kids are off school and I'm trying to work around them.



# Misunderstood Millennials

This age group had the highest rate of displaced workers with 90% saying the place they do the majority of their role has been significantly affected by COVID-19. They also appear to have very little contact and understanding from their managers.

I am currently overburdened with work and find it difficult to work from home, especially with the children off from school. My manager does not have kids and therefore doesn't understand how stressful this can be.

My manager shows no empathy.

**41%** never have one-on-ones

# Gen Z: Tech Savvy & Distracted

The youngest working generation are frustrated by their organization's lack of remote working resources and tools, and their tech-illiterate colleagues. A third of Gen Z respondents explained that tech and communication tools were making it difficult to contact their managers.

We do not have resources to ensure a productive meeting and the ability to share resources.

It is difficult to communicate because my manager is not very tech-savvy, so it's a hassle trying to arrange a video meeting and to schedule time.

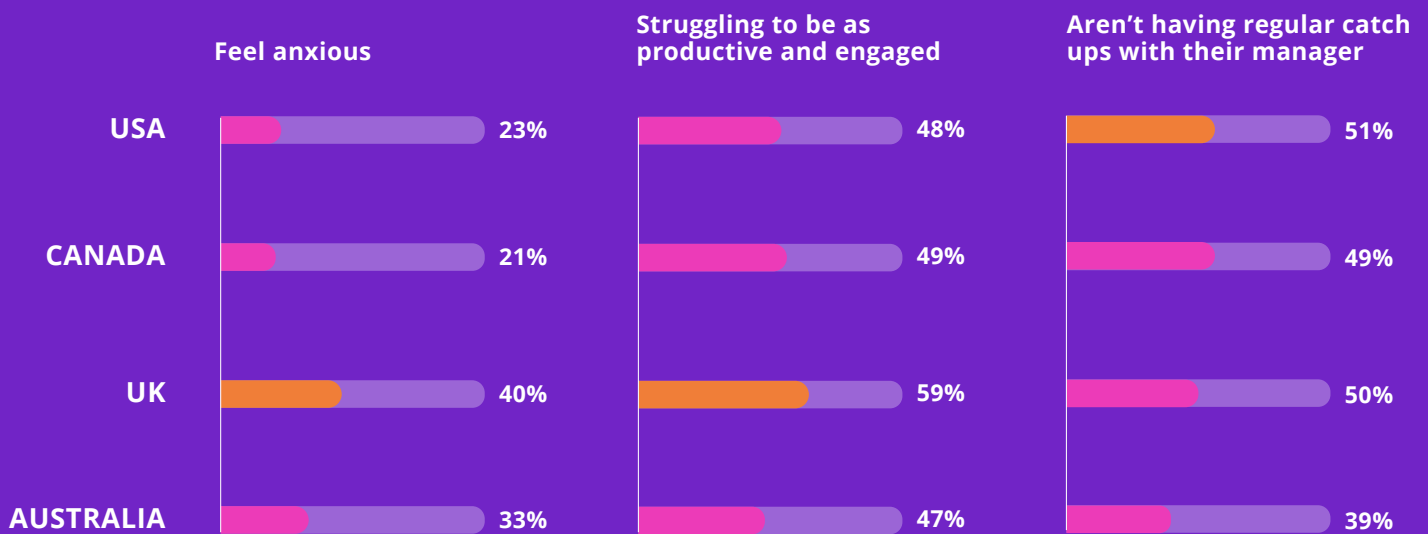
**60%** struggle to stay engaged and productive

# Geographical Differences



# Location Matters

As each country reacts differently to the COVID-19 situation, it's only natural that emotions, sentiment and productivity differs from region to region. To understand your people and how you can support them, it's important to take their geographical locations into consideration.



## Anxiety on the Rise

The UK recorded the highest levels of anxiety with 40% saying it was the best word to describe how they're currently feeling, while Canada had the lowest levels of anxiety with only 21% admitting to feeling anxious.

## Productivity Challenges

Universally, around half of employees say they're struggling to remain as productive and engaged from home.

## Low Communication Frequency

Australians are most likely to have regular catch ups with their manager with a record 61%, compared to less than half in the UK, USA and Canada.

# The Key Findings



# Summary

***While COVID-19 has inexplicably created a lot of uncertainty, the research has allowed us to cut through the noise and assumptions to find valuable insights to help us shape the way forward.***

According to the data there is a breakdown in communication on every level – from directors to entry-level staff – and in every country.

Poor communication has a significant and negative impact on employee experience, leading to steep declines in productivity, engagement, retention and bottom line business performance – a place that no organization can afford to be in right now.

That's why the most predominant and urgent takeaway is the need to fix communication – and fast!

Employee experience and great communication go hand-in-hand. Nailing your communication during the current COVID-19 pandemic will have a disproportionately positive impact on your organization's employee experience.

But where do you start? Improve your organization's communication by following the Four C's framework: connection, compliance, culture and clarification.

## Connection: Ask The Right Questions

During times of deep uncertainty and unprecedented change, we need to shelve assumptions and go straight to the source. It's not enough to assume we know how our people feel, as businesses and managers we have to make sure we're asking the right questions, regularly.

In order to fully support employees through this period of uncertainty, managers need to build deeper connections with their teams.

For some managers this can be the first time they've had to ask personal questions and often, this doesn't come naturally.

**Before heading into a one-on-one during this complicated time, we recommend asking a variety of questions that relate to these five categories:**

## **RESILIENCE**

- Thinking about COVID-19 how would you rate your level of stress?
- What activities are you doing to provide stress relief?

## **LONELINESS AND ISOLATION**

- Do you feel lonely?
- Do you maintain regular virtual contact with friends and family?

## **ANXIETY**

- How anxious has COVID-19 made you feel?
- Are you concerned about yourself or a family member contracting COVID-19?



## STABILITY

- Are you concerned about your personal financial situation now and in the future?

## SENSE OF COMMUNITY

- Are you feeling connected to your colleagues?
- Have you done anything lately to maintain connection with your colleagues?

Find a platform that can act as the trigger and automatically send these questions to your employees. Once the responses have been collected and fed back to the managers, they can be used as a guide for their next one-on-one. Managers can use this information as indicators to have a deeper conversation with their employees.



Hi Chloe,  
How connected are  
you feeling to your  
colleagues?



# Compliance: Get the Basics Right

The data raised a common concern amongst employees and managers: they're all finding it harder to communicate.

To make matters worse individual catch ups are on the decline, when they should be on rise.

It's also evident that many employees are feeling anxious and the alleviator is greater transparency. The key here is to remember that your employees don't know what you know. While you might be having regular business updates from the CEO, are you making sure your team is kept in the loop?

As managers and HR leaders, we should all be encouraging our CEOs to show more face time with employees. Communication relieves anxiety, even when the message isn't good news!

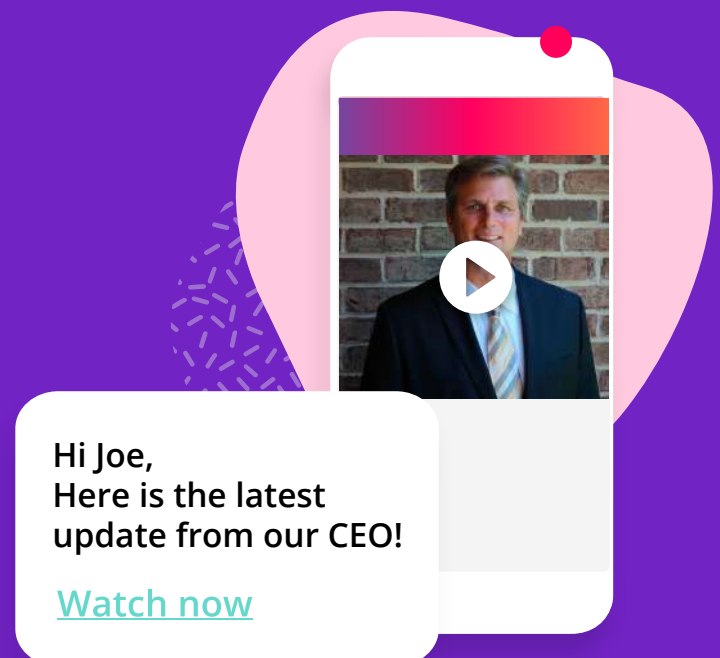
Employees want to know what is happening in the business, but they're also inundated with various modes of communication right now, from Slack to email, Zoom to WhatsApp. And it's causing a lot of confusion.

The best approach is to communicate little and often with the right message at the right time on the right channel.

Before you send another email that's likely to get lost in the bottom of someone's inbox for the next week, rethink the way you're communicating.

**If it's a company-wide update, video on the go is an easy way to cut through the noise and communicate effectively. Have your CEO film an informal fortnightly video that provides all employees with a high level business update - it'll make them feel connected and informed, and we guarantee it won't stay unopened in the bottom of their inbox!**

Use this creative thinking to add an experience layer to any compliance communications you need to send during this period such as policy updates, EAP information and workplace health and safety material.



# Culture: Recreate Office Interactions Virtually

Now, more than ever, people need to feel connected. Loneliness, anxiety and confusion are amplified in isolation – and the data proves this. For isolated employees or those who live alone, the working day might be their only social interaction right now.

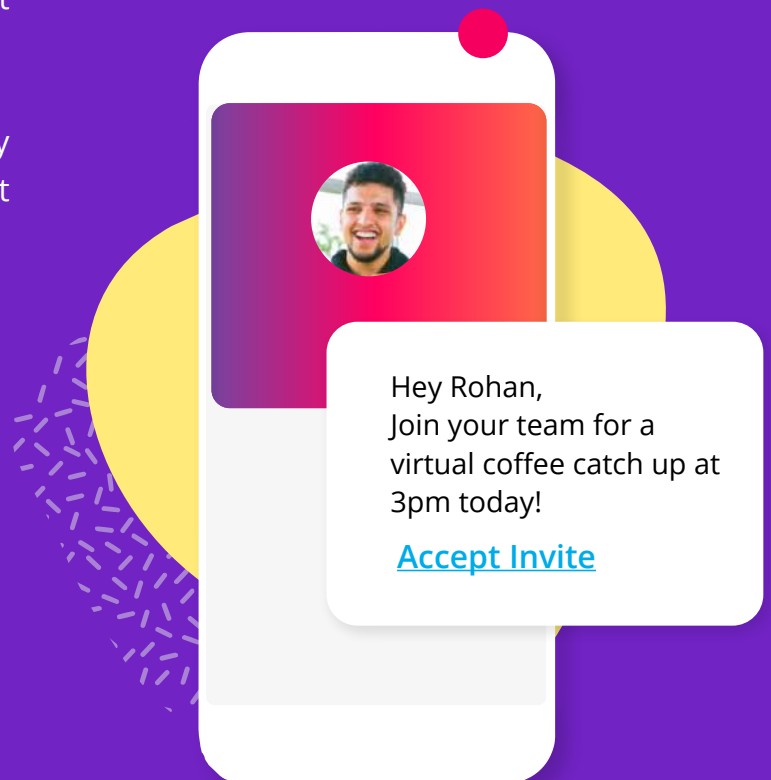
**As human-centric organizations we need to be seeking out new ways to bond from afar.**

All the small and informal human interactions we have in the workplace – grabbing a coffee together, team lunches or bumping into a member of another team when you're making your 3pm cup of tea – are no longer available to us. But they're a necessary part of work.

As a people leader, we need to actively create the opportunity to interact without discussing work.

Virtual water cooler chats simulate the same spontaneous, cross-team interactions you would have in the office. Set up a zoom link and share it with your entire organization, so that everyone is free to join when and if they please. The idea is that when your employees feel like they need a ten minute break, they don't have to take it alone! They can log in and chat to a colleague.

The objective here is to create a culture that fosters connection and allows your organization to get to know each other for who they are, not what they do.



# Clarification: Redefine The Role of Managers

We're all learning to adjust in this uncharted territory and it's not fair to assume managers know what to do.

Organizations need to empower managers by giving them the triggers and information they need to do great work.

Educate and equip managers to take meaningful action – in real time! During times like these there's no point sending a survey to find out how an employee is feeling, if their manager isn't going to talk to them about it for months.

This all starts with clearly defining the role of managers during this time. For most organizations, it's likely your managers' roles are undergoing a paradigm shift from a focus on managing projects to caring and supporting employees. It's time to regroup and clearly establish the responsibilities and expectations your organization has of its managers during this period.

It's time to get your managers thinking differently.

For example: most managers have been focused on making meetings efficient with defined agendas and set roles, and while this is effective in the office, during this remote working period we all need to be open to trading some efficiency to allow for human connection. It may seem counter productive at first, but the benefit in the long run is, ironically, greater productivity.

To support your managers, you could set up an 'HR: Ask Me Anything Hour' where HR can address how COVID-19 has changed the role of managers, outline what the organization expects of them, answer any questions, concerns or challenges managers are facing and encourage them to share best practices with each other.



Hi Chloe,  
HR has invited you  
to an "Ask Me  
Anything Hour"

[Add To Calendar](#)

**Now that you understand the impact COVID-19 is having on employee experience, it's time to leverage this data to put your people first and start repairing the way your organization communicates. We all need to help and support each other through this change.**



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