

Beyond lockdown: Starting over together



*Insights and proposals
to lead the way
and foster re-engagement*

I. Entering the post-lockdown era: Re-engaging to rise up together

- People are both eager to get back to an active life and anxious about going back to the workplace. Most are aware that there will be no easy, quick way to “get back to normal”.
- The challenges are huge (pages 3-5). Yet, there are also many opportunities ahead (pages 6-7).
- **Re-engaging your workforce** will be crucial. Co-workers may have been upset by the pandemic and the sudden shift in their worlds (p. 3). Teams may experience a split along new fault lines linked to differing lockdown conditions (p. 4), and there may be a wider disconnect between employees and organizations (p. 6).
- We explore these challenges through our lens of specialists of leadership psychology, and offer proposals for action (p. 8).
- We can work with you at building a tailored intervention in your organisation. A more complete version of this memo is also available. Do not hesitate to reach out.



II. The challenge: overcoming the obstacles to re-engagement (1/2)

The pandemic and the lockdown are uncharted territory for all of us. We are all experiencing a fast-changing mix of emotions – perhaps more than we like to acknowledge.

These concerns can get in the way of re-engaging and getting restarted at the best of our abilities. For example:

- Many employees are in **fear** at the idea of getting back to their workplace, or just taking public transportation.
- For a lot of people, **deep uncertainty about the future**, at all levels, triggers anxiety and/or saps energy.
- Some will have to **mourn** dear ones, lost in tough circumstances. Others may feel tired of being locked down, **frustrated, or angry** as “going back to the lives they lived before” will prove impossible for a long time.
- The “**forced helplessness**” of confinement may have had serious emotional impact on some people. They will need to restore a sense of agency and control on their immediate environment.



III. The challenge: overcoming the obstacles to re-engagement (2/2)

New fault lines may emerge across organizations and teams. A divide may arise, for instance, between:

- People who had to remain exposed to the virus in essential jobs and those who stayed at home.
- People who had to endure the lockdown crammed in small housings, and others.
- People who found it impossible to focus on their jobs while taking care of their households 24x7, contrasting with others.
- People who have been overworked (or have put themselves under pressure) whereas others may have felt side-lined or under-utilized...

Some, who had the chance to experience a relaxed lockdown, will have to remobilize themselves and adapt to a much more complicated new world.



How will they look at each other?

How will this impact their ability to cooperate in the future?

IV. Why should you care as a leader?

Aren't these 'psychological problems' the remit of mental health professionals dealing with fragile people?

The impact on the workforce appears so huge that it *also* requires a managerial response:

- 78% of the population in France feel upset ([IFOP](#)). 56% of Italians suffer from the uncertainty; 25% of them say they are still in fear ([SWG](#)).
- 35% of Chinese employees experienced psychological distress – with a heavier impact on the younger and better-educated ([GPSYCH](#)). 25% suffer from insomnia or anxiety ([AJP](#)).

When we feel concerned or overwhelmed, we find it hard to work effectively and contribute at our best as we experience difficulties to focus, think clearly, make decisions, communicate and collaborate.

Burn-out and post-traumatic stress also affect hardy and experienced people. Confinement has a lasting impact ([Lancet](#)) and symptoms may only come to the fore after several months. The World Economic Forum ([WEF](#)) anticipates a “second epidemic” of stress-related illness leading to lower organisational productivity.

**Will your teams follow you through the coming hardships?
Will they be able to contribute at their best?**



V. The upside: seizing the opportunities of the transition (1/2 – short term)

The new reality we are facing harbours many positive opportunities. Yet, they need to be brought to fruition quickly, as they may otherwise turn into frustration and liabilities.

- **New solidarities** have spontaneously bloomed at many levels. *Has it happened in our work teams? How could we trigger and pursue this?*
- **New ways of working** have taken root. New expectations have been created. *Will we be able to leverage this, while maintaining the bond within teams and with the broader organization?*
- Many employees now consider that the ethical stance shown by their leaders, and their ability to maintain a true dialogue, has been a **watershed moment** for their future commitment. Some feel more strongly engaged than ever. Some others, however, seriously consider leaving their organisations...
Will we seize our chance to make the difference?



VI. The upside: seizing the opportunities of the transition (2/2 – long term)



Some organizations have seen **a surge of mobilization** to respond to the urgency. There is huge potential in this, but mobilization only translates into long-term engagement if accompanied by dialogue, shared information and decisions, and joint sense-making – starting from operational setup to the long-term societal role of their organizations. *Will we be able to create that dialogue, and translate mobilization into long-term engagement?*

Research into resilience and “post-traumatic growth” ([PTG](#)) shows that **adversity can open new spaces for growth** at individual and collective levels.

In this new world, where recent norms have become irrelevant, will we just ‘endure’, or will we respond, adapt, experiment, celebrate the unprecedented things we’ve had to do, learn and grow from them, so as to be better after the pandemic?

How will we tap into this collective resilience and intelligence?

VII. Concretely - what you can do, how we can help.

Re-engaging your teams starts with a deeper dialogue.
Here are the key steps that we propose:

1. Take stock together so as to clarify your objectives and:

- Identify your own reactions to the crisis, so as to foster empathy and compassion, as these will be crucial in the next stages;
- Tailor the next steps of the process to your business requirements and to the situation in your teams.



2. Gauge how your team members feel, and create a space to hear their voices: how have they experienced the lockdown period? How do they feel about getting back to the workplace, and dealing with new unknowns?

- Anonymous surveys can help run this process in a way that feels safe.
- Confidential 1:1 conversations can be offered to those colleagues who so desire.

3. Organize meeting(s) with your work teams so that all of you can:

- Share individual experiences and concerns,
- Contract on measures and common rules that will alleviate these concerns and create a sense of control and safety,
- Tap into the positive experiences, lessons learned and inner resources at individual & team levels,
- And restart on a new footing!



Reach out!

This document reflects our experience and insights as Leadership consultants, most of us being Psychologists. We leverage a diversity of approaches, and have identified building blocks of interventions, which we can tailor to your specific situation and needs rapidly.

We stand ready to support you in this difficult, complex, yet immensely rich journey of re-engagement into a new and hopefully better world.

We would be genuinely happy to discuss this with you. Don't hesitate to reach out!

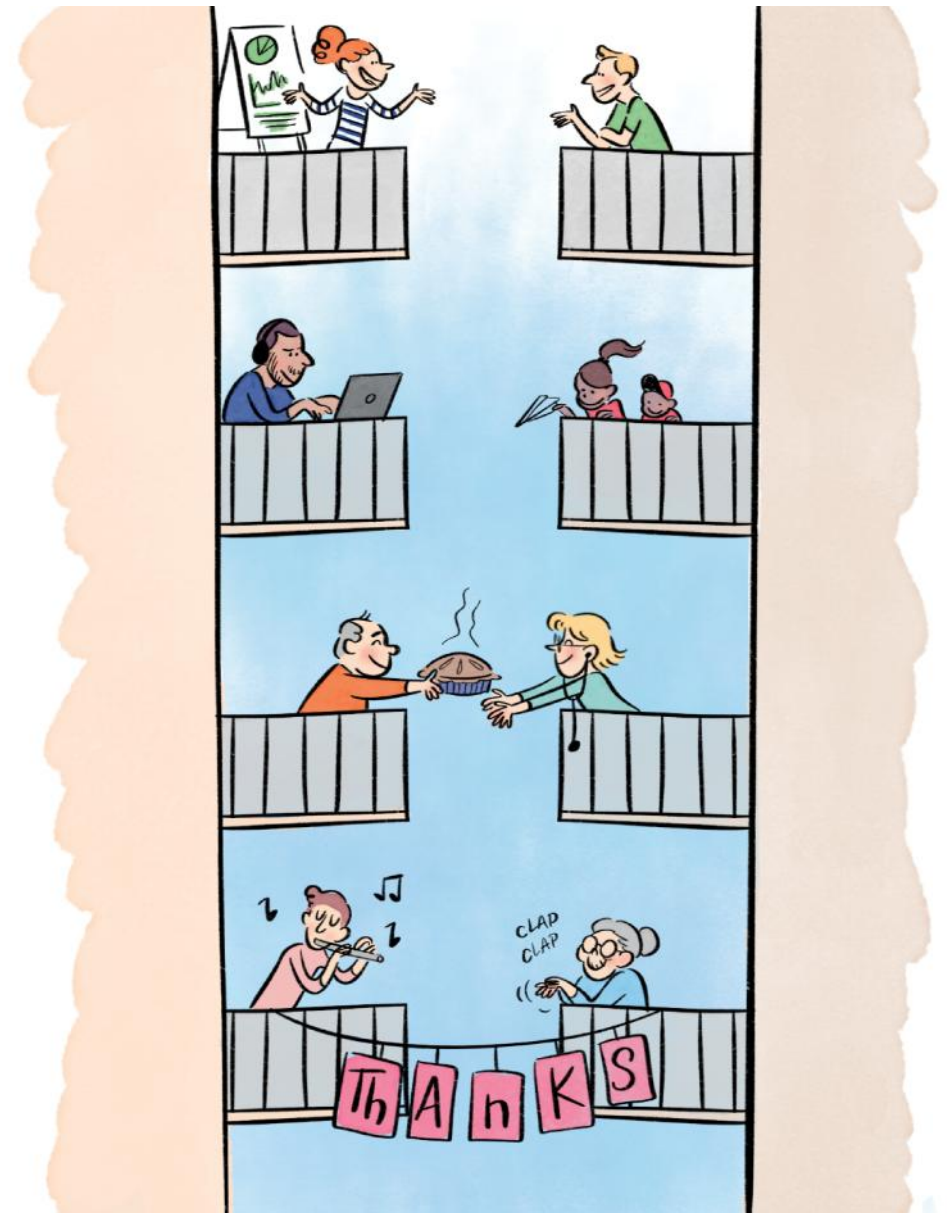
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