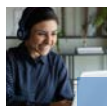


HOW TO *INSPIRE YOUR WORKFORCE* DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

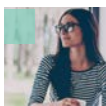


Contents



03

Introduction



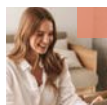
04

Staff retention and
engagement



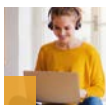
13

The employee experience
of a pandemic



19

Communication and
performance management



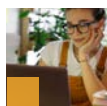
23

Building a better employee/
manager relationship



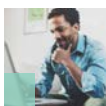
28

Training and development



32

Building resilient teams



35

The role of corporate
responsibility during COVID-19



39

Rewards and recognition



42

How ELMO can help



Introduction




COVID-19's world-wide rampage has touched the lives of so many; no one is immune to its wrath. Communities have been destroyed, businesses have closed their doors, livelihoods are at a stand-still and economies are vulnerable. Life as we knew it has changed forever.

One of the most drastic changes is the imposed social distancing measures put in place by governments worldwide to slow the spread of the Coronavirus. This has meant that many businesses have mandated their employees to work from home for extended periods. Even for businesses that had existing work-from-home policies in place, this was challenging. For businesses that did not have the infrastructure to complete productive work remotely, it has been disruptive to business operations – and for some, it has been fatal.

Although the social, economic and financial fallout of COVID-19 is not yet known, experts predict its impact will last for months – even years. While the future is uncertain, business leaders and HR professionals must do what they can to steer their business through these tough times, and the best place to focus attention is on the workforce.

Inspiring a workforce during uncertain and troubling times is no mean feat and involves the consideration of many unique situations and factors. This eBook will discuss the ways business leaders and HR professionals can help to quell the impact of COVID-19 on employees to aid their physical and mental wellbeing and to maintain business momentum. We look at:

- Staff retention and engagement
 - The employee experience (EX)
 - Communication and performance management
 - Building employee/manager relationships and resilient teams
 - Training and development opportunities
 - Corporate social responsibility (CSR)
 - Motivating employees through rewards and recognition
- 

The more supported a workforce is, the more productive and engaged it will be. As a result, your business will be better positioned to confront whatever happens on the other side of COVID-19.



Staff retention and engagement

Retaining key talent has never been more critical. As the business world reels from the global pandemic and an economic downturn seems more likely, retaining your most talented and productive staff members will become an even greater priority.

The key to retention, of course, is engagement.

It's worth remembering that Australia and New Zealand faced an uphill battle with disengaged workers even before the new trials of COVID-19 presented themselves. In summary:

- **14%** of Australian and New Zealand workers are engaged in their jobs; **71%** are not engaged; and **15%** are actively disengaged¹
- **20%** of leaders are engaged²
- **7th** – Where Australia and New Zealand rank out of 11 global regions, trailing behind Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe³
- **74%** of employers only measure employee engagement annually; **8%** do so monthly or more frequently; **18%** do not formally measure engagement at all⁴



Why is employee engagement so important to address? Again, the numbers tell the story:

- **18%** - The difference in productivity seen between the top and bottom performing engagement quartiles⁵
- **37%** - How much higher absenteeism rates are in organisations scoring in the bottom 25% on engagement⁶
- **26%** - How much higher revenue per employee is when employees are highly engaged⁷

1. State of the Global Workforce, Gallup report, 2017

2. State of the Global Workforce, Gallup report, 2017

3. State of the Global Workforce, Gallup report, 2017

4. Global Human Capital Trends, Deloitte

5. Harter, J.K., Schmidt, F.L. & Hayes, T.L. (2002). Business-Unit Level Relationship Between Employee Satisfaction, Employee Engagement, and Business Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(2), 268-279

6. Ibid

7. Taleo Research, Alignment Drives Employee Engagement and Productivity

How can you ensure your staff are engaged?



Engagement is sometimes referred to as the emotional bond employees feel towards their employer. Engaged employees are more productive, more loyal and are greater advocates for their employer. In summary, engaged employees are vital to business success.

A way to keep your staff engaged is to encourage connection through virtual activities. For example, employers may promote employee physical and mental wellbeing by offering virtual yoga sessions via video conferencing platforms such as Zoom. Or, in place of Friday after-work drinks, employers can arrange weekly [“virtual happy hours”](#), where employees can grab a drink, dial into group calls and wind down after a long week.

So, how can you ensure your staff are engaged? It’s important to start with solid foundations. Over the next 6 pages are the essential building blocks, without which even your Friday afternoon virtual happy hour and online yoga sessions will fall flat.

»





1. Undertake a staff engagement survey

First, understand the “lay of the land” to obtain some benchmark figures. An engagement or pulse survey can indicate not only how engaged your staff currently are, but what needs to be done in order to keep them committed and even boost engagement further. With people now working remotely, it can be difficult to assess how people are faring, simply because you may not be seeing or interacting with them in person daily. Regular surveys (such as those offered by [ELMO Survey](#)) can help to ease some of these challenges.

Your employees are on the frontline. They may be able to come up with suggestions or indicate areas that need improving. This could help to foster a sense of trust as they may feel their ideas are being taken into account. Everyone wants their voice to be heard – an engagement or pulse survey allows that to occur. »





2. Refine company strategies and find your 'North Star'

One of the main drivers of employee engagement comes from company strategies and policies rather than specific characteristics of the staff themselves. Making your staff aware of these policies and how their role fits in could be a great way to boost engagement as well as retention in the long run. Everyone likes to know how their work contributes to the bigger picture. Hopefully, what will not change during a time of great change is your values or your mission / purpose – this is essentially your 'North Star' or reason for being. People need to know why they are doing what they are doing, and why the business exists. Your values and mission can provide the answers to these big questions and reinforce that people are in the right place, especially if these values align with their own personal values.

»

3 questions to ask:

What is our vision? This question is aspirational. What do you want to become? It's a question that young people are asked as they are starting out in life, and organisations should ask the same question. A vision is a definitive mental image of what you would like the business to be at some point in the future, based on your goals and aspirations. To inspire employees to do great work, avoid self-aggrandising statements ("to be "the biggest", "the most innovative", etc.). Instead, find a way to express the organisation's impact on the lives of customers, students, patients – whomever you're trying to serve.

Some examples:

- A financial services company: "Empowering people to stay a step ahead in life and in business."
- A food processing company: "Nourishing families so they can flourish and thrive."
- An insurance company: "To help people manage risk and recover from the hardship of unexpected loss."

What is our mission? This is often the easiest question to answer because all you need to do is examine what you are doing. Your mission is the "what" of the organisation. For example, if you work in a hospital, your mission is to care for sick or injured people and to get them back to health as quickly as possible.

What are our values? A vision and/or a mission won't mean much if they are not reinforced by strong values. Values shape the culture – that is, the way people behave toward others. Ethics and integrity should be a given. Beyond good behaviour, people also want to work in a culture where cooperation and collaboration are also standard. They also want to know their work matters and they will be recognised for it ([see point 4](#)).



3. Communication

Communication is critical during times of uncertainty; there's almost no such thing as "too much" communication – although "[Zoom fatigue](#)" is a legitimate complaint. To allay fears, to reinforce necessary changes, and to explain next steps, leaders need to ensure their communication skills are sharp. Use a variety of communication channels and modes, including one-on-one (via tools such as Zoom, Skype or Slack), to ensure messages are being understood, and to encourage two-way communication. Remember, in the absence of information, it's human nature to jump to worst-case scenarios, so ensure communication updates occur regularly; even if you don't have new information to share, be upfront and remain present and contactable.

»

Did you know?

ELMO's latest module, [Connect](#), offers instant messaging functionality and integration with Zoom video conferencing. [Contact us](#) to find out more.



4. Appropriate rewards and recognition

It's easy to assume "reward" equates to remuneration. While there's no question remuneration is always important, don't underestimate the power of a simple "thanks" for a job well done. Feeling appreciated for your work is a key part of engagement. This becomes even more critical when employees are coping without the regular interaction with managers and colleagues that occurs in a physical office environment. Virtual [rewards and recognition](#) programs, which embrace peer-to-peer initiatives and elements of gamification to reinforce the right employee behaviours, can help.

»



5. Professional development and performance management

Providing opportunities to develop the skills and careers of employees is another key contributor to engagement. Even while operating remotely, [eLearning](#) can be conducted to ensure professional development continues (see '[Training and Development](#)' section of this eBook).

Hand-in-hand with professional development are appropriate [performance management](#) processes. People want to know their work is hitting the mark by achieving goals or meeting KPIs. They also want to know where they can make improvements by perhaps undertaking further development. So, ensure regular manager/employee check-ins are occurring.

»



6. Inspirational leaders

Has there ever been a more crucial time for strong, decisive leadership? From the political sphere to the corporate world, challenging times shine the spotlight on our leaders. Sure enough, leaders play a crucial role in engagement; they inspire their employees not just to execute their jobs well, but to also find purpose within their roles.

The best leaders also take the time to get to know their employees and what makes them tick. They understand what support is required. This is even more critical during uncertain times. One McKinsey study shows that supporting employees – along with problem-solving, collaborating, and improving productivity – accounts for 89% of overall leadership effectiveness.⁸

An old maxim states: “Take care of your people, and they’ll take care of the mission”. In 2020, that maxim has never been more appropriate.



Take care of your people, and they’ll take care of the mission

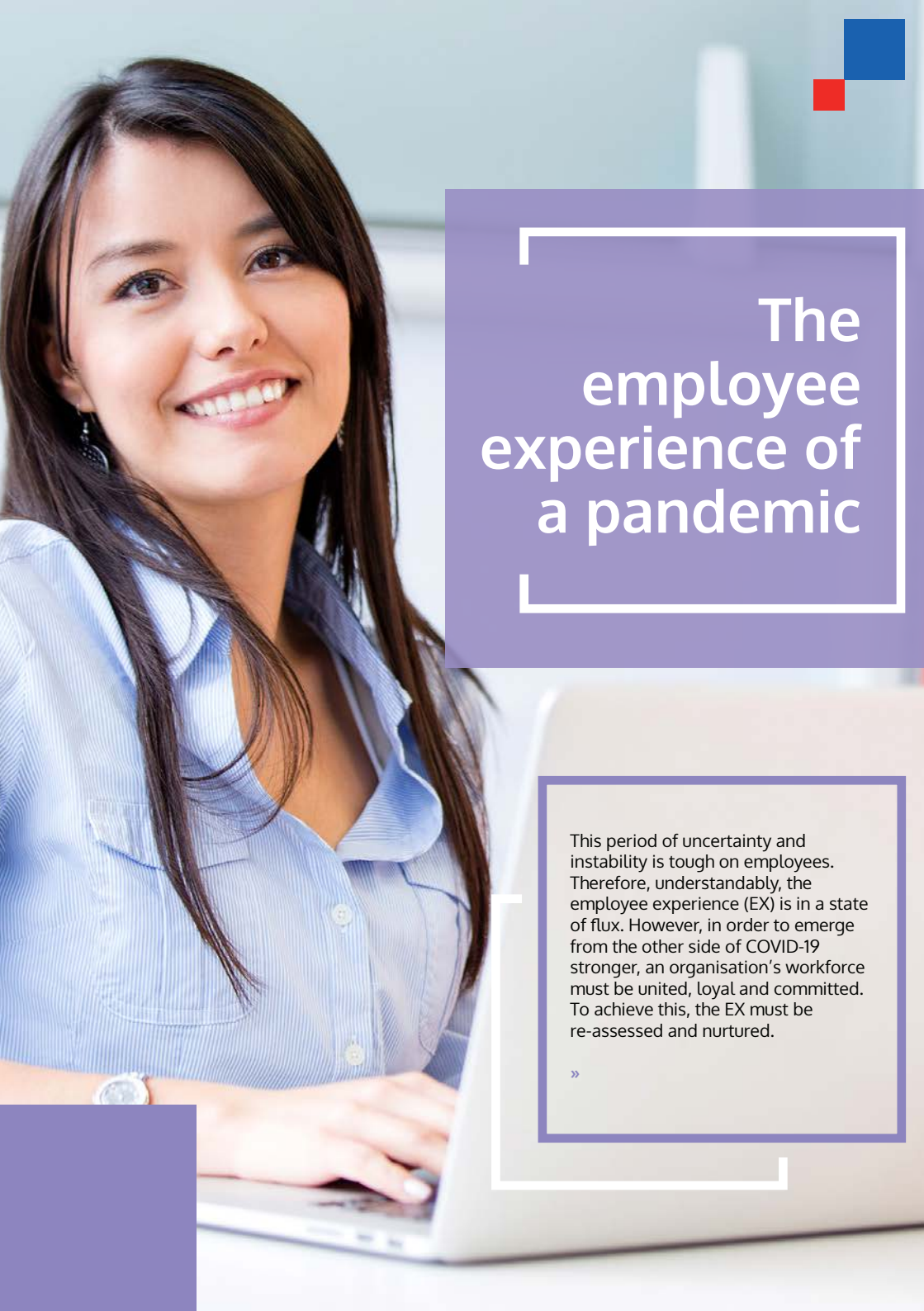


Don’t forget!

High engagement is an outcome of a positive employee experience. Every touchpoint an employee has with their employer, from ‘hire to retire’, should be assessed to ensure it has a positive impact on the experience of all employee, regardless of where they are based.



8. McKinsey’s Organizational Health Index, cited in McKinsey Quarterly article, “Decoding Leadership: What Really Matters”

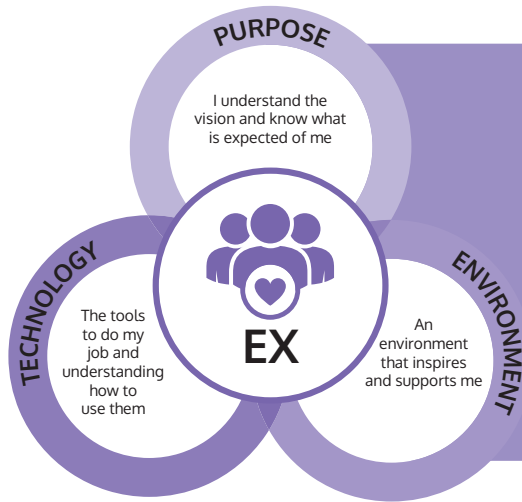


The employee experience of a pandemic

This period of uncertainty and instability is tough on employees. Therefore, understandably, the employee experience (EX) is in a state of flux. However, in order to emerge from the other side of COVID-19 stronger, an organisation's workforce must be united, loyal and committed. To achieve this, the EX must be re-assessed and nurtured.

»

What is employee experience (EX)?



“

EX is more than good coffee and being able to work from home

It's a mix of technology, purpose and the physical workplace itself

”

What is meant by the employee experience (EX)?

The EX encapsulates what people encounter, observe and feel over the course of their employee journey at an organisation. It covers every touchpoint an employee will have with their employer, from hire to retire.

The EX looks at more than engagement and culture; it brings together all the workplace, HR, and management practices that impact people on the job. It borrows heavily from customer experience (CX), using data tools and design thinking principles to optimise the company environment, culture, HR services and events.

Naomi Simson, founder of RedBalloon and co-founder of The Big Red Group, summarised the concept to ELMO back in 2018: “When we think about the employee experience, it’s not about what you give to people; it’s the framework you create for people to allow them to do their best work.”

According to Simson, employees will ask themselves three questions: *Do I know what I’m here to do? Did anyone notice? Do I feel proud to work here?* Similarly, employers should consider how well they know their employees by asking themselves questions. For example, they may ask: *What do my employees enjoy about their roles? What frustrates them? What makes them tick?* If an employer does not know the answers to these responses, they will be on the back-foot.

But what does the EX look like during COVID-19?



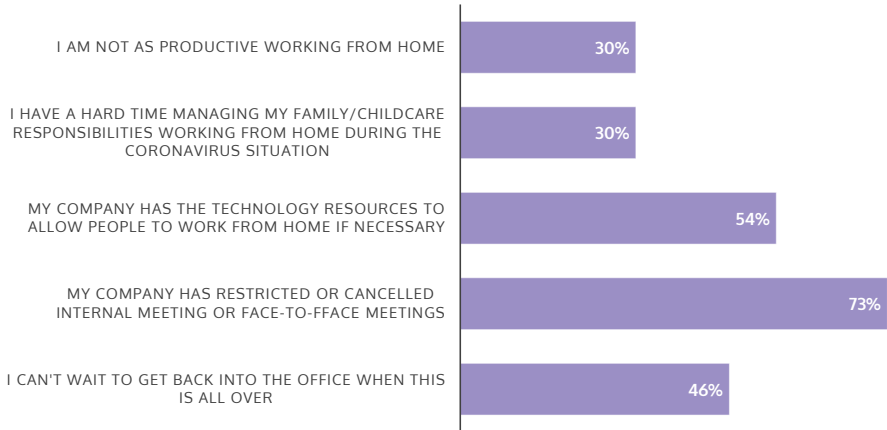
Employee concerns in Australia and New Zealand

– what to consider during COVID-19

The biggest workplace shift that has occurred as a result of COVID-19 is the shift from office-based working to remote working. According to Gartner, nearly 50% of organisations say they have at least 81% of their employees working remotely; another 15% said 61-80% of their workforce are working remotely.⁹ The shift to remote-first has changed the EX immensely, and employees have been presented with a plethora of new challenges that neither they – nor the employer – were prepared for.



Forrester's PandemicEX survey uncovered some of those key challenges. See the graph below.



Source: How Australian Employees Feel About COVID-19: Forrester's PandemicEX Survey, 2020

The results show that workers need more support when working remotely. Almost one-third (30%) of respondents admitted they are less productive when they are working from home, which isn't surprising considering only half (54%) believe their organisation has the technology and resources to enable effective remote working.

»

⁹. "Gartner HR Survey Reveals 41% of Employees Likely to Work Remotely at Least Some of the TimePost Coronavirus Pandemic", Gartner, April 2020

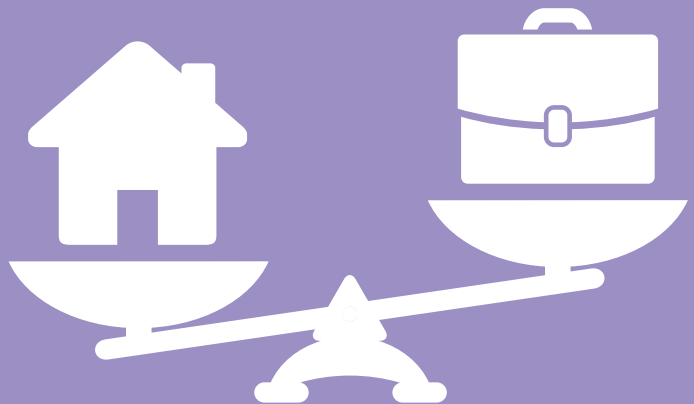
Managing family and childcare responsibilities is also a big challenge, recognised by 30% of respondents. This may be due to a number of reasons – for example, parents may struggle to complete tasks with minimal disruption whilst simultaneously providing full-time care to their children; families may not have enough computers to ensure both adults and children can simultaneously complete work tasks and virtual education, respectively; employees may struggle without the technology infrastructure (e.g. Wi-Fi connectivity) that they have in the office, etc.

Interestingly, though, less than half (46%) of respondents say they “can’t wait to get back into the office when all this is over,” which implies that, for most people, working from home is the preference. Furthermore, Gartner analysis reveals that post-pandemic, 41% of employees are likely to work remotely at least some of the time.¹⁰ It begs the question: when the time comes for office-working to resume, will it be necessary? Employers should consider the needs of their employees – both now and during the aftermath.

In New Zealand, a survey by Auckland company Frog Recruitment has revealed that working from home is the preference for many. Over two-thirds (70%) of respondents said they are anxious to return to the office when the government advises it is safe to do so because they have grown comfortable working from home.¹⁰ This shift in preferences should not be ignored; business leaders must ensure that they listen to the needs of their employees, and that the employee experience is safeguarded through every future business decision.

[Read ELMO’s blog on how employee journey mapping can help to help bolster engagement.](#)

»



10. “Kiwis anxious about a return to the office, survey finds”, Newshub.co.nz, May 2020

Protecting and reinforcing the EX during a pandemic

The situation facing businesses, communities and individuals worldwide is unprecedented. Naturally, this means that the EX has taken a new form.

Forester¹¹ identified a new set of questions that employers should be asking. **These are:**

QUESTIONS:

How are my employees feeling? What is their emotional journey during the pandemic?

What can my employees contribute at this time?

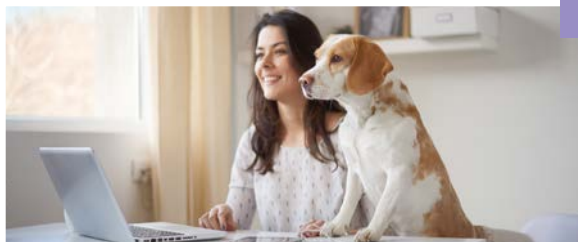
ANSWERS:

Asking the question “are you ok?” is crucial. Times of crisis have a polarising effect on emotions, so managers should be prepared for different outcomes within their teams, and individualise responses.

HR managers should facilitate regular conversations between managers and employees and provide extra guidance in the form of training, guidelines, email reminders, etc., on how to handle communication relating to COVID-19.

Employee experience is about more than managing and paying employees; it involves inviting employees to contribute to the goals of the organisation. Employers can encourage their employees to become active participants in the organisation by asking them about their experience during this time. Survey tools like [ELMO Survey](#) are useful for uncovering the pulse of a workforce.

»



11. Webinar: The Employee Experience of a Pandemic, Forrester, 2020

QUESTIONS:

What can I do,
as a leader, to
guide and motivate
my employees?

How can my
organisation
stimulate
innovation?

ANSWERS:

The “new normal” of remote working requires a great deal of trust between employer and employee. It is both counterproductive and uninspiring to micro-manage workers during a period of crisis. Rather, the key is to manage the goals of the employee/organisation/team, rather than managing the tasks. Employees need to feel like they are being measured and rewarded for their outcomes – not their tasks. Furthermore, employees shouldn’t feel they must be chained to their desks from nine-to-five; high activity does not equal high productivity. The key here is trust; when employees feel trusted, they will be motivated to accomplish more.

Coupled with trust is acknowledgement. Employers must work hard to recognise the efforts of their employees and provide rewards when earned. Rewarding and recognising employees not only motivates the workforce but it instils company values — that hard work is rewarded and the organisation is committed to the long-term success of employees.

This is the time where organisations should emphasise their company principles through the way they treat their employees. So, when the recovery comes, the values are clear and staff are motivated to accomplish their goals

Employers may also adopt tools and technologies (e.g. software or automation tools) if they aid productivity and inspiration. Employers may also use this time to encourage employee learning and development. Up-skilling, re-skilling and cross-skilling staff will help to insulate a company against future risk.

Investing in the EX now will solidify loyalty, dedication and commitment within your workforce, which will bring high returns when the recovery phase inevitably commences.



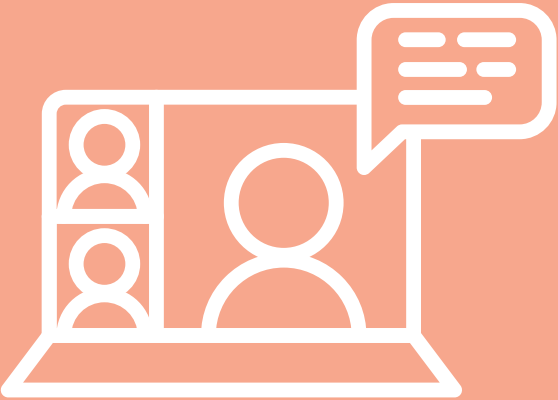
Communication and performance management

Remote working, in theory, shouldn't compromise business outcomes. After all, if employees can complete their work online using cloud-based software, they should be able to maintain productivity and performance, despite their changing work environments.

Nevertheless, most managers are not accustomed to managing remote workers for long periods of time, and therefore may require some guidance.

To maintain momentum, achieve high performance and keep spirits up, business leaders should concentrate on two fundamentals of good people management: communication and performance

»





Communication

Communication is essential when managing remote workers in times of crisis. In fact, there is almost no such thing as too much communication in times like this – although “Zoom fatigue” is a genuine concern. Anxiety and fear are contagious and is fuelled through isolation and loneliness. Managers can reduce these feelings through regular communication and virtual engagement initiatives.

Slack, Zoom, Skype and Microsoft Teams are valuable tools for enabling remote workers to take part in virtual team collaboration, which mitigates feelings of loneliness but also aids productivity. Instant messaging tools like Slack connect employees in real-time, and audio and video-conferencing tools like Zoom feed employees’ craving for social interaction.

To aid high-quality communication and collaboration, [ELMO Cloud HR & Payroll](#) has recently launched [ELMO Connect](#), which offers instant messaging functionality and integration with Zoom video conferencing. Discover how ELMO Connect can assist your organisation.

More tips for encouraging quality communication are below.

- 1. Make time for small talk** – When working remotely, it can be easy to forget how to talk to colleagues about anything besides work. However, removing the simple acts of human connection is detrimental to engagement and productivity levels. Managers should make a conscious effort to have a non-work chat at the beginning of the working day (and throughout) and continue to build rapport with team members to reinstate the human bond that feeds positive work outcomes. Even the most introverted person craves connection on a personal level, so it’s important to interact with employees like you would in the office.
- 2. Reinforce communication etiquette** – Online communication can be tricky and clumsy and, like the previous point touched on, people can forget they are talking to other humans who need positive social interaction. As a manager, you must reinforce politeness, patience and consideration within your team when communicating virtually. Just because two people are not interacting face-to-face, doesn’t mean quality socialising must be compromised.
- 3. Use video as much as you can** – Although face-to-face interaction isn’t possible, we are lucky enough to be in an age where the next best thing – video-chatting – is accessible. It is advised that managers jump on video calls regularly to discuss tasks – big and small. This will maintain collaborative and routine work, despite the environment.
- 4. Spread optimism** – What employees need in times of crisis is their leader to show an optimistic outlook. Managers who actively raise team morale and cheerlead their team’s efforts will achieve greater productivity and will come out stronger the other end. Championing a team through uncertain times and keeping them feeling positive and motivated is arguably the biggest responsibility a manager has right now.



Performance management

Out of sight, out of mind? Not necessarily, although one of the biggest challenges of remote working is finding new ways to monitor employees' output, as measuring hours worked is less effective in a work-from-home situation. This is no surprise – we have been trained to be productive in an office environment for over a century and learning at-home work practices are relatively new.

"The proof is in the pudding" is a common phrase but isn't the easiest way to measure whether key performance indicators (KPIs) and objectives and key results (OKRs) are being met. Instead, alternate ways of measuring performance must be found. This differs depending on role and industry, but some tips can be found below.



- 1. Conduct regular one-to-ones.** Keeping an open dialogue through times of change and disruption is key to monitoring not only the productivity of your team members, but also their wellbeing. Without the disruption rife in traditional office space, managers will find themselves with more time to give on a one-to-one basis, which is a definite benefit. What's more, different team members will react in different ways. Some will be totally fine, while other may require more support.
- 2. Focus on performance relating specifically to remote working.** Remote working – especially for businesses that operate entirely office-first – is trial and error, and managers should endeavour to seek as much feedback on the process from their team as possible. It is natural for drastic change to impact productivity, routine and motivation, but by making performance reviews and one-to-ones specifically related to the remote working experience, managers can gauge more information and gain actionable insights.
- 3. Encourage self-assessment.** Remote working requires employers to trust that their employees are completing their work. That being said, managers may ask employees to account for their time using spreadsheet documents and to-do lists.





Building a better employee/manager relationship: the questions to ask

As many people managers have already discovered since COVID-19 turned business operations upside down, one of the challenges of remote working is keeping communication levels up. Even with the benefit of video-conferencing technology, what's often missing from virtual manager / employee interactions are the visual cues such as facial expressions and body language. It's therefore easy to overlook the nuances that can provide deeper insights into how your employees are really coping.

»





To combat this, managers may need to consider making some subtle changes to how they chat with remote-working staff members. Some well thought-out questions can help managers read between the lines, to help focus on issues that are left unspoken. Here are 8 questions to ask (with follow-ups), and what the responses may uncover.

Questions to ask	Follow-up questions	What can the responses reveal?
<p><i>What are you enjoying most – and least – about working from home?</i></p>	<p>What is a highlight of a typical working day – and why is that so enjoyable?</p> <p>What is a low point of a typical working day – and why is that such a struggle?</p> <p>Tell me what work task you think you'll enjoy most this week?</p>	<p>Employee motivators and demotivators.</p> <p>It's important to know what drives your employees, and equally what has the opposite effect. Get to know what these elements are in a lockdown environment. This may also provide valuable insights into what your team members enjoy doing outside of work hours. This is a time of extreme personal disruption – for example, staff may be caring for vulnerable family members. Empathy has never been more critical.</p>
<p><i>Can you walk me through your typical daily routine?</i></p>	<p>How often do you take breaks from work?</p> <p>How do you prioritise your daily/ weekly/monthly workload?</p> <p>Are you finding time to undertake physical exercise and recharge mentally (e.g. through meditation or yoga)?</p>	<p>Time management and self-care capabilities.</p> <p>Without having an office to go to each day, established workflows and the ability to prioritise tasks can take a hit. These questions can uncover if employees are feeling overwhelmed.</p> <p>Equally, these questions can open up a discussion about the importance of maintaining physical and mental well-being. Regularly check that employees feel cared for and safe. Support them to make decisions about how they can operate effectively though this crisis.</p>

Questions to ask	Follow-up questions	What can the responses reveal?
<i>Can you outline – or show me with technology – your workplace set-up?</i>	<p>If you could improve your remote work productivity by 10%, what would you suggest changing to your physical work environment?</p> <p>Do you find the technology tools you use satisfactory?</p>	<p>Challenges and opportunities relating to the physical environment.</p> <p>It's important to ensure employees have optimised their physical work-from-home environment so that health and safety is not compromised, and to keep productivity up.</p> <p>If possible, ask them to show you their workspace with video cameras. Alternatively, create a self-check questionnaire relating to WHS, technology and other issues (a guide to the sorts of questions to ask can be found here).</p>
<i>How are you coping with social distancing and not seeing colleagues in-person?</i>	<p>Is there anything else the company can do to support you during these times?</p> <p>Are the technology tools used for communication and collaboration helping you to stay connected?</p>	<p>Level of social connectivity.</p> <p>Human beings are by nature social creatures. Without face-to-face interactions, it's easy for people to feel isolated. Supporting employees with the right tools can go some way to easing anxiety.</p> <p>Organise virtual group activities such as yoga and meditation, or social activities such as a Friday afternoon wine club, book clubs and group personal development sessions.</p>
<i>Who do you connect with most often at work?</i>	<p>Are there any co-workers that you wish you had a better connection with?</p> <p>If you've got suggestions for improving work processes or just general suggestions about work issues, who do you go to?</p>	<p>Support networks and work-flow insights.</p> <p>From HR to IT, there are multiple colleagues that most staff rely on to do their jobs well. Uncovering these connections – even if some are unexpected – can improve workflows and cross-team dynamics.</p>

Questions to ask

Follow-up questions

What can the responses reveal?

Do you feel you can collaborate with others and take part in virtual meetings?

Are there any technology-related issues preventing you from taking part in meetings – e.g. can you see and hear when you are on a tele-conference?

Do you feel like you get enough of a say in team meetings?

Team dynamics and collaboration.

Those taking part in meetings remotely in the past may have felt disadvantaged if other team members were all on-site. Today, with whole teams operating remotely, this is less likely – but there can still be technological issues hindering collaboration. The responses to these questions can also unearth problems with the structure of meeting agendas and whether people feel they “have a voice”.

Is there any company or team information you feel you're missing out on?

Is the company / team communicating enough, and through the right channels?

Are you concerned about anything that I can help with or find answers to?

Information flow gaps.

With the work context changing so rapidly, it's important that information to employees keeps pace. Try to understand what information people need and provide it to them, quickly and regularly. Always be open to suggestions on how this information flow can be improved.

Proactively say where you can give certainty and where you can't at this time – you won't have all the answers, but endeavour to find out the answers as soon as possible.





Questions to ask	Follow-up questions	What can the responses reveal?
<i>Is there anything you'd like me to change in terms of how we interact, or feedback you'd like me to share?</i>	<p>Was there anything your previous managers did that you'd recommend I do as well?</p> <p>Is there anything you don't like about my management style?</p>	<p>Insight to manager / employee relations.</p> <p>Any relationship is two-way, so it's important to ask questions about how you can improve as a manager. For example, with remote workers it's even more important to clarify expectations, communicate clearly and be assertive. And remember, what works for one team member may not work for another, so making (reasonable) adjustments to how you interact and communicate with team members can make a huge difference.</p> <p>These questions will also help you get the most from one-on-one meetings with team members.</p>



With so much happening, it can be tempting for managers to bunker down and raise the drawbridge; however, this approach is not recommended as the consequences may be damaging.

Now, more than ever, managers need to be mindful of how employees are coping with significant changes and doing everything within their power to make them comfortable with untested working conditions.

Meaningful conversations that get “beneath the surface” are one way to build trust and confidence.





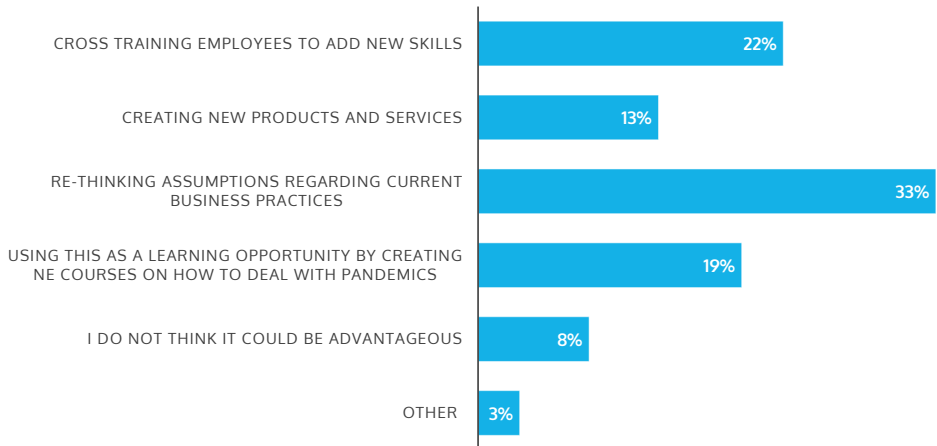
Training and development

When Coronavirus hit, the knee-jerk reaction was to cancel all training initiatives or at least shift them to a time when face-to-face training could once again occur. Neither of these options is ideal. In fact, now is the time to continue with learning initiatives, and possibly even to introduce some new elements. With more time on their hands – thanks to no commutes and fewer office-related disruptions – many employees are keen to upskill or reskill. eLearning provides a golden opportunity for this to happen.

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Which of the following ways could the coronavirus outbreak be advantageous to your business function?



Source: Future Workplace's survey, The Impact of the Coronavirus in the Workplace, March 2020

Not surprisingly,
the top response
was to view it as an
opportunity to re-think
assumptions

The graph above is based off a survey of HR professionals done in late March, just as the real impact of Coronavirus was starting to be understood. Respondents were asked how the Coronavirus outbreak could actually be advantageous to their business.

Not surprisingly, the top response was to view it as an opportunity to re-think assumptions about their products, services and business model, possibly with a view to re-emerging onto the market with something new to offer.

However, the second and third most popular responses relate to learning: cross-training employees to add new skills; and using this as a learning opportunity by creating new courses on how to deal with pandemics. In other words, it's not just businesses that might emerge with something new, but individuals as well.



Training during a pandemic



Every organisation has been forced to adapt to these unusual circumstances, and this has naturally had an impact on the learning opportunities on offer.

Some organisations have seen increased demand for their products / services during COVID-19 (for example, food delivery, hygiene supplies, health and pharmaceutical). Employees in these organisations should be focused on delivering peak performance – indeed, you may wish to cancel or reschedule all non-essential training until a later date. Any training that doesn't help your organisation handle this crisis should be considered non-essential. Pandemic or “essential” training requests can be grouped into four categories:

- **Policy-based**, such as educating employees about your company's sick leave or remote work policies
- **Technology-based**, such as showing people how to use company hardware and software to work from home, including how to log on and access applications securely
- **Health and safety-based**, such as reminding people of how to practice good hygiene and social distancing measures
- **Customer-focused**, such as training staff to answer customer questions about your company's response to pandemic

On the other hand, if your organisation has seen a decline in demand for products or services. Now is the perfect time to invest in the skills of your employees. Here are four key areas that you might need to modify or focus on to suit the current circumstances:

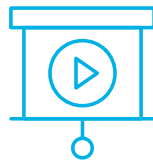
- Moving up and re-prioritising annual compliance training
- Shifting in-person or blended training initiatives completely online
- Promoting existing professional development opportunities available through your company
- Launching new learning opportunities that can lead to competitive advantage for your workforce

COVID-19 has made eLearning the focal point of most training and development initiatives. Indeed, the Coronavirus and the enforcement of social distancing may be eLearning's “coming of age” as more and more organisations come to acknowledge its flexibility and cost-effectiveness.

»

What is tech facilitating?

- **Learner-centric learning:** Training paths today can be based on the learner's preferences. The structure of courses now focuses on the learner, then the content, which can be customised based on role, skill level and industry
- **Immersive learning:** Virtual Reality is providing immersive learning experiences, while Augmented Reality is integrating content, interactions with peers and learning managers, and assessments. In addition, social learning will eventually become second nature to future workers
- **Learning anytime, anywhere, on any device:** Mobile devices are allowing for continuous training accessibility, done from any location
- **Video-aided learning:** Multimedia training can be more engaging for learners accustomed to digesting media delivered through many different formats. It's significant that 7 out of 10 organisations have integrated video-based online training to their learning cultures¹²
- **Self-directed learning:** Learning styles such as micro-credentials are now allowing learners to choose an area of focus, how they want to learn, and then allowing them to demonstrate mastery



The key to eLearning is flexibility. It's self-directed, social and informal. It's continuous, consumable, highly relevant and, of course, available on-demand. By its very nature it is "bottom-up", driven by employees themselves. Just as critically, it provides bite-sized chunks of knowledge at just the right time, when it is most needed. That means there's no more waiting for longer, scheduled courses.

Even before COVID-19, the rise Gen Y and Gen Z – "digital natives" who have grown up never having known life without the internet – were forcing employers to change how learning was delivered. These generations expect to instantly access and consume content online. Whether it's Snapchat, Netflix, or your LMS, engaging content should only be a few clicks away.

Keen to know more?
Read our blog on [the online courses you should enrol your employees in now.](#)

¹². 2017 Workplace Learning Report, LinkedIn



Building resilient teams...

Resilience is universally defined as your ability to cope with tough times by applying your inner strength and engaging support networks.¹³ Resilience can enable you to face difficult situations and maintain good mental health. Sounds like an invaluable trait to hold right about now...

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13. healthdirect.gov.au/resilience

Unfortunately, whenever resilience is mentioned it's often accompanied by two interlinked myths. The first is the commonly held belief that resilience is not something you can develop; you're either born with it or you're not. The second myth is that you can only build resilience through experience. Both are untrue. Anyone can build resilience – and there are techniques to build resilience both in yourself and in others.

Dispelling these myths is important, because if anything will get people through COVID-19 it will be resilience, especially in the workplace. Resilience is as much a characteristic of high-performing groups as of high-performing individuals – but what's perhaps less known is the key role leaders play in building resilient teams.



In practice, here are 4 ways leaders and managers can build resilience in their teams.

1. Walk the talk



Managers and leaders play a key role in promoting adaptive behaviours. How they respond to setbacks plays an important role in building resilience in teams. Their response can either be a model for building or eroding resilience. If managers and leaders show resilient behaviour and thinking, they can spark it in others. Simple ways to do this include promoting optimism about the achievement of goals, celebrating success, and promoting learning from failure (but not dwelling it). An ability to embrace failure will determine how well team members grow and learn in a high-pressure environment. A negative relationship to failure or not allowing teams to innovate for fear of failure can inhibit growth.

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2. Build a culture of support



Leaders also have a major impact on how their team members interact with each other. While maintaining productivity and profitability remains a key priority regardless of external conditions, instead of focusing solely on results, leaders should also focus on their relationship with employees and their relationship with the company. Be transparent about each employee's role within the company and why their contribution matters. Empathise with them when they're having rough days.

Not sure where to start or what your team members need most of all? Ask them! Listen to your team, act on the feedback they provide, and, importantly, communicate this message: "I hear you, and here's what we've done based on your feedback." An engagement or pulse survey – such as those offered by [ELMO Survey](#) – can help.

Leaders and managers are uniquely placed to develop a collective sense of purpose, cohesion and belonging among their team members. There are echoes here of resilient families. Organisational psychologists have discovered that the more resilient families tend to promote family cohesion, celebrate family events, develop a culture of their own, support and advocate for one another, and display good communication. The same foundations can apply to work teams.

Also remember that shared purpose and values will give employees the sense of belonging they so desperately need right now. With quarantines and social distancing applicable everywhere, employees need a sense of connection, so make sure you're communicating regularly through multiple channels.

3. Develop a sense of purpose and belonging



4. Know your team



A separate study¹⁴ found that resilient teams are intimately familiar with one another's knowledge, skills and abilities, so they can draw upon the right expertise at the right time. At a time when work is far from normal, this ability to improvise and develop new ideas to handle adversity is like gold. The manager or leader should acutely understand individual strengths and skillsets.

Resilience is not about buckling down and redoubling your efforts, especially as that may not be possible in the new world of work. A "head down, tail up" approach without time for reflection may even lead to burnout. Work smarter, not harder, and take the time to appreciate the strengths of individuals in your team. Everyone has strength within – sometimes we just need a helping hand to draw it out.

14. Survey of 2,000 National Collegiate Athletic Association coaches, cited in "The 4 Things Resilient Teams Do", Harvard Business Review



The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) during COVID-19

In this pandemic-stricken world, the role of businesses in society has expanded; in addition to existing responsibilities, businesses must now be more community-focused to support government action. Everyone has a responsibility to step up and do their part to quash the coronavirus.

As Aaron McEwan, VP of Advisory at Gartner points out, "How [organisations] respond [to coronavirus] could have enormous implications for their employer brand, corporate reputation and even their financial survival". Therefore, business leaders must take this as an opportunity to make a positive impact and do the right thing by society.

A recent Havas Meaningful Brands Study looked at the consumer perception of brands during crisis. It found:¹⁵

- 78% said that they will have a stronger affiliation to brands and businesses who go above and beyond
- 78% believe brands need to adapt their business to help the greater good during the COVID-19 crisis
- 66% have even gone as far as saying that they will abandon brands and businesses that only act in their own self-interest in the current environment

The above statistics clearly indicate that consumers think brands should play an active role in supporting people during this pandemic. Rising to this challenge is known as corporate social responsibility (CSR). Of course, the scope by which businesses can "give back" is relative and depends on their own standing.

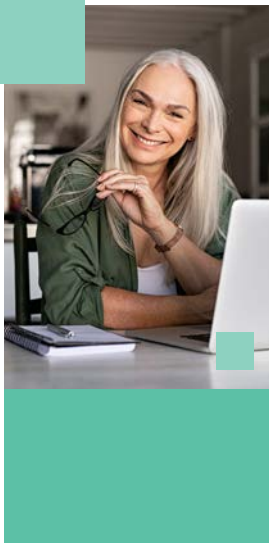
There are three main types of CSR: environmental, ethical and philanthropic. Examples of CSR include:

- Engaging in charitable giving and community volunteering
- Making socially and environmentally conscious investments
- Improving labour policies and embracing fair trade
- Changing corporate policies and introducing initiatives to benefit the environment (e.g. reducing carbon footprint or going "green")

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, CSR has become even more critical. Communities around Australia and New Zealand have been experiencing extreme hardship – with hospitals and foodbanks, for example, having a higher demand for supplies and assistance.

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15. ["Is there a new post-crisis era for brands? The research says yes", Dynamic Business, 2020](#)



Corporations in Australia and New Zealand are doing what they can to help those in need. For example, Nestlé announced it will donate a minimum of \$2 million worth of products including coffees, cereals, pet food and meal bases to be distributed through Foodbank Australia's 2400 charity agencies to help those who are vulnerable. It was also reported that, as of 1st April, New Zealanders had raised \$850,000 for The Salvation Army in response to a call for donations to accommodate the growing demand on its foodbanks.


There have also been reports of donations of personal protective equipment (PPE) to hospitals, as well as support to non-profit services and charities who help those in need of mental health assistance, domestic violence support, etc. What's more, many businesses – small and large – around Australia and New Zealand have reportedly been reducing the price of their products and services to alleviate some pressure on their customers.

The degree to which a business can “give back” during COVID-19 depends on their unique situation in a universally unique time. However, there is always something that can be done – big or small. Forbes¹⁶ has identified some initial questions businesses can ask themselves:

- Who are our core partners and how are they? Do we have the capacity to shift how we do things?
- What major COVID-19 related concerns is my organisation positioned to solve? Do our products, brands, talent or services lend themselves to helpful engagement right now? If so, how can we best and most effectively deploy this value?
- Is my labour force working at capacity? If not, is there a way to repurpose roles/teams to fill new needs and maintain productivity?
- Can we offer help to the healthcare system?
- Can we join forces with those doing similar work? Can we create new partnerships and collaborations to benefit the community?

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16. [“The power of purpose: how CSR should be acting like first responders to tackle coronavirus”, Forbes, March 2020](#)



Below are three ideas for enhancing your organisation's commitment to CSR:

1. Support local businesses and local non-profits

The economic fallout from COVID-19 will affect communities for weeks and months to come. Therefore, it's important that communities club together to keep each other afloat. Instead of investing financially in large corporations, businesses should, where they can, give their business to those smaller and/or struggling. They should also invest in local non-profits who are responding to COVID-19 but don't have the capability to fundraise on a larger scale, and therefore are receiving fewer charitable donations. By receiving cash donations, local non-profits can purchase goods and services that will best serve the community's unique needs.

2. Give attention to mental wellness

The repercussions of COVID-19 have had negative impacts on the mental wellbeing of many Australians and New Zealanders – accelerated mostly by social distancing and working remotely. Business leaders should do what they can to extend support to their employees through an employee assistance program (EAP) and partner with other charities and support services.

Financial stress may also be impacting employee health and wellbeing, so businesses should look at ways they can offer support or financial relief to staff. This could be in the form of childcare assistance or offering more paid leave so that employees can care for dependents at home.

[Read our 5 tips for dealing with COVID-19 anxiety.](#)

3. Virtual volunteering

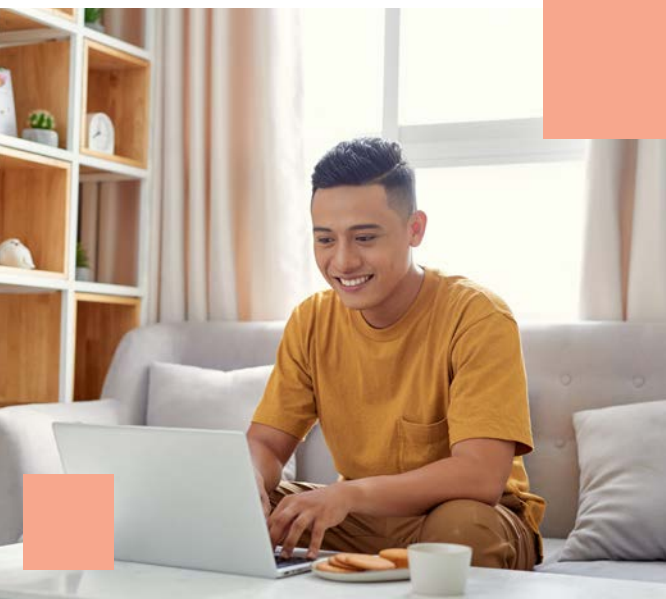
In-person volunteering isn't possible right now, but there are ways remote employees can "give back", even when sat at their desks. Businesses leaders should look to connect employees with not-for-profits that are making a positive impact around the world, and that align with their own values. GlobalGivingTime is an online virtual volunteering platform that connects businesses with not for profits around the world. [Points of Light](#) is another non-profit, nonpartisan global network that connects volunteer-mobilising organisations around the world.



Rewards and recognition

Even outside of a pandemic situation, an effective rewards and recognition program is one of the main drivers of employee engagement, and a key reason that employees might stay or leave. It can also bolster productivity and morale as employees have something to strive for.

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Although rewards and recognition are often grouped together, it's useful to look at both elements separately. First, recognition. The fundamentals of a recognition program in a work from home situation are the same as any other situation – it may just need some tweaking in the delivery methods used. For one thing, recognition must still be specific (tied to a particular behaviour the recipient has demonstrated or an activity they have done well). It must also be carried out in real time. The longer the gap between the deed and the recognition, the less effective the recognition is.

A quick congratulatory email that no one else sees probably isn't going to cut it – although never underestimate the motivational power of a “thanks for a great job” pat on the back from a manager or peer. Why not devote some time during your weekly virtual team meetings to recognising the exceptional work of a team member? It's also worth remembering that what gets recognised gets repeated. When the recognition is made public, perhaps through social channels or during those team meetings, it amplifies it and increases trust and transparency along the way.

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Read our blog on [how to do peer-to-peer recognition well](#).



Managers play a key role here. They need to be present and aware of the great things that are happening and bring these to light. This is important when people cannot see amazing work happening in person.

When it comes to rewards, the default is to think that this only means financial rewards. While bonuses and commissions will always be highly regarded by employees, in tougher financial times they may not always be possible. Non-monetary rewards can play an important role in keeping motivation levels up – and just as critically, they can be just as gratefully received as financial rewards.

Examples of non-financial rewards are below:

- Partner with stakeholders and local businesses to give gift cards or vouchers to high-performing and deserving employees – e.g. a lunch voucher for a local restaurant/café
- Face-to-face praise through video conferencing tools like Zoom and [ELMO Connect](#)
- Use company-wide communication channels like Slack to recognise the efforts of employees (both work-related efforts and community efforts)
- Implement an Employee of the Month program – voted for by peers
- Provide opportunities for professional development by putting employees forward for training and development programs
- Offer extra paid or unpaid leave entitlements

The admin burden of keeping track of rewards programs and tallying points, etc. can be daunting. Technology such as [ELMO Rewards & Recognition](#) can help by automating processes relating to rewards & recognition, including the tracking of peer nominations and sending notifications and reminders.





How can ELMO help ?

ELMO Cloud HR & Payroll can help business leaders manage their workforce, even while operating remotely. As a cloud-based solution, ELMO helps employers manage their teams from anywhere at any time from a secure, centralised database. All employee-employer touchpoints are covered by ELMO's suite, from 'hire to retire'. This includes recruitment, onboarding, performance management, payroll, rostering / time & attendance, learning & development, and more. For further information, [contact us](#).

For further information, tips and best practice examples of people management, visit our [COVID-19 Resources Hub](#).



For further information

Contact us

