



Association
of International
Certified Professional
Accountants™

AICPA® CIMA®

Human Signals

Exploring how new patterns of behavior from
COVID-19 are affecting the accounting profession

August 2020

Developed in partnership with



Introduction to this report

In the last 50 years, the global community has seldom faced multiple challenges as it has had to endure in 2020. From the evolving public health challenges arising from COVID-19 and its impact on financial markets at the global, national and local level, to the highlighted deep social, political and economic divisions across the world, our community has been challenged in a way that many predict will take years or decades to recover.

Global representative bodies, governments, nonprofit organizations and business all have a role to play in ensuring the community they serve is able to recover quickly and continue the progress made before these most recent challenges.

The Association has a responsibility to the accounting profession, its practitioners and the communities it serves to advocate, innovate and guide the profession in a post-pandemic world. We will do this by strengthening our ties with our members and students and building new relationships with partners and governments. Key to this is ensuring that we, the Association, are able to provide informed and robust intelligence across a range of key topics. The content in this report serves to highlight the human impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the profession, its practitioners and the wider community. It aims to empower all readers and provide some guidance on how to navigate a highly unpredictable future.

We are living and working through a time of profound change. The COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent lockdowns have forced significant changes upon our day-to-day lives. However, this crisis has also demonstrated that we are capable of making the impossible possible.

Working with our partner EY Seren, we have researched the crisis to make sense of the situation. We would like to share our reflections of what it means for our community of accounting professionals.

Our mission

We will enable a dynamic and adaptive accounting profession; one that is informed and able to meet the demands — within the profession and the community it serves — in a constantly changing and uncertain world.

How we approached the research

1. Starting hypotheses 2. Agile research approach 3. Synthesized insights 4. Edition 1

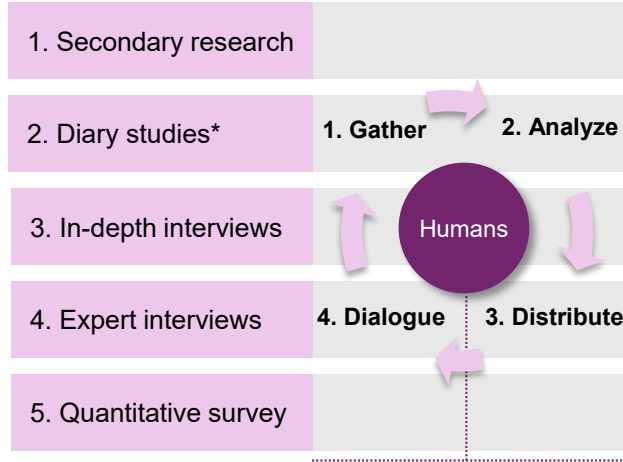
We started by defining research hypotheses relevant to the profession.

We believe that COVID-19 has:

- Changed the face of communities
- Amplified the need for speed and flexibility of learning
- Challenged the purpose of the accounting profession and its role in the community

*Detailed description of hypotheses is overleaf

Over the past three months, our partner EY Seren has been conducting research around COVID-19's impact on human behavior which has informed the creation of four reports called, "Human Signals". We draw on the insights from these reports, as well as specific insights developed by the Association over the past three months.



*EY Seren customers in the U.K recorded behaviour diaries



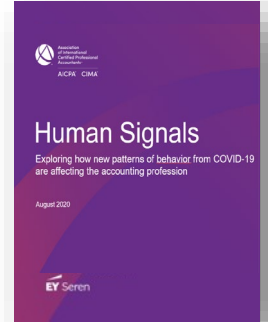
We looked at all Human Signal reports through the lens of declared hypotheses and defined the most relevant insights to the accounting and finance profession.



The Association's research insights

- Lost sense of belonging
- Reinvention of working practices
- Polarized experiences
- The need to adapt and adapt more
- A million new normals
- Daily dissonance
- New purpose in service

The insights from our initial research were then tailored and combined with internal insights and presented in this document.



Our starting hypotheses for how COVID-19 affects the profession



The face of community is changing

We believe the crisis has changed how we gather, socialize and collaborate in communities. The crisis has shown how digitization and personalization can both bring communities together as well as force them apart. For some, the loss of their original community models has left them uncertain of how to connect; for others, it has inspired opportunities to connect in new ways.



The need for speed and flexibility of learning

We believe the crisis has accelerated us into a new era of digital learning. In a world that can change overnight, new skills of adaptation, agility, compassionate leadership and empathy for clients are rising in influence. At the same time, how we learn has changed. The new era is characterized by greater personalization, tailoring and omnichannel access. This spells the end of a one-size-fits-all approach to learning.



Purpose needs to have value beyond profit

We believe finance professionals are looking beyond their professional accountancy commitments and values and are grappling with the reality that the world needs radical change. They are challenging themselves and their employers to better connect purpose with planet and profit.

Overview of insights

From our research, we have identified seven key insights which we feel are relevant to the accounting profession.

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The anatomy of our insights (See references on page 18.)



Daily dissonance

Being forced into circumstances we haven't seen firsthand before, people end up having split perceptions that they change like measurable trends.

- Self-identifying values vs. Workplace events
- Social-identifying values vs. Public spotlight
- Personal freedom vs. Corporate control
- Open-minded Extrinsic vs. Reserved colleague
- Climate activists vs. Multi-national businesses

The contradictory beliefs that co-exist in our minds are causing significant psychological stress, which is reducing the quality of life for everyone.

As a result people may lose their values or beliefs, which may leave organizations or industries, unable to leverage new information that goes against their previous, longer-held values or needs that had caused their dissonance.

The cause is simple – certainly, the only way to support people in resolving their confused emotional reactions is to help them to build sources of emotional truth.

The cognitive dissonance challenge gets even bigger: that you are holding accountable the interests of others, like subscribers, clients, the public, and so on in this scenario is to open up your vulnerabilities to reveal ideas and get back and to use negative strength, and enhance better human connections as a solution.

How long will it last?

It is expected to rise in each business and across the back of certainty during the crisis. People yearn for certainty, yet leaders need to balance the need to lead with transparency and confidence in the long-term and working with customers and partners in the face of ongoing uncertainty (to generate creative empathy). In the work, learn to change how you connect. To take a more "customer-centric" approach and connect to deliver what's valuable today.

Supporting evidence

Nearly three quarters (73%) report that clients are struggling to open their doors, and many are reporting that they are struggling to pay their bills. The Association of Certified Chartered Accountants is seeing a similar trend. In May, 17% of accountants reported that clients had decreased the amount of being their own boss."

The coronavirus not only co-opts our hearts, but exploits our cognitive biases. Humans construct stories to manage meaning from uncertainty and purpose from chaos. We crave simple narratives, but the pandemic offers none.

Implications today

- Support your customers and colleagues by offering them real advice and engagement options rather than simple empathic ones. This may mean making hard decisions in the absence of clear government policy.
- Take proactive steps in identifying customers that may need help, or at least need explicit points of contact that if they are the others, you will be needed to the point.

Implications tomorrow

- Be careful not to expose hard truths on colleagues or customers unless you are confident in your own perspective. Transparency, honesty and the willingness and ability to face the truth are how they return to the world.
- Provide a range of positions and roles within the company that are not tied to customer experience you provide.

Hoping for the best, expecting the worst

Phase 1 & 2 Social distancing & isolation 18 weeks

Almost every country has progressed through this phase, gradually recognizing the threat, deciding on their strategy and isolating people as a result.

Phase 3 Pulsing & false recovery 12–18 months

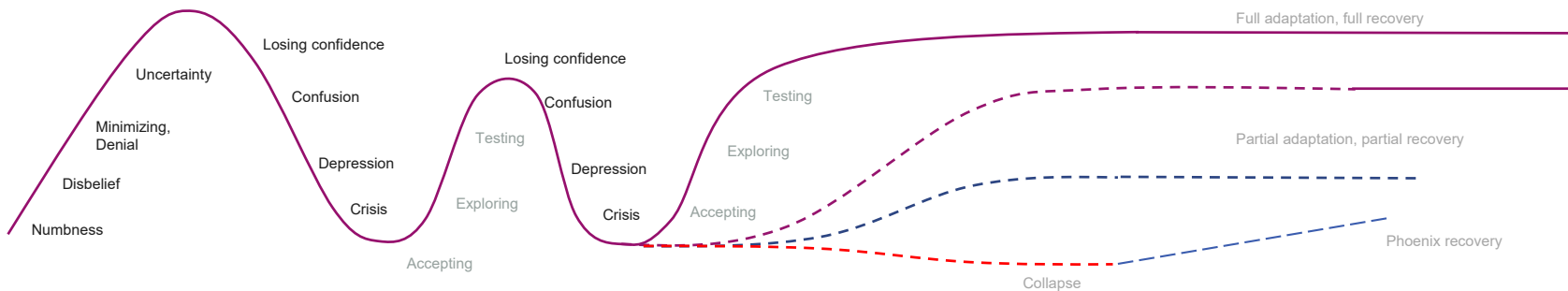
Many countries are moving out of phase 3, either cautiously or at speed to balance the risks to health and the economy. Regional and temporary isolation is pulsed as infection spikes occur.

Phase 4 Pulsing & true recovery 12–18 months

As government stimulus programs are withdrawn, the true impact of the crisis is being revealed, leading to insolvencies and redundancies. A new economic crisis is emerging, forcing people into a second wave of recovery. At the same time, we can't rule out a second wave of infections.

Phase 5 & 6 Vaccine & immunity 24 months

Forty global teams hunt for a vaccine, while ultimate immunity remains inconclusive.



Gradual awareness leads to overnight change in behavior. People are forced to rapidly shift behavior to adjust to lockdown restrictions.

Service providers focus on short-term service resilience and continuity.

Many people begin to accept aspects of the crisis, exploring and testing new ways of living and working. Others take longer to adapt, adapt less well or not at all. A strong government stimulus helps sustain normality.

Providers step back and start adapting existing journeys and channels, and launch new propositions to help clients begin to recover.

As the economic stimulus is removed, a wave of insolvencies and redundancies damage much of the recovery work, with people now needing to pick themselves up again.

Successful providers are better prepared for this new spike of demand with new propositions in place to help clients and employees through the change.

A range of end states materialize, based on two variables – how well the individual recovered and how long it has taken them. Some people will have to invent new futures for themselves, while others recover through interventions.

Successful providers survive recession with their strategy and purpose intact, and are able to innovate at speed, remotely and at low-cost to create an effective future for their clients and colleagues.



The face of community is changing

1. Losing a sense of belonging

Everyone's lost something to COVID-19 and **everyone's navigating the recovery from this loss**. Personal loss includes death of loved ones, income, security and freedom.

Lockdown restrictions and working from home has **taken away essential elements of our day-to-day professional lives**: serendipity, spontaneity, frictionless communication, even small talk have all been subdued. Going a level up, many of us have lost **security, agency, identity and independence**.

Loss is a well-established area of psychological inquiry. It can lead to **depression, anxiety and lack of motivation**.

Understanding two key dimensions of our collective sense of loss is crucial for supporting people through this crisis:

Resources: Access to resources is an indicator of how well someone will recover from loss. If you have access to information, support and money, you're more likely to recover.

Capacity: Although you may have access to resources, you may not have the capacity to apply them due to the effects of grief, redundancy or workload.

When it comes to the loss of human contact, we are finding ourselves in a catch-22. While social relationships are seen as a leading stress-recovery instrument, it is still unclear whether we can **facilitate human contact deep enough to fall in love, get a job or secure a business deal through solely our screens**.

How long will it last?

There's a strong feeling that we've all lost human touch and serendipity in our lives; in a professional context, this is beginning to impair the quality of our connections with colleagues and clients. Accounting professionals have an exciting opportunity to rethink what community means, and how new forms of professional, inclusive and empathetic community can arise from the crisis.

Supporting evidence

"The impact of the novel coronavirus may be so sweeping that it alters human rituals and behaviors that have evolved over millennia. This could change everything from the way we conduct our economy to our greeting and grieving rituals" – **The New Yorker**

"Scheduled online 'tea trolleys' and 'coffee mornings' are increasingly irritating now that calendars are jammed with more pressing virtual appointments." – **Financial Times editor**

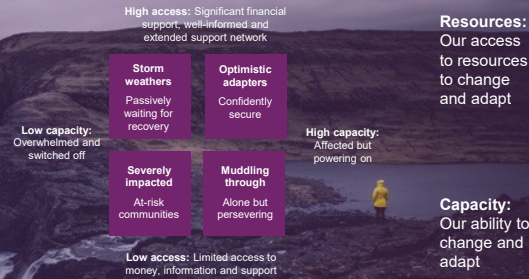
Human insight

"[Referring to remote working] People are less likely to communicate and most communication is by email." – **Member***

"I think the mental health aspect of working from home and, in some cases, self isolating is really hard whether you are extrovert or an introvert" – **Member**

*Referring to AICPA or CIMA

Loss Mindsets. We have created a framework to identify four mindsets across a spectrum that maps the intersection of our psychological capacity for change and the access to resources required to support us through that change. This framework allows us to align new and optimized service experiences to the specific needs of clients and colleagues, experiment with ways to serve clients better, and use digital services and advanced analytics to support clients in improving their capacity for change in circumstances where we can't improve their access to resources.



Implications today

- Recognize the vulnerability of our clients and colleagues as a fact, no matter how confidently they position themselves. Don't try to airbrush it out.
- Help people to normalize their emotions by providing information about reactions to stress and reinforce the notion that people often prevail and even grow through crisis.
- Recognize the loss of meaningful connections and stop trying to heal it through meaningless video calls.

Implications tomorrow

- Conduct a thorough investigation of your operations and experiences. What crucial elements of the human experience are missing? Don't rush to conclusions; facilitating human connection and serendipity is not as easy as we may assume. After all, what is planned serendipity?
- Think of the ways to maintain a sense of belonging within your communities remotely. Start with supporting your peers in the re-creation of digital communities to encourage personalization and meaningful connection between their members.

2. Reinventing work

On a positive note, “Lockdown could turn out to be one of **the most creative times for humankind**,” says Sandi Mann, author of *The Science of Boredom*.

For decades, economists, governments and companies have wondered what would happen if people couldn't work. Now we have been granted the opportunity to explore initially unorthodox ideas, such as universal basic income and a four-day workweek.

On the back of this crisis, **factors of boredom, paused work** (e.g., business can't operate) or **reduced work** (e.g., furlough) **are catalyzing** an organic real-life experiment. On the one hand, there is an emergence of more creative behaviors:

- Professionals launching their **own series of webinars**
- **Networking events** where people are riding **on stationary bikes**
- **Organizers delivering drinks** to your door for a cocktail party

And on the other hand, people are **struggling** with this newly acquired time and a **lack of direction** for how to use it efficiently.

Psychologists confirm that **boredom is a very powerful source of innovation**. However, **people also need to be reminded not to feel bad if this is not their story**; sometimes what we need is to rest before taking new things further down the road.

How long will it last?

Right now technologies, such as videoconferencing, email and shared workspaces are dictating how people work. Software companies, such as Zoom, have been thrust into the spotlight at short notice. In the short term, work has molded around technology. What we now need is for the technology to be molded for the remote and virtualized way of working. Determining how you and your teams work and collaborate is the new imperative.

“*Colleagues are working to provide the best virtual experience and to help keep employees and family members safe.* – Member”

Supporting evidence

“Corporate events get creative to beat lockdown doldrums. Planners move beyond video conferences to entertain clients without meeting in person.” – *The Financial Times*

The productivity and creativity of Microsoft employees increased 40% after working a 4-day work-week – *Business Insider*

Human Insight

“As a worker, I see that I can build a community, work with other developers, and create something positive out of a situation that's been so negative” – *Software developer, US*

“Many of our real-world, in-person gatherings aren't actually that useful or warm or connective or transformational. Turning them virtual may not be as bad as you'd think.” – *Priya Parker, facilitator*



Implications today

- Clarify the purpose of the work routines you are trying to recreate. You may discover they never had a significant purpose.
- Use this experimental time to test new products and service ideas. People may be more receptive now to new ideas, products and services. Clients might even consider the option of co-creating new value offerings with you.
- Give clear guidance to those who are struggling with the lack of direction on how to spend the lockdown time efficiently.
- Experiment with the ways in which you engage with your clients and communities. Don't be afraid to be bold; people will appreciate your creativity.

Implications tomorrow

- Consider the impact of a four-day week on your colleagues and clients. Many companies have discovered a range of benefits in this model.
- Reinvent the community experience. Start by understanding *why* people were attending your gatherings. Translate these values into functional elements, identify their online counterparts and only then glue them into a holistic experience.
- Move from binary options (either online or offline), to an omnichannel experience to make everyone feel satisfied, regardless of their physical presence.
- Consider newly discovered digital ways of connecting with people as an opportunity to expand your client base or join new communities.

3. Polarized communities

The **COVID-19 crisis is a pervasive crisis** — a backdrop that generates more anxiety. There's a growing sense of polarization across society. Our differences, beliefs and experience are being compounded and deepened.

Emerging theory indicates that social-media algorithms tend to drive people into increasingly extreme filter bubbles. More than 50% of people get their news and form opinions from social media, which explains the increasingly **polarized points of view and behaviors** among the public.

The pattern: Whenever there are two camps each increasingly end up more entrenched. This is problematic, as healing requires open and well-rounded debate. We're seeing this division being played out across racial, ethnic, political and economic lines. There's a risk that COVID-19 has created two new camps of experience — negative and neutral.

Negative — Around 70% of people are having a negative experience through loss of health or income. Those impacted by COVID-19 tend to already be disadvantaged, with women and ethnic minorities disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19.

Neutral — In contrast, roughly 30% of the population have retained most of their income, and aside from some disruption and uncertainty, have adapted relatively easily to working from home.



Social-media platforms know what you're seeing, and they know how you acted in the immediate aftermath of seeing it, and they can decide what you will see next in order to further determine how you act—a feedback loop that gets progressively tighter until it becomes a binding force on an individual's free will... Negative emotions like outrage and contempt and anxiety tend to drive significantly more engagement than positive ones. *- The New Yorker*



How long will it last?

Social technologies are embedded in our lives, so we expect this ongoing polarization to continue. Organizations need to consider how they help clients and colleagues manage this trend at a time when being human and client-centered is becoming core to many business strategies. Special care must be made when applying advanced technologies so they don't polarize services or exclude their diverse members.

Supporting evidence

"Recognising the disproportionate burden of the pandemic on low-skilled workers, a recent poll of economists found that the vast majority are concerned that COVID-19 will raise inequality (IGM 2020). Our results strongly support this concern (Furceri et al. 2020). We find that major epidemics in this century have raised income inequality, lowered the share of incomes going to the bottom deciles, and lowered the employment-to-population ratio for those with basic education but not for those with advanced degrees." – VoxEU

"During events like the Black Death and World Wars I and II, the loss of millions of working-age adults created labor scarcities that had an equalizing effect, ushering in new political structures such as the decline of feudalism, the expansion of the working-class vote, and the creation of social safety nets like the United Kingdom's National Health Service. These more inclusive political and economic structures allowed groups to work out their differences by democratic means." – Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Implications today

- Return to your purpose with strong and affirmative positions on key events. Provide forums for debate and discussion around divisive issues.
- Reaffirm your commitment to diversity and inclusion, while encouraging healthy debate and tolerance of varying view points.
- Ensure you aren't inadvertently handling your workforce in two streams, with the *neutrals* looked after at the expense of the *negatives*.

Implications tomorrow

- Review how machine-driven technologies are being applied in the service of your colleagues and clients, so they don't unintentionally encourage polarization or bias.
- Expand contact between employees and clients to drive empathy and pop filter bubbles.
- Ensure you are aware of and understand how to meet the new day-to-day needs of your teams. Consider normalizing practices such as an increased need for flexible working and access to childcare.



The need for speed and flexibility of learning

4. Adapt and adapt more

From a morning walk to the **way we learn**, we are no longer able to do what we want, the way we want. These changes have forced us all to **adapt rapidly — emotionally and practically — to our new situation and routines**.

However, future scenarios suggest this won't be a one-time adaptation. Increasingly, in a world that expects continuing system-level change, your ability to adapt is becoming a core skill.

Social cognitive theory indicates that **the keys to learning a new behavior** are an ability to:

- See what the change will bring you
- Have self-belief that you can master the new skill
- Identify with the change, usually through a role model or similar
- Feel that you have power and influence on your future

The crisis, and the period of profound change we find ourselves in, continue to demand greater adaptation and resilience from everyone. **The great news** is that studies on resilience have revealed it's something we build throughout our lives, and that people can actively develop their ability to respond and adapt to crises.

How long will it last?

The learning trajectory of many people will be affected by this crisis. It's no longer enough to learn the technical skills of the professions. Never has a focus on skills pertaining to people, business, leadership and digital skills, and the ability to adapt and change been more important. Furthermore, your ability to coach clients and colleagues in the same techniques is likely to become a competitive advantage.

17% of AICPA members and **25%** of CIMA members are unsure that they've adapted well to challenges resulting from COVID-19.

Supporting evidence

A summary of internal research with existing members and students of the Association:

- Home is critical. The ease of transitioning to a new way of working is completely dependent on at-home set up, family structure and access to technology.
- Many members are not used to the new ways of working, including setting up a home office and continuing business as normal.
- Members are adapting but expressed a desire for more formalized, structured training around new technical skills.
- Study methods have had to change which has proved challenging for some, particularly for those who prefer classroom learning.

“ When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves. ”
- Victor Frankl, Austrian Neurologist

Implications today

Helping people to adapt is critical right now. The two keys to behavioral adaptation are resources and capacity. Don't provide resources — information and content explaining changes to clients and employees — without considering how you increase their capacity to act upon it. Make resources discoverable, simple, usable, understandable and actionable. Otherwise the information overload will overwhelm and the changes are unlikely to stick.

Human insight

"I intend to continue my studies as best I can, however I anticipate the work-life-study balance will shift somewhat, working from home, and trying to do this remotely as we enter into month-end and year-end accounts." – Member

"I have time to resume my studies but my financial plan has been greatly affected." – Member

"Given that there is a greater amount of 'spare' time, it would be really good to be able to use it for self development — CPD and any additional training, maybe podcasts/ blogs recommendations that can be helpful in studies." – Member

Implications tomorrow

- Forget a one-size-fits-all approach — it won't work in the immediate future. Expect clients and colleagues to emerge from this crisis with various experiences and preferences. This is an opportunity to understand those differences and better accommodate the needs of your clients.
- Anticipate the move to omnichannel experiences; define the ways in which you will help clients adapt to the ongoing crises in both digital and physical environments.

5. A million new normals

We entered lockdown with a relatively shared normal — nine-to-five work, a morning commute and kids in school. COVID-19 has triggered a **wide range of different responses and experiences**, as each person seeks to re-establish stability in their lives. Expecting a single 'new normal' is perhaps misguided. Instead the criteria guiding the million new normals among professionals and students include:

- **Cognitive style.** Many introverts have discovered they work more productively alone, with short stints of collaboration.
- **Health.** Until transmission rates reduce, personal health concerns will dictate preferences.
- **Trust.** Erosion of trust in traditional sources means each individual is making up their own mind on what matters most.

These are replacing old factors of **location**, which has been dissolved by digital acceleration and **organizational culture**, where the conventional logic of command-and-control leadership has proved less critical than once believed.

And so, many of us are having a **moment of reflection**: How am I preparing myself for a new reality? What have I let go of? What have I stopped and never need to do again?

How long will it last?

We don't expect a single concept of new normal to emerge. Digital technology has always driven hyper-personalization, and there's no reason it won't do so again. We predict a million new normals emerging as each individual and organization determines what's right for them. Providers who can help clients and colleagues create and realize their new normal, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all, will be more likely to succeed.

54% of AICPA and **48%** of CIMA members said that working from home will be a permanent aspect of work in the future.

Supporting evidence

"But not many people want to pay almost £10,000 a year for the privilege of attending Zoom calls. Many UK universities are bracing for a gaping hole in their budgets as they expect fewer students to turn up in the autumn." – Wired

"Fortunately, there is a silver lining for accounting professionals. Conferences and in-person events tend to have much higher costs to attendees than webinars and self-study because there is a great deal of overhead that must be recovered. Just as we have seen at universities, the cost of in-person education seems to have gotten out of hand and needed to be brought back to reasonable levels." – CPA Practice Advisor

Human insight

"I am concerned about my lessons moving to online tuition - as I find in-class more effective." – Member

Only 8% of UK citizens are perfectly comfortable with returning to shared physical spaces, whereas others require various types of reassurance to make them feel safe.



Implications today

- Do not assume that once lockdown restrictions are lifted your employees and clients will rush back to their normal routines. Try to keep alternative digital options available for longer periods of time to support those who are not ready to return to the physical world just yet.
- Be careful not to impose blanket rules on colleagues or clients unless absolutely necessary. Individuals and businesses will want to make their own decisions.
- Make efforts as leaders to support your teams in creating and adopting new social rules.

Implications tomorrow

- Innovate and develop new ways for your clients to engage and interact with your products and services. Current measures of social distancing and use of screens, although effective now, may not be sustainable longer term. Your ultimate goal is to enable the same level of experience while eliminating any awkwardness or inconvenience.
- Reconsider how you make use of the physical space. Is it for focused work or more for interacting? How will your policies support potential new ways of working?



Purpose needs value beyond profit

6. Daily dissonance

When forced into novel circumstances, the way in which we react is not always clear. Half of us often hold onto the old reality, while the other half tries to embrace the new:

- Child-hugging **parent** vs. self-isolating **employee**
- Social-distancing **citizen** vs. polite **neighbor**
- Confident **leader** vs. vulnerable **human**
- Open-minded **roommate** vs. reserved **colleague**
- Climate **activist** vs. profit-oriented **businessperson**

People experiencing dissonance — when reality no longer marries with our expectation of reality — **yearn for certainty**. Staying too long in this state contributes to **psychological stress and sustained feelings of bewilderment**.

Coping mechanisms include **people hiding their actions** or beliefs, **shying away from conversations** or debates, **avoiding consideration of new information** that goes against their principles, and **ignoring specialist advice** or research that causes discomfort.

The instinct is to assert confident and certain leadership.

However, evidence suggests **recognizing dissonance** and **sharing personal vulnerabilities** is a far more effective way to achieve cohesion and renewed purpose in a group and a better route to relieving personal stress.

How long will it last?

It's important first to sit with dissonance and admit the lack of certainty during this crisis. Leaders will need to balance their instincts to lead with manufactured confidence (to allay fears) with openness and honesty in the face of ongoing uncertainty (to generate collective empathy). Author Jacob Morgan has identified critical "Future Leader" mindsets, which he has coined as the explorer and the servant, to reframe what's valuable today.

Supporting evidence

"The coronavirus not only co-opts our cells, but exploits our cognitive biases. Humans construct stories to wrangle meaning from uncertainty and purpose from chaos. We crave simple narratives, but the pandemic offers none." – **The Atlantic**

"This pandemic has served to amplify the personal, social, and economic costs of mental illness to a magnitude that is unprecedented. It is likely that the mental health consequences of COVID-19 will become the most urgent public health challenge worldwide for decades to come, impacting the well-being and productivity of billions." – **Psychiatric Times**

Human insight

"Generally morale is good but there is a lot of uncertainty in terms of government policy and business response." – **Member**

"People's lives are at stake right now. Transitioning to cleaner energy, that's for the future." – **Production line lead, Tesla Inc.**

"Advocacy is an outstanding way for you to support me/us." – **Member**

Implications today

- Recognize the lack of certainty and start sharing your own vulnerabilities. This will make it easier for people around you to face their own personal challenges.
- Take proactive steps in identifying clients and colleagues who are struggling the most and provide them with mental health support when you can.

Implications tomorrow

- Move from interpersonal to organizational levels and start having open conversations about the right thing to do.
- Explore how concepts of conscious and vulnerable leadership can be applied at scale.
- Identify opportunities to demonstrate how strength and certainty can emerge from uncertainty.

7. New purpose in service

The COVID-19 pandemic has **stirred the instinct to find purpose**, clarifying our **collective sense of mission** — to protect one another and save lives.

There is a **profound and renewed respect for those serving on the frontlines** to help the world survive the crisis, whether they be nurses, supermarket workers or delivery drivers.

People in every sector are asking, **“How can I help others through this crisis?”**

These actions started small, often on a personal level, with **nine-to-five office professionals sewing masks** for first responders or **volunteering** to be redeployed to parts of their company where help is needed.

However, the question now is: How do we bottle this newfound purpose in service, so we can continually **guide, advise and comfort colleagues and clients over the long term?**

A side effect of the health crisis is a **rediscovery of the better versions of ourselves and our communities.**

If we can bottle this renewed sense of purpose, how can we turn it to the bigger crisis on our doorstep, serving the planet as a whole as we face the climate crisis?

How long will it last?

We believe that this will be a defining generational moment, akin to World War II, and will remain in the social memory as a time when the collective need overtook other motivations. People will ask: What did you do during COVID-19? This is a powerful opportunity to reconnect the service you run with the intrinsic values people have found in serving one another. How can your service help progress people through this crisis?

Supporting evidence

“Months into a pandemic that brought businesses to a standstill and upended daily routines, many workers are wondering: Does my job matter?”
 – *The Wall Street Journal*

27% of blind network members agreed “My work does not feel particularly important or meaningful.” – *The Wall Street Journal*

BlackRock employees in the United States are jointly declaring that they need to continue to earn money so they can give back to the community.

Human insight

“We are doing all we can to help our clients, mainly accounting practices and banks, to continue to help [clients] plan and re-forecast their finances in this very difficult and fluid time.” – *Member*

“The perspective of how important or noble the job is kind of changed with this new essential and nonessential divide.” – *Production line lead, Tesla Inc.*

“Pay me my worth, but I also want to feel like I am contributing to something larger than myself.” – *BlackRock employee*



Implications today

- Ensure your organization is supporting the wider collective COVID-19 recovery without jumping on any bandwagon.
- Remove anything that could be seen to detract from this new collective purpose (e.g., client penalties).
- Communicate on how your service is delivering on the wider goals of humanity.
- Provide employees with time to volunteer and participate in the broader mission.

Implications tomorrow

- Ask how your organization serves client and ask your employees how they serve one another in that mission. Use this to inform your commitment to service in the long-term.
- Look beyond user-centered design or customer-journey mapping to consider how your value proposition meets the broader human needs of people and their families.
- Go further into purpose-centered design and consider how your services can be designed for communities and society as a whole.

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