



HOW TO LEAD A WORK-FROM-HOME WORKFORCE

Five Skills to Manage an Increased Workload



Crucial Learning



The Bad News.

The data show leaders who ignore the potential impacts of work-from-home (WFH) put their organizations at substantial risk. Where leaders have failed to adapt to this new work mode, there is **diminished trust, engagement, and performance.**

And The Good News.

On the other hand, where leaders proactively engage employees in spite of WFH, commitment, engagement, and teamwork are stronger than ever.



HIDDEN COSTS OF WFH

Leaders who have done little to address the new WFH dynamic are at risk of:



EMPLOYEE TURNOVER



SINKING PRODUCTIVITY



**WEAKENED EMPLOYEE
COMMITMENT AND CONNECTION**



**STRAINED TEAM PERFORMANCE
AND TEAMWORK**



**LOWER EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT AND MORALE**



**WEAKENED EMPLOYEE/
MANAGER RELATIONSHIPS**

What's more, employees at organizations where leaders have done nothing to preserve or improve the culture in light of WFH are:



Significantly more likely to report their culture has suffered than employees whose leaders have taken action.

200%

more likely to report feeling substantially less committed to the organization.

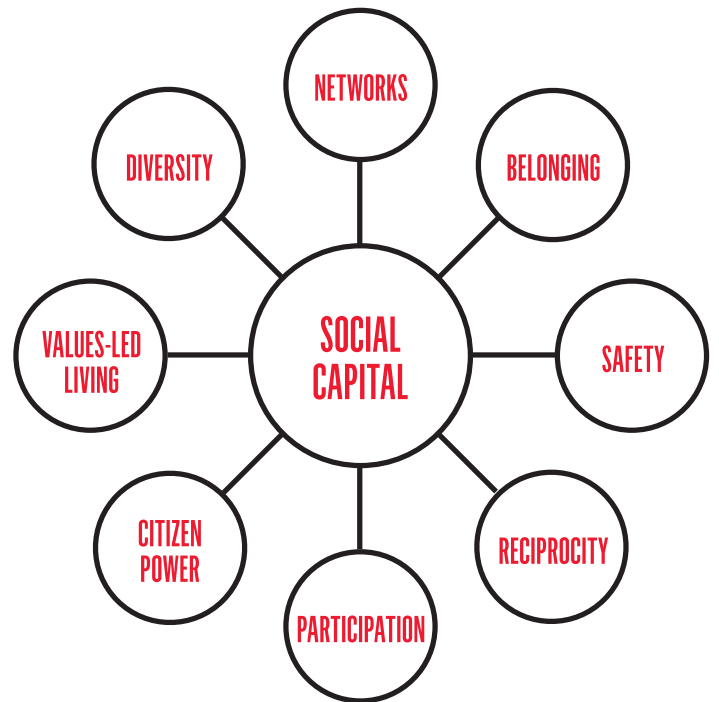


The Collapse of Social Capital

But the greatest cost of inaction is to social capital. We define social capital as cooperative goodwill in the pursuit of achieving a shared goal. Or in other words, the measure of people's willingness to work together to get things done.

To measure social capital, we used a five-question scale that indicated whether healthy group performance had increased or decreased since WFH. Specifically, do employees:

1. Respond quickly to requests from each other?
2. Give one another the benefit of the doubt rather than taking offense?
3. Sacrifice their own needs to serve a larger team goal?
4. Take initiative to solve problems rather than waiting to be told?
5. Invest more than the minimum effort required to keep their jobs?



According to the study, social capital is deteriorating in organizations where leaders have taken no action to preserve culture. In other words, employees in these organizations are much less likely to respond quickly to colleagues' needs and more likely to suspect one another's motives, focus on their own narrow interests and do as little as possible to avoid being fired.

Success Is About Leadership Not Location

Social capital facilitates social interaction and cooperation—the fundamentals of teamwork and collaboration.

In our view, it is a report card on leadership—ignoring your reserve of social capital is as dangerous as ignoring your reserve of cash.

But social capital is not just a predictor of organizational success, it is also a measure of leadership competence. The job of a leader is not simply to generate results. Leadership is about creating a social system that generates results. And when distance impacts that social system, leaders need to get creative.

LEADERSHIP IS
ABOUT CREATING A
SOCIAL SYSTEM THAT
GENERATES RESULTS.



The Office is a Way not *the* Way



We found that tremendous social capital can be generated if leaders match new social behavior with virtual technologies. The limiting factor has never been distance, it has been an absence of innovation in social rituals that create similar effects to proximity.

What worked about the office was that it was a highly structured way of promoting unstructured interaction. It gave the illusion of spontaneous connection. But the truth is that those “chance” happenings have always been engineered. We were all required to arrive at 8am,

lunch at noon, leave at 5pm, and office where we were told. And it worked. Like marbles in a bowl, our contact with each other was not elective, but it was effective.

Leaders who have thrived in recent months understand that WFH demands more than substituting conference calls for conference rooms. It isn't just about using virtual technology to substitute for the structured interaction required to get work done. They are experimenting aggressively to create new norms and rituals for unstructured interaction.

Leading Out: Strategies to Engage Your WFH Workforce

According to employees who feel more committed to their organizations since WFH, simple interventions like the following have the **most meaningful** impact:



Offer virtual learning at least as consistently as was offered prior to COVID



Implement new tools and technology to facilitate connection



Offer counseling or psychological services



Hold fun, off-the-wall, virtual events (virtual dance parties, online eating contests, etc.)



Increase frequency of team meetings



Ask for input on needs in company-wide and 1:1 meetings



Survey employees for feedback on what's working



Change work hours or implement a flex-time policy



Schedule non work-related meetings for team members to simply connect

CREATE CARING AND CONNECTION

SENIOR EXECUTIVES AND EMPLOYEES SHARED STORIES OF SOCIAL INNOVATION THAT PROMOTES MEANINGFUL VIRTUAL CONTACT:

“Every morning at 9:30, my team meets for a video call. The meetings are scheduled for 15 minutes - just a check-in to make sure everyone is okay. We started working remotely after just one day’s notice, so initially it was to make sure people’s systems were working, they were healthy, they had projects, and it was very work-focused. Now, after 5 months of working from home, one employee, after missing a morning call due to another meeting, the next day said ‘I missed you guys yesterday. This meeting is the best part of my day, I really look forward to it.’ The rest agreed that touching base every day was helpful and a comfort during a very challenging time . . . Our morning check-in has stretched to closer to a half hour and has become a time to share personal stories, give tours of our homes, see each other’s families, have our morning coffee together...all things we just didn’t do before. If anyone is upset, we show compassion. If anyone needs help, we provide assistance. If anyone has a success, we all celebrate. Through the shared traumas of the pandemic, ongoing racial injustice, and the divisive election, we have really come together as people who care about each other and help each other. It has made this crisis a little more bearable.”

—EMPLOYEE

Our company now holds more large group meetings and employees are having one-on-one interaction with upper management. They are asking us to participate more in sales and marketing than we ever did before and communicate how we are contributing to our company goals.”

—EMPLOYEE

Our group rarely got together socially except for at Christmas (and even that was still “work”). Since our team has been remote, we have had several Zoom Happy Hours that have been a great success. We share what’s going on in our lives at home and at work. People seem to relax and truly open up—perhaps it’s because they are in their own environments. These ‘gatherings’ seem to lift everyone’s spirits. People often marvel at the fact that ‘remote’ can feel so ‘close.’”

—EMPLOYEE



The Manager Matters

In addition to structured and unstructured social innovations, another critical element to building social capital in a WFH environment is manager-to-employee relationships. An employee report of an improved relationship with his/her manager is strongly associated with every other positive outcome.

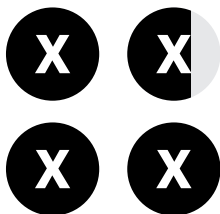
Likewise, when comparing those who report their relationship with their manager has suffered to those who say it has improved, those who say it has suffered:



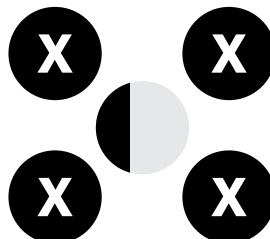
Report **57% lower** commitment.



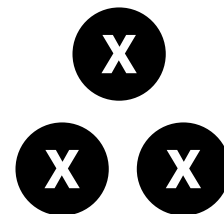
Are **40% less likely** to exert discretionary effort.



Are nearly **4 times more likely** to respond slowly to requests from others.



Are more than **4 times more likely** to assume the worst of others when problems happen.



Are **3 times more likely** to worry more about their own interests than larger organizational goals.

IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH...



“

On several occasions, members of upper management have asked me how my kids were handling the transition to remote learning. In fact, in one meeting with our CEO, he asked everyone with small children how their entire family was doing in the remote environment.”

—EMPLOYEE



“

In the past, high-ranking global corporate officers visited individual locations infrequently. Since WFH, our global division leader sends weekly fireside-chat-type videos to all staff sharing information about the different organizations in our division along with success stories from each. This has made me feel more connected to my global organization outside of my own work group.”

—EMPLOYEE



“

Prior to the WFH deployment, I met with all employees roughly once a quarter for updates. After deploying to WFH, I changed that cadence to weekly with shorter (15-min) all-hands updates. I did this because I was worried people would feel disconnected otherwise. The feedback has been very positive . . . I will be doing it this way going forward regardless of whether we all return to the office.”

—EMPLOYEE

Just Do Something . . .

When it comes to improving social capital, some interventions had greater impact than others. But encouragingly, almost *everything* leaders did to create moments of connection made a difference. A key finding of the study is that **leadership matters more than location**. If leaders invest in increasing social capital, they can largely offset the cultural downsides of WFH.

Specifically, where leaders proactively build a sense of connection during WFH, Crucial Learning index of social capital is substantially higher. For example, employees are:



60% more likely to respond quickly to requests from each other.



Nearly three times more likely to give one another the benefit of the doubt rather than taking offense.



Nearly three times more likely to sacrifice their own needs to serve a larger team goal.



More than twice as likely to take initiative to solve problems rather than waiting to be told.



Distance Isn't Destiny

This study provides both a warning and a roadmap for leaders trying to navigate a new WFH landscape.

For decades, studies of corporate culture have concluded that the further two people were apart physically, the lower their estimation of one another was likely to be. Our findings suggest otherwise—distance isn't destiny. **At the end of the day, the necessary condition to a productive social system is leadership not location.**

The forced WFH experiment of 2020 suggests it is possible for leaders to create strong social capital without physical proximity and doing so is absolutely vital.






A Case for Virtual Learning

While there are many options to engage your WFH workforce, virtual learning is one that checks the boxes on creating both structured and unstructured connection. It's also surprisingly effective at preserving culture. The study shows that among the employees who say they are getting the same or more learning and development since WFH . . .

- 33% say their culture has improved since WFH.
- 22% say they feel more connected to their organization.
- 52% say their commitment to the organization has increased.

Crucial Learning virtual learning options can help your WFH team not only build crucial skills but also strengthen social capital, commitment, and connection.

Crucial Learning Virtual, On-Demand, and In-Person Courses:

COMMUNICATION SOLUTIONS	 Crucial Conversations. FOR MASTERING DIALOGUE	 Crucial Conversations. FOR ACCOUNTABILITY
PERFORMANCE SOLUTIONS	 Getting Things Done.	 The Power of Habit™
LEADERSHIP SOLUTIONS	 Influencer	

Get Started

To bring the skills to your organization for increased productivity and engagement, contact us to learn more. Call **1-800-449-5989** or visit us at **CrucialLearning.com**.





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