



**Smarter Working Adaptive Leadership**

**Journey4**

## Smarter Working

The Coronavirus epidemic has forced companies to operate differently under various lockdown measures and after several months operating under these unprecedented conditions, UK businesses have learnt to adapt and change their business models. As businesses start to look to the future and consider new ways of managing the process of work, we want to help business leaders prepare for the best ways to engage with and lead their teams such that employees feel they can be effective, connected and motivated.

We believe the learnings from this period can be used to help organisations transform future business models and harness some of the benefits of increased productivity, improved communication and enhanced employee well-being experienced through working from home. At the same time, we also need to address those things that haven't worked so well, such as social interaction, feelings of isolation and some of the practical and technical issues of working remotely and using a domestic space for work.

Journey4 ran a series of workshops on the theme of 'Smarter Working' during and after the initial lockdown period which involved representatives from 20 different businesses across 13 sectors. This process identified some key considerations for business leaders:

- Everyone's personal circumstances are different and, therefore, businesses will need to adopt an employee-driven approach, rather than implementing one-size-fits-all solutions from the top down
- Leaders will need to understand individual needs and circumstances and find flexible solutions that work for different segments of the employee population to maintain an engaged and productive workforce
- The best ideas about effective working arrangements often come from the employees themselves so business leaders should have the confidence to ask their colleagues what they think will work best
- Leaders should also ask their colleagues what they have found to be the best and worst aspects of the lockdown / restricted working period, including those who continued to work and those who were working from home

## Adaptive Leadership

Government ONS figures from September show a huge drop in turnover for businesses across most sectors, with some such as Arts, Education, Hospitality and Recreation being hit particularly hard. Organisations have no option but to adapt to the evolving work climate. This, to coin a phrase, is the Age of Adaptability.

Leaders will need to demonstrate high levels of integrity and commitment in making decisions in the face of these organisational challenges and opportunities. They will have to invest in ensuring the organisations purpose, vision and values are congruent, understood and acted out every day, whilst checking the corporate values are aligned with their own and those of the workforce.

Senior leadership teams will have to become more adaptive to fully recognise and respond effectively to these challenges and new opportunities for growth. As we all know, to keep doing the same things, in the same way, and expecting different results is not going to work.

Adaptive leadership can be achieved through a set of strategies and practices used to overcome obstacles, achieve meaningful change, and adapt to challenging and complex environments.

Faced with a situation where the future is unpredictable, a lot of businesses are having to make tough decisions on people and costs, which pose difficult questions for leaders, such as:

- How do we lead and work in a smarter more flexible way, whilst still making difficult decisions and keeping teams motivated and committed to ways of working smarter?
- How do we maintain coherence between personal and organisational values when making difficult decisions about growth prospects, revenue protections, and cost cuts?

Leaders often find it easier to go back to their 'comfort zone' and demonstrate old behaviours during challenging times, so they require straightforward and easy to adopt approaches to help them individually and collectively deal with a world of heightened and protracted uncertainty

This also needs to be addressed at pace as planning horizons have from moved from years to months for many organisations, so the focus for leaders now needs to be on new and better ways of:

- Making good decisions
- Collectively leading change
- Encouraging innovation
- Empowering people

This will require a different kind of leadership, Adaptive Leadership.

## The Adaptive Leader

Having a growth mindset is the first step to change the way we lead in these uncertain times, which is about being open to learn, develop and change. Such a mindset is required to move away from a position where the leadership qualities are carved in stone and static towards new behaviours that allow leadership qualities to adapt and grow through effort and application. Being open to evolve and grow is a prerequisite to being an Adaptive Leader.

Whilst businesses will be able to embrace the concept of Adaptive Leadership, it will ultimately require individual leaders to reflect on their own style and behaviours - becoming an Adaptive Leader requires a level of personal adaptability and a willingness to change.

The first challenge for individual leaders will be to recognise the limitations of traditional leadership styles and the characteristics that will restrict the adaptation to the demands of the time, such as:

- Being task focused
- Placing an emphasis on delivery and compliance
- Having a low degree of self-awareness in the leadership team
- Concentrating on structure and trying to create certainty
- Setting fixed objectives and goals
- Centralised decision making
- Feeling that people need to be managed and monitored
- Maintaining silos

The second challenge will be to commit to exploring the characteristics of Adaptive Leadership, which embraces a more democratic leadership style and creates a vision of the future that motivates the whole team to deliver. This approach builds a sense of community within the organisation by providing opportunities for people to interact with one another, wherever they work from and whatever their role is.

The key characteristics of an Adaptive Leader include:

- Being empathetic and people focused – adaptive leaders are human, kind, and genuinely connected with their colleagues
- Placing more emphasis on creativity and empowerment - they can work collectively and collaboratively
- Concentrating on being flexible and managing ambiguity - they break down barriers and allow organisational structures and governance to be more flexible
- Using scenario planning to look at future risks and opportunities, rather than past-referencing
- Encouraging inclusion and diversity in decision making - adaptive Leaders create a shift in culture to tap into innovation and knowledge, and recognise that leaders don't have the answer to everything
- Having implicit trust in colleagues and the wider team - they are trustworthy, respectful and respected
- Understanding the whole is greater than the sum of its parts – they appreciate the value in the interconnectedness of things and break down silos

## **Timing is Critical**

Business priorities for improving customer engagement and delivering operational efficiencies may remain the same but the pace of change required has increased and workforce enablement and smarter working is becoming a top priority for leadership teams. There is now a pressing need in most businesses to accelerate the pace of change and decision-making and to do that safely and confidently.

Journey4's assessment of Smarter Working across a large number of organisations in different sectors has identified that less than 25% are proactively planning new ways of working and making long-term changes to support growth. Furthermore, a recent survey by Harvey Nash / KPMG identified that almost six in ten (59 per cent) of respondents feel that they will be unable to accurately forecast for long-term planning decisions for at least three months and almost one in ten think it will take a year or more.

This survey also showed that only 26% of organisations will be able to continue to operate in a 'Business As Usual' mode after the pandemic in order to meet the needs of their stakeholders. The remaining 74% will need to adapt to major changes for recovery and growth opportunities with just one the changes being that over half the workforce, (averaged across all sectors and geographies) will be working from home post Covid-19 restrictions.

It is clear that, at present, organisations are not adapting to the changes required for the new normal at the rate they should for effective recovery and growth. However, it is also clear that leaders will have to quickly accept these challenges if they are to recover and grow their businesses.

## **The Adaptive Leadership Service**

We have developed a quick, cost effective process, based on our experience of similar transformational initiatives, delivered over the following timescales:

- 4 Days – Organisational, team and individual leadership assessment
- 4 Weeks – Leadership team development
  - Week 1 – Initial leadership team facilitated workshop
  - Week 2 – Individual discussions with the leadership team to identify key areas of focus
  - Week 3 - Second leadership team facilitated workshop
  - Week 4 – Report and recommendations
- 4 Months – Organisational roll out

The Journey4 Adaptive Leadership service is based on our collective experience and existing services that we have adapted to meet the requirements of the current climate.

## **The Benefits of Adaptive Leadership**

Journey4 has developed an approach that allows the basics of Adaptive Leadership to be put in place in just a few weeks and then swiftly implemented to achieve the following benefits:

- A clear and consistent vision from the leadership that helps create an energised and productive workforce in recovery mode
- Rapid progress in improving customer engagement, operational efficiency, and workforce enablement through Smarter Working
- New forward-thinking approaches to quickly resolve complex interconnected issues
- Leaders having the confidence to ask their colleagues and employees what changes they think will work best for the organisation
- Employee-driven 'remote' working options, rather than implementing one-size-fits-all solutions from the top down
- Improved employee engagement and a positive impact on health and safety, well-being and innovation
- Leadership teams having improved well-being and morale, feeling more connected and better equipped to lead personally and collectively

## About Journey4

Journey4 is a customer driven growth and business transformation consultancy that helps businesses achieve their potential, meet customers' expectations and gain an advantage over competitors. We engage key stakeholders and motivate people to implement effective change and deliver long-term profitable growth. Our unique growth and transformation framework, known as the 4E's, defines and guides the delivery of our services and underpins our operating philosophy.

For more information, visit [www.journey4.co.uk](http://www.journey4.co.uk) or contact [jonathan.booth@journey4.co.uk](mailto:jonathan.booth@journey4.co.uk)