

Together we are stronger

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There is an old saying that “what doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger”, and never has that saying been more chillingly appropriate. Around the world, we have all been through a terrifying period of change and uncertainty, and, sadly, many of our friends, colleagues and families are no longer with us as we start down the long road to recovery from the ravages of a global pandemic.

As we pause to reflect on the faces of those we have loved and lost, I want to challenge everyone to think not about what we have lost but about what we have gained through the last 12-18 months and how we can forge an enduring legacy in our working lives.

For most of us, the biggest challenge posed by the pandemic was transitioning to a new way of working - with our kitchens, dining rooms or spare bedrooms becoming our new working world. Our daily commute was replaced by a few steps across the house, and our working relationships flipped almost overnight from face-to-face exchanges with our colleagues to the joys of Zoom, MS Teams or other applications. But it became pretty clear quite quickly that, while these applications offered us the ability to communicate, they also took away the personal interactions that are so integral to our working lives. Meetings became more focussed and those chance conversations, the ‘water cooler moments’, disappeared overnight, and we were forced to rethink how we engaged with our peers and colleagues. It didn’t take long for us to realise just how integral those social interactions were to us, as we all struggled during our varying degrees of isolation.

I think that lockdown has revealed to us how much we humans are a social animal, how much we need and value our colleagues and our families, so, perhaps, one of the enduring legacies of the pandemic will be the value we see and place in each other.

The flip to working-from-home (WFH) meant that we all had to deal with the challenges of getting the right equipment, the right connectivity, and it really focussed our minds on what was important – even if that meant thinking or working in new ways. We got a unique opportunity to exercise our mental muscles and radically overhaul our working practices, to reboot our long-standing workflows and processes, and I think we were all empowered to challenge ‘the way we’ve always done it’ and to look for newer and better ways to deliver the services that we needed to deliver. Importantly, everyone was given a voice, even those who had previously felt that they were silent onlookers, and this, I hope, will be another of the enduring legacies of the pandemic.

Perhaps that may sound very idealistic, but I am not foolish enough to believe that we re-invented the world during the pandemic. What I do believe is that it gave us the chance to re-evaluate the traditional ways of working, to build afresh where it was appropriate to do so, but also to consolidate those existing practices which we had long employed but realised were still the best way to do things! We’re so often pressed to look for and deliver continuous improvement, but sometimes it is comforting to reassure ourselves that the old ways (in some, but not all cases) are still the best. We learned to value again those things that we had perhaps grown to take for granted.

Despite the fact that we were, in the main, working alone, we all had a role to play in making things work during these extraordinary months. And I hope that this sense of each other, this awareness of what we have achieved, and the adrenaline-rush that comes with realising exactly what our collective strength can achieve will enable us to move forward and build new and better ways of working.

These views are the authors’ own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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