



# CURVE

leading online

HOLDING THINGS TOGETHER WHEN EVERYONE IS APART

**“Everyone wants to know when this will end. That’s not the right question. The right question is: How do we continue?”**

**DEVI SRIDHAR,**  
University of Edinburgh

**COVID-19** has presented us with a crisis that many of us were unprepared for. What’s clear though, is that strong, effective and compassionate leadership will have an enormous impact on how we as individuals, teams and organisations will experience the next few months. Difficult decisions will need to be made continuously. Many of us lack our usual sources of data and are questioning whether we’re doing the right thing, undermining the confidence we’ve built over the course of our careers.

This document is a workbook, something that offers some space and structure for a moment of reflection on where you are at. We’ve also shared some practical things you may like to put into practice, to demonstrate the leadership your team needs from you.

Be aware that one size really doesn’t fit all, and everyone’s answers to the questions posed will be different. Despite the frenetic pace of work in the face of this uncertainty, there’s huge value in pausing to focus on lessons to be learned from the past, your vision for the future and finding ways to get strength and motivation from your peers and provide support and inspiration for those following behind.

The document has three sections: You, Your Team and Your Organisation. We welcome your feedback and reflection when using it. Do get in touch.



# you

PART 1:



Label your emotions and  
you won't feel so emotional.

# how are you?

*If, like us, almost every meeting starts with this question, it's worth asking yourself whether the answer you are giving is the easy one, or the one that is true.*

WHILE IT isn't always appropriate to share the depths of your personal worries with your team – this can sometimes backfire by heightening their own fears and concerns – being vulnerable and honest is one of the most powerful ways to create connection with others. It can make those who report to you feel more able to share their anxieties and express their needs.

## TOOL:

Emotional Check-In

## INSTRUCTIONS:

- When everyone logs into an online meeting, ask them to tune into how they are feeling
- Ask them to give that feeling a score, out of 10, using their fingers to display the results. 10 is "I feel amazing", 1 is "I feel desperately low"
- Briefly share your observations when seeing how everyone is feeling. Pay attention to those who have very low scores, not calling them out in front of the group, but checking in with them 1-on-1 afterwards

## INSIGHTS:

Labelling emotions is one of the best ways to reduce heightened states of emotion. It serves to validate them, but also diffuses them, allowing you, and others to recognise how each person is showing up. It often has the effect of "smoothing" out any big divergence between people; they make the effort to support the people who are feeling most down, and reduce the extreme enthusiasm of those at the other end of the spectrum

what are you  
working on?  
why are you  
doing it? who  
is it for? what  
do you need  
to achieve?  
how will you  
make it  
brilliant?

Use the Canvas on the next page to work through setting an ambition and making a commitment to action

*One of the things that we've been hearing from people in leadership roles, is the sadness of having to set exciting ambitions aside, and the frustration of knowing that many dreams will go unrealised.*

We have new and intimidating constraints to work within, and they have been imposed in a way that is causing significant personal pain. Yet, we cannot stay in crisis mode for too long. The mental and physical cost is too high, and so it's helpful to give ourselves permission to look forward and lay the foundations for future achievement, even if it feels artificial or naive in the current moment.

**TOOL:**

Intention Setting

1. What you want to achieve in your role, specifically during this challenging time?

you

THIS SECTION IS ABOUT DEFINING YOUR  
AMBITION AS A LEADER AND UNDERSTANDING  
WHAT YOU ARE MOTIVATED TO ACHIEVE

2. What is the biggest challenge, getting in the way of you being successful?

3. What does this challenge make you think?

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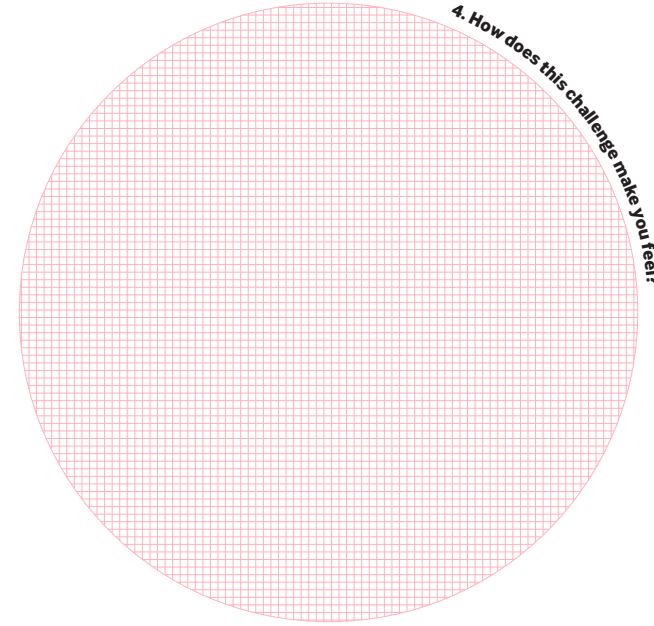
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4. How does this challenge make you feel?



### COMMITMENT STATEMENT

What is one thing that you commit to doing straight away, that will take you one step closer to achieving your ambition? (Perhaps it's a change in the way you are thinking or reacting. Perhaps it's a specific action you can take).





# YOUR PART 2: TEAM

We see people through stories. We remember people by telling their stories. Without stories we aren't anyone.



# tell me more?

*One of the most important requirements for successful collaboration is trust and connection among everyone involved.*

**WE OFTEN** refer to teams as though they are singular things, forgetting that each one is a group of individual people with their own set of experiences and perspectives. It's very easy to see people in the workplace, through the one-dimensional lens of their job title, forgetting to ever get to know the full breadth of who they are, what they care about and what skills and insights they can contribute.

## TOOL:

Tell Me More


## INSTRUCTIONS:

- Explain to people that you will be dividing them into pairs (if you are using video software that allows breakout rooms. If not, invite them to set up a separate link, just for this exercise)
- Ask them to choose one person to be the Speaker, and one person to be the Listener
- Explain that the Speaker should take two minutes to talk. The Listener shouldn't say anything other than "Tell Me More"
- Ask that they swap over after the two minutes is up, so that the Speaker becomes the Listener and the Listener the Speaker
- You can set the topic of conversation to be anything you like, but the exercise works best when it is personal; for example, "How did you come to be in this role?", "Where are you most creative?", "What's the most exciting trip you've ever taken?"
- Come back together as a whole group and ask each person in turn to introduce the highlights from their partner's story

## INSIGHTS:

- It doesn't take long to have a quality conversation. We all have surprising and interesting stories to tell. Knowing each other personally is not unprofessional – it is a requirement for creating trust, accountability and building successful collaborations. If you are responsible for sharing someone else's story, you listen more carefully and you can set aside your own ego. Empathy is too often practiced in a very lazy way. Not making assumptions about someone, but faithfully representing their story, is a much more intentional way to understand their context, their concerns and their subsequent behaviour





Being prepared doesn't mean  
having the answer to everything.

# heading in the same direction

*Everyone is trying to work out the right thing to do,  
but one of the ways in which you can have the  
biggest positive impact is to empower others.*

**HOW CAN** you get out of your team's way and enable them to achieve their potential (even if that is drastically limited for the time being)? Not only does doing so demonstrate trust and support, which is reciprocated with effort and loyalty, but it reduces the pressure on you and simultaneously increases your chances of success. In an already pressurised situation, you becoming the bottle-neck or break point is a risk to try and avoid.

## TOOL:

Mandating Action


## INSTRUCTIONS:

Use the Canvas on the next page to work through setting mission for your team

# your team

**THIS SECTION IS ABOUT YOUR TEAM'S ABILITY TO TAKE ACTION. IT ENCOURAGES YOU TO THINK ABOUT HOW TO ENABLE THEM TO SUCCEED AND HAVE IMPACT.**

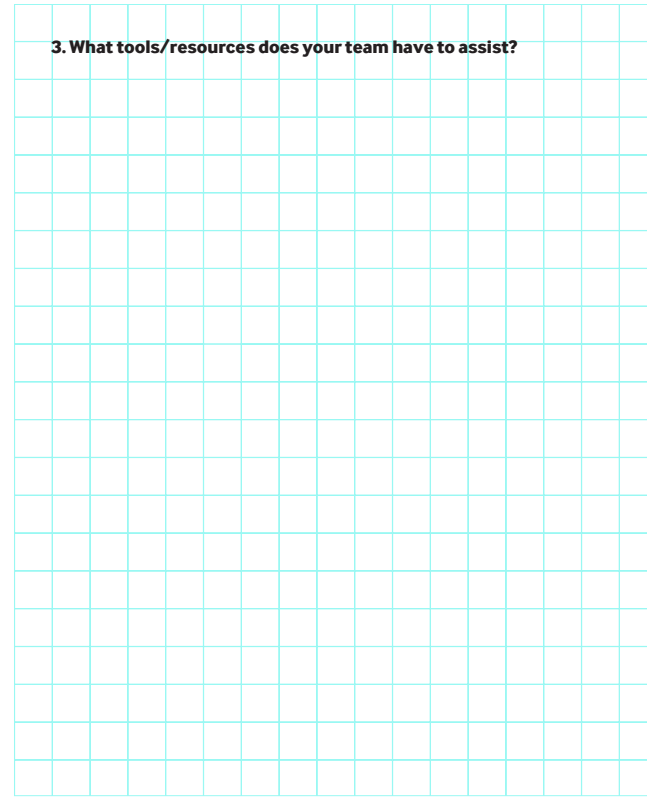
**1. What do you want to enable your team to achieve? (Be specific)**



**2. What is the biggest challenge, getting in the way of you being successful?**



**3. What tools/resources does your team have to assist?**



**4. Who within your ecosystem will you need to engage with?**



## MISSION STATEMENT

**Summarise your aims and values for the team, to enable them to pull together, even when they are remote**



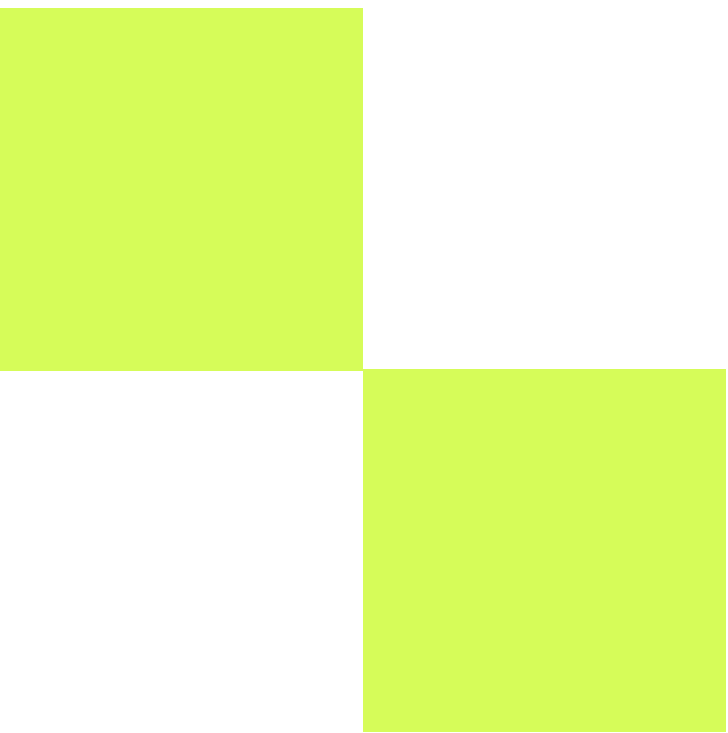


# YOUR ORGANISATION

PART 3:



ADEBORO ODUNLAMI / UNSPLASH



# can we survive?


*Thinking beyond the obvious provokes us to make connections between ideas that we'd never previously stopped to consider.*

## TOOL:

15% Solutions

## INSTRUCTIONS:

- Ask everyone to identify an organisational challenge that they think is a priority
- Discuss each challenge, asking "What is a response that likely offers 15% of the solution?" The point is to think of one or more hypotheses which provide a tangible first step, but don't pretend to have an all-encompassing answer
- Define an experiment that could be done quickly and easily by the people within the group, which would test the potential of this solution
- Identify a way to measure progress and agree how to document and share the result
- After experiments have been run, you can then decide to move forward and expand the scope, or to start again with a new hypothesis



The smallest step is the start of a journey, the largest leap not taken gets you nowhere.

# where to from here?

*The jobs we now have to do aren't easy ones either. We have many many complicated decisions to make, one after the other after the other, some with huge consequences.*

**THERE ARE SOME big questions that leaders of organisations are having to work through. Can we survive? Will our products/propositions/programmes remain relevant? Should we be pivoting? If so, how quickly? With what amount of investment? And the list goes on and on, almost without end. While all of these are important, they are also overwhelming, and have the potential to be paralysing.**

MOVING FROM talk to action has to be the priority, and the quickest way to do this is by starting small and accumulating momentum, confidence, and of course data. Building cultures of experimentation, which for a long time have been conversations reserved for the digital and innovation departments, suddenly have a place on the agenda of the entire organisation. Experimentation always carries the risk of failure, but delaying action is likely to cost more in the long run.



## CONCLUSION:

**In all of this, the goal is to enable others to take action and succeed. Hopefully these tools and suggestions will help you to make progress and feel more comfortable in this new normal. If you only do one thing though, we encourage you to make the time to think about what it is that you need, and commit to something very specific, to ensure that need is met.**



tomorrow I will...

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