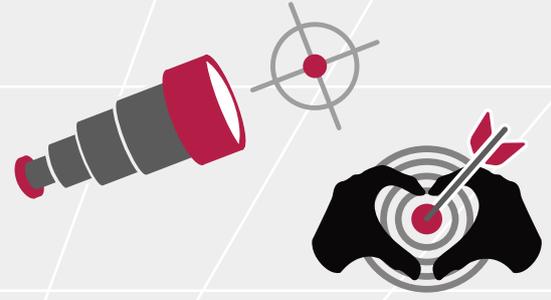


# Virtual office established... what next to ensure your organisation remains effective?



Recent weeks have challenged organisations to operate in a way few of us ever expected, or planned. We've seen them move quickly to roll out and upscale virtual offices. They've changed how they operate both to meet the demands of customers and to help employees adapt to remote working. Still, an important question remains: what next?

Leaders have had to manage the challenges against a backdrop of difficult personal and business circumstances and no one should underestimate the effort and energy it has taken to achieve so much in so little time. It's worth pausing to give your people credit for this.

As operations stabilise, leaders are starting to look at what all this change means for their organisations' strategy, processes and structures. While doing this, they should invest the same energy and commitment into addressing the softer, intangible aspects such as team dynamics, company values and the informal, unofficial ways things get done. It is tempting to focus on the tangible elements that are easier to articulate and measure progress against. But the risk is that doing so creates serious, unintended consequences for your organisation and people. We believe businesses that look holistically across everything that influences their organisational effectiveness will be best placed to weather the storms ahead. And they'll be the ones that overcome these challenges and come out on the other side stronger.



## Think about what makes your organisation effective

One fundamental component often underestimated when looking at an organisation's effectiveness is its purpose – why it exists. For most, this won't have changed as a result of Covid-19, though a few companies have seen a seismic shift in the short term – carmakers becoming medical equipment assembly lines and perfume houses producing hand sanitiser, for example.

If your organisation's purpose is understood and unchanged, you're in a position to ask **"How can we be most effective in this new environment?"**

At Berkeley, to help clients understand the elements that contribute towards their effectiveness, we've defined a simple organisational effectiveness framework. There are three main questions we suggest you and your team work together to answer:



## Are you focusing on the right things for your organisation?

Today, many leaders are taking time to step back and consider their company strategy. Does it need to be paused or revised in the short term to reflect the changes brought on by Covid-19? Will the changes have a longer term effect on the organisation and how it operates?

While it's important to review your strategy, at the same time, you need to ask what this means in terms of living up to your organisation's values and behaviours. How you handle the next few months will help define the stories told about you and your organisation. It's about not only delivering to a strategy but also considering **how** it will be delivered. Organisations will be remembered for how they kept things going, rallied together, stepped up, prioritised activities and more. With everyone operating under different pressures from three months ago, values and behaviours will be tested in ways never thought possible. Getting these right cannot be taken lightly in terms of their effect on brand reputation, employee engagement and public perception.

To address the intangible aspects, you should consider how your organisation's values and behaviours translate into the unusual circumstances you now face. Do you need to rearticulate them to reflect current ways of working? How can you continue to promote and demonstrate them in a remote working world? How can you share great examples and strengthen your organisation's culture?

## Have you shored up your operations for the mid to long term?

Organisations and their employees have been under immense strain in recent weeks. They've had to adapt day-to-day operations to reflect dramatic changes in business volumes – up and down – and the need to support a much greater degree of remote working. Many transformation programmes are under review to decide whether the scope, timeline or means of delivery needs to change.

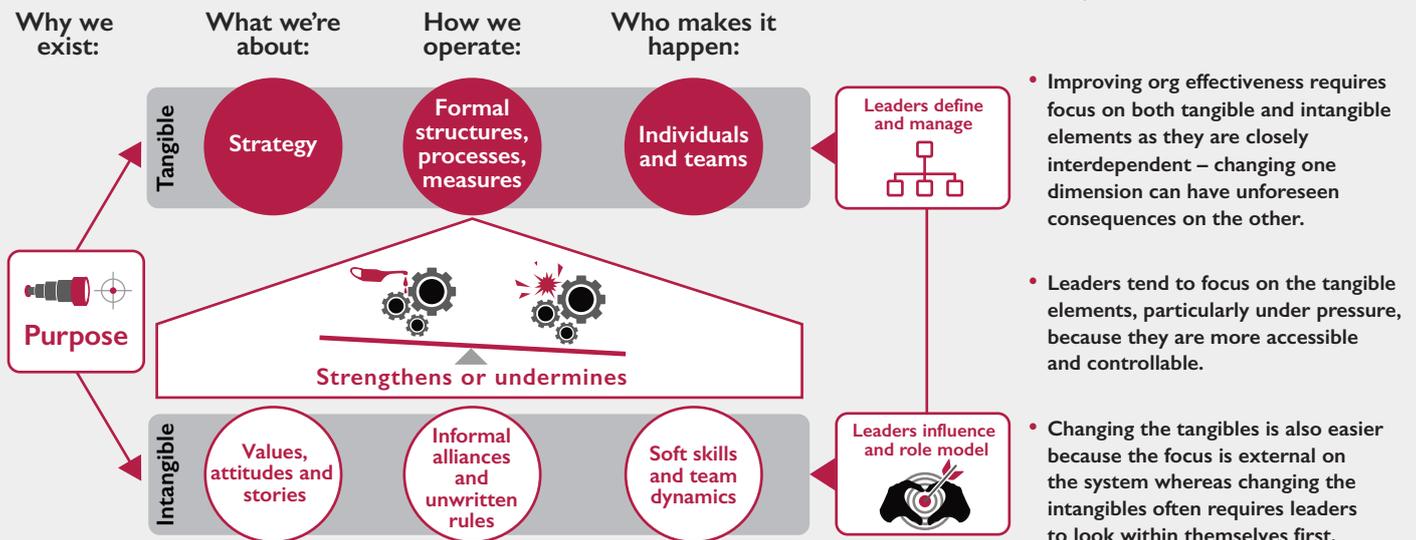
Leaders are shifting their focus to shoring up these new ways of working to make sure they are sustainable for what could be an extended period. At the same time, it's important to consider what changes are necessary to informal ways of working and how to maintain these in the coming months. No matter how well defined processes and procedures are, organisations rely on informal alliances and personal relationships to make sure things run smoothly and efficiently. Take desk-side conversations, impromptu catch-ups and opportunistic meetings, for example. Each forms part of how we successfully operate. Replacing these with too much formal communication and tighter governance and controls, introduces a risk of inefficiency, disempowerment and reduced connectedness into the organisation.

You need to encourage your employees to continue to invest, albeit virtually, in maintaining strong relationships at work – both within teams and across functions. You should also look for opportunities for people to connect outside of standard business activities and promote a healthy mix of formal and informal meetings. Are your people being more collaborative or more siloed? Is there a good balance of structured and unstructured opportunities to talk? Do employees feel encouraged to reach out to others in the organisation, as well as to external suppliers and customers?

It's important for everyone to be vigilant to pressure points in the organisation. If processes prove cumbersome in a virtual office, you need to make sure there's a channel for people speak up, share the problem and work together to adapt and improve the processes. Done well, this could be a fantastic opportunity to improve effectiveness across your organisation, providing a trigger for change that (rightly) isn't seen as a cost-saving exercise but instead about making it a better place for everyone to work.



## Organisational Effectiveness Framework



## Are you doing the right things to support your people and teams?

The current situation is unprecedented and likely to have an impact on your people. Sadly, some organisations are facing difficult short-term decisions to ensure their survival, putting people in furlough or having to let them go completely. Others are managing to avoid this but nevertheless need to invest effort in supporting and retaining their people through this turbulent time.

At the team level, business functions may remain the same, but how they operate, the balance of resourcing and the underpinning team structures could change as a result of shifts in strategy, processes and ways of working.

Leadership teams may use this time to look at the impact these changes will have on organisation structure. But this should be in conjunction with the more intangible aspects of soft skills and team dynamics. Now more than ever, you need to act as a coach and supporter for your teams, providing pastoral care and helping them adapt.

Employees will need to find a working style that best suits them, while recognising this may differ from the styles of other people in their team. Managers need to accept this and have open conversations to understand how the different styles can operate effectively together. How will people need to adapt? Who might need specific support?

Above all, trusting your employees will be vital. Building and developing effective teams in the virtual world will be new to many organisations. There's a risk managers might adopt a task-focused style that's seen as micromanaging, placing too much emphasis on measuring individual employee productivity. What's really needed is a focus on outcomes and team working rather than individual tasks. This will give employees and teams more autonomy and help create and build trust.

## So... what next?

In any context, improving your organisation's effectiveness requires focus on both the tangible and the intangible elements – they're interdependent. In today's backdrop of significant social and economic change as a result of Covid-19, you should view the coming months as a challenge and an opportunity to set the foundations for your organisation's future success. Take time to consider what you want the legacy for this period to be and put the right steps in place accordingly. The benefits include being well placed when you emerge from this challenging time.

If you are interested in learning more about the Berkeley Organisational Effectiveness Framework or would like to discuss any of the topics in this article, please contact Simon Close at [Simon.Close@berkeleypartnership.com](mailto:Simon.Close@berkeleypartnership.com)

