



# The Coronavirus: An Unexpected Opportunity to Change the Way We Change

*Featured Blog Post from Blanchard LeaderChat  
By Pat Zigarmi and Judd Hoekstra*

The coronavirus pandemic upended our world in a matter of weeks.

Businesses closed. Stores shuttered. Unemployment soared. And worst of all, the virus took our loved ones.

Companies were forced to reinvent the way they worked in just a few days. IT departments scrambled to provide equipment for employees. Managers and their people struggled to adjust to the new reality.

For those of us fortunate to keep our jobs, the boundaries between work and home vanished. Spare rooms became offices. Some of us worked exceptionally long hours. Some had little to do.

When historians chronicle these dark days, they will write how fear and uncertainty cast a pall over the world. They will also share that there were surprising pockets of innovation as employees exercised their newfound autonomy and rose to the challenges of the moment.

Now, organisations around the globe are reopening, sort of. Unevenly for sure. Making decisions without complete information. Uncertain about the future.

This creates an opportunity for all leaders to embrace the changes ahead in a radically different way.

## **The Business Case for High-Involvement Change**

The pandemic acted like a microscope.

It magnified how courageous, curious, agile, and resilient we (individuals and organisations!) can be. It gave us new ways of thinking about how and where work gets done.

So what are some of the lessons we're learning?

The command-and-control leadership style looks like a relic from the past. The idea that a few at the top know what is best for the many seems untenable. Additionally, unlike hierarchical organisations of the past, today's frontline employees have more access to information than ever before. The Internet has become a great leveller, empowering employees and making command and control look slow and old.

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The conclusion is that leaders must invite all stakeholders to conversations about change.

We also know that the pre-pandemic status quo suppressed employee engagement and enthusiasm. Creative solutions emerged when employees took ownership of problems. An inclusive, high-involvement environment is the only way to keep alive the surges of creativity, resourcefulness, and collaboration we've witnessed in the last months.

The coronavirus pandemic also showed that employees could co-create solutions and implement changes that met organisational and individual needs.

When employees return to the office, it will be a critical time for leaders to capitalise on their creativity and rethink how and where work gets done.

## Essential Conversations Ahead

Change means different things to different people. We define it in our Leading People Through Change® (LPTC) workshop as “the gap between what is and what could be.”

In the case of the pandemic, change is the gap between what was, what is, and what could be. The challenge facing all companies is jettisoning what didn't work (like endless face-to-face meetings) and embracing what did (like agility and empowerment).

To understand what did and didn't work before and during the pandemic, leaders need to have meaningful conversations with their people. Before leaders announce any change, they need to share what they saw/see with their peers and understand the implications. Finally, they need to ask employees what they saw/see and know.

These conversations will help your organisation define potential changes about where and how work gets done going forward and ensure that the proposed solutions solve the right problems.

The goal of these conversations is to help each other appreciate different perspectives about work before and during the pandemic so you can co-create the “what could be” for your workplace.

Why is this so important?

Change initiatives are notoriously difficult undertakings—they fail 75% of the time. And most are unsuccessful for the same reason: 80% of companies use a top-down, minimally inclusive approach. And yet we've also learned this from our change work over the years: “Those who plan the battle rarely battle the plan!”

Involving others to develop realistic and right-resourced change plans will also let you discover potential implementation problems before you reopen. Casting a wide net has inherent value. Our founder Ken Blanchard powerfully summed up the reason: “None of us is as smart as all of us.”

Once you reopen and/or adapt some blended solution of working from home and at the office, your employees will have concerns that arise in a predictable sequence. The Leading People Through Change® Stages of Concern model, below, illustrates this.

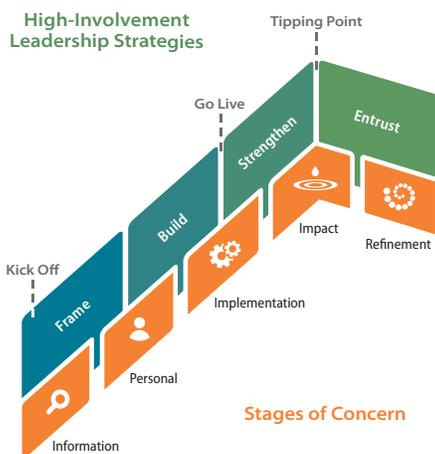
Perhaps the most important conversations you'll have with employees when you reopen are what we call Concerns Conversations. These surface people's unanswered questions with the proposed changes.

When you think about reopening your organisation, we bet that these are the questions keeping people awake at night. But if you use a high-involvement approach to change, you don't have to have all the answers. The answers come from bringing those affected by the change into the conversation.

**Want to know what your people are feeling from the pandemic-forced break from working on-site? Here are some questions to ask.**

- What was your typical work week like before and during the pandemic?
- What did you miss about the office while working from home?
- What will you miss about working from home if you come back to the office?
- Which do you prefer?
- What do you gain and lose in each scenario?
- What are the issues we need to address for you to feel safe, supported, and energised when coming back to the office?
- What are the issues we need to address if you were to continue working from home?

## Leading People Through Change®



In reality, the only thing fast about a top-down approach is decision-making. However, the speed of implementation and realisation of results are significantly slower with a top-down approach because those outcomes rely on the commitment of those being asked to change.

An African proverb captures the essence of Blanchard's high-involvement approach to change: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

## Get Ready to Go Far

The pandemic is demanding change in your organisation. Leading People Through Change® can make it a transformative moment.

Joe Dunne, director of sales enablement at Global Industrial, recently went through LPTC training with forty sales leaders. Here's what he had to say about it:

"Leading People Through Change® has been a game changer for us. The highly interactive virtual sessions were delivered flawlessly, under a tight time frame, by our trusted partners at Blanchard. We're seeing immediate on-the-job application of the mindsets and skillsets we learned as our people return to the office from working remote."

Leading People Through Change® can be conducted as a one-day face-to-face session, a seven-hour virtual instructor-led training (four virtual sessions), a two-to four-hour executive overview, and a soon-to-be-released 35-minute digital overview.

Please [contact Blanchard Australia on 1300 25 26 24](tel:1300252624) if you would like to learn more about our [Leading People Through Change®](#) solution.

# Blanchard® AUSTRALIA

1 Queens Road  
Melbourne, Victoria, 3004, AUSTRALIA  
**Within Australia:** 1300 25 26 24  
**International contact:** +61 3 9863 7031  
**Fax:** +61 2 9243 4690  
**Email:** [info@blanchardaustralia.com.au](mailto:info@blanchardaustralia.com.au)

[blanchardaustralia.com.au](http://blanchardaustralia.com.au)