

# **LEADING FROM A DISTANCE**

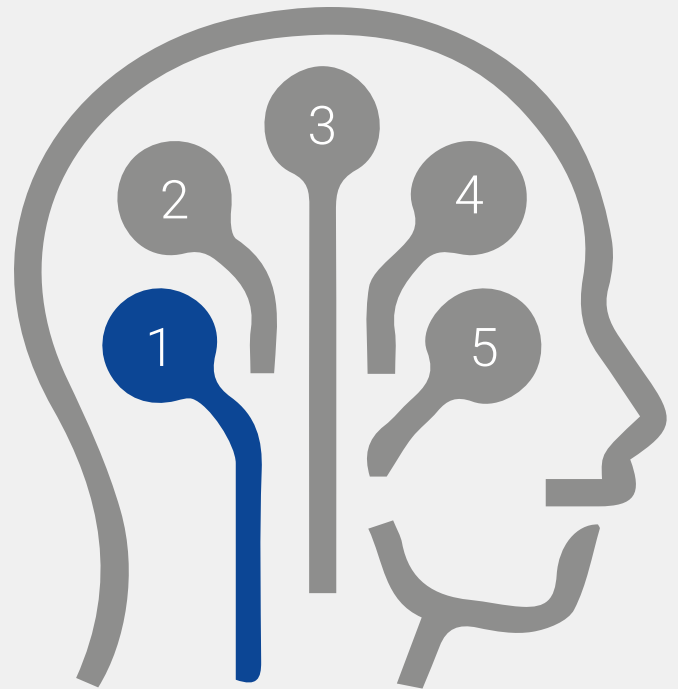
**PART 2 OF A 6 PART SERIES**

The essentials of leading through crisis to transformation

# FIVE ESSENTIALS OF LEADING THROUGH CRISIS TO TRANSFORMATION

## 1 Leading from a distance

- 2 Building high-performance teams
- 3 Responding to crisis with empathy
- 4 Earning and keeping trust
- 5 Sustaining the transformation



Amid any crisis, business leaders in all industries must make tough choices, in real time, to survive under new constraints and challenges while also planning for the future. As the worst of the impacts and restrictions from COVID-19 begin to ease, leaders are wondering what the new normal might look like. For instance, for how long will people continue to work at a physical distance from one another? What new challenges—and opportunities—might the new normal present? How might those realities evolve? During the considerable uncertainty, leaders are asking themselves, “How can I get the best from my teams in this new world?”

“An organization cannot choose its external circumstances, but it can choose how it responds to them.”

— Paraphrased from Greek philosopher Epictetus

There are no one-size-fits-all answers on how to best lead at a distance. But forward-thinking leaders know that even though the pandemic has served to spotlight the usefulness of remote work, such work will always be needed as organizations continue operating in a globalized world. Transformative leaders—those who know how to cause marked change in others—can master distance leadership by heeding lessons we’ve gleaned from analyzing organizations’ experiences during the pandemic. As a result, they’ll help their organizations and teams emerge stronger as well as more productive and resilient in the postpandemic era.

# THREE LESSONS TO MASTER DISTANCE LEADERSHIP:

## 1 ALIGN EVERYONE BEHIND YOUR LONGER-TERM STRATEGY

Strategic alignment amongst leadership teams is more crucial than ever if organizations hope to navigate the alien landscape the pandemic will leave behind. The most-effective C-suite teams are those that can achieve alignment on why, where, and how their organizations created value yesterday; how they can create value tomorrow; and how they’ll have to pivot operations and reallocate resources swiftly to continue generating value in the future. Such alignments are often elusive even under normal circumstances. And they’re of course harder to achieve when people are struggling to recover from a type of crisis they’ve never experienced before and when choppy Zoom videoconferences must serve as strategy-room meetings.

Leaders who can align others behind their company’s strategy for the next normal will set the stage for successful execution (figure 1). And it’s only through concerted execution that a strategy can deliver the intended results.

**FIGURE 1: STRATEGIC AND CAPABILITY ALIGNMENT IS CRITICAL**



Source: AlixPartners

Leaders can foster this alignment by:

- **Clarify their organizations’ value-creation opportunities** by moving beyond the numbers and into precise actions and pertinent opportunities to shift resources effectively—based on new circumstances.
- **Diagnosing their own alignment** behind those priorities and the strategic actions needed to achieve them.
- **Implementing open-source leadership concepts** such as **Salesforce’s V2MOM**—which stands for vision, values, methods, obstacles, and measures—to better communicate organizations’ visions and strategic priorities and thereby foster transparency from the top down to the front line through frequent communication by means of all channels available.

## 2 BREATHE EASIER ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONAL COSTS OF REMOTE WORK

As huge numbers of people began working from home during the pandemic for the first time, organizations had to learn how to help employees and teams stay productive.

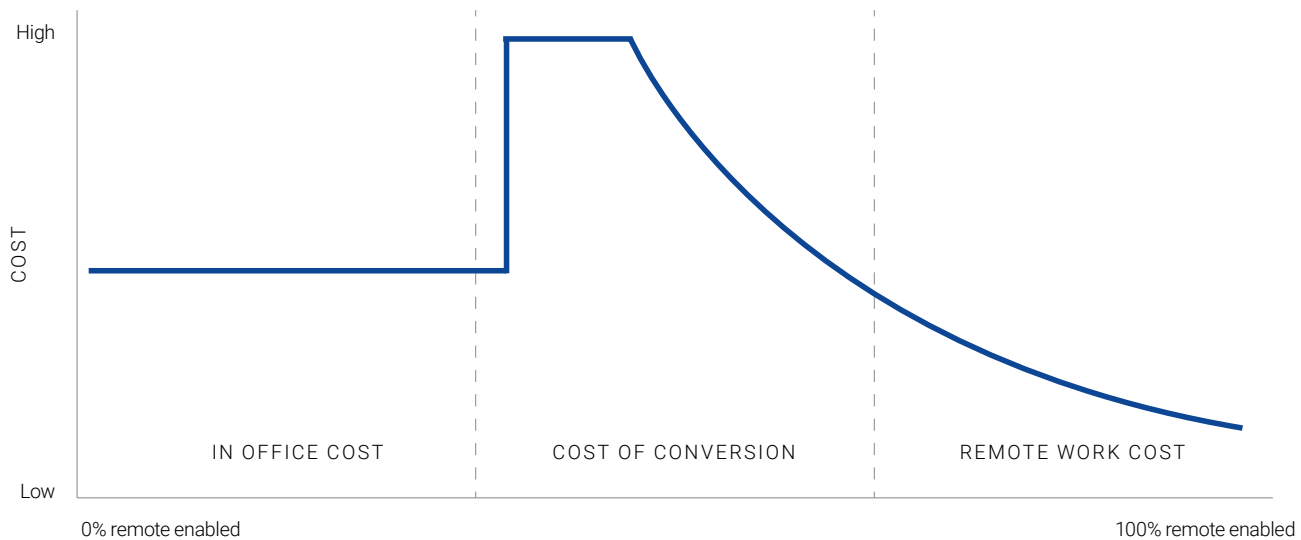
**Like any major change, the effort initially came with high costs.**

For instance, people had to adopt new processes and master new technologies. And as their organizations' culture carriers, leaders had to model new behaviors – like being accepting of kids' and pets' interruptions of videoconferences, respecting employees' boundaries, and understanding that the merger of professional and private lives might necessitate more flexible work hours – all essential to making remote work effective.

But there's good news: with any big change, as people normalize new ways of working, their productivity starts resurging. Consequently, those initial costs get amortized over time. The same is true for organizations that switched to remote work during the pandemic (figure 2). Many of the immediate hardships that came with the shift—such as the costs of new technology and drops in productivity—have become sunk costs and cannot be recouped. Therefore, companies that were new to remote work may decide to let employees continue working from home—and without seeing a significant drop in performance and productivity.

After all, remote work encourages greater autonomy among employees operating close to customers and other stakeholders. And that frees up leaders' time to focus on important activities like setting strategy for their teams and helping employees strengthen their own leadership capabilities.

**FIGURE 2: ORGANIZATIONAL COSTS OF MOVING TO REMOTE WORK**



Source: AlixPartners

# 3 ARTICULATE EXPECTATIONS AND DECISION RIGHTS

To get maximum value from remote work and continue driving down initial costs, leaders will have to overcome certain accompanying challenges.

One key tactic is to clearly communicate expectations. For instance, every morning, when employees log on, they should know what they're expected to accomplish, why they are doing particular tasks, and how to report progress. Leaders can take advantage of agile project management tools like:

- Kanbans: help to visualize work.
- Story points: estimate effort as influenced by the amount of work, complexity, risk, and uncertainty involved.
- Wiki pages: ensure that teams understand the strategy behind their objectives, the company's implementation plan, their role in implementing the strategy, and outcomes expected from employees.

All of this serves to further strengthen strategic alignment.

At the end of the day, an organization's value is really the sum of the decisions it makes and executes. Its assets, structure, and capabilities are inert unless its executives and managers have visibility into the essential decisions that they are individually charged with making and can competently execute.

Remote working will continue presenting both opportunities and challenges for organizations that retain some or many aspects of this paradigm postcrisis. But by taking advantage of the lessons described here, transformative leaders can lead effectively at a distance—and thus capitalize on the opportunities while surmounting the challenges.

## AUTHOR:

**Connor Lott**  
Vice President  
clott@alixpartners.com

## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

**Ted Bililies, PhD**  
Managing Director  
tbililies@alixpartners.com

## ABOUT US

For nearly forty years, AlixPartners has helped businesses around the world respond quickly and decisively to their most critical challenges – circumstances as diverse as urgent performance improvement, accelerated transformation, complex restructuring and risk mitigation.

These are the moments when everything is on the line – a sudden shift in the market, an unexpected performance decline, a time-sensitive deal, a fork-in-the-road decision. But it's not what we do that makes a difference, it's how we do it.

Tackling situations when time is of the essence is part of our DNA – so we adopt an action-oriented approach at all times. We work in small, highly qualified teams with specific industry and functional expertise, and we operate at pace, moving quickly from analysis to implementation. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our clients until the job is done, and only measure our success in terms of the results we deliver.

Our approach enables us to help our clients confront and overcome truly future-defining challenges. We partner with you to make the right decisions and take the right actions. And we are right by your side. When it really matters.

The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of AlixPartners, LLP, its affiliates, or any of its or their respective professionals or clients. This article *Leading from a distance* ("Article") was prepared by AlixPartners, LLP ("AlixPartners") for general information and distribution on a strictly confidential and non-reliance basis. No one in possession of this Article may rely on any portion of this Article. This Article may be based, in whole or in part, on projections or forecasts of future events. A forecast, by its nature, is speculative and includes estimates and assumptions which may prove to be wrong. Actual results may, and frequently do, differ from those projected or forecast. The information in this Article reflects conditions and our views as of this date, all of which are subject to change. We undertake no obligation to update or provide any revisions to the Article. This Article is the property of AlixPartners, and neither the Article nor any of its contents may be copied, used, or distributed to any third party without the prior written consent of AlixPartners.