

KURT BAUER

General Manager for Services in Greater China, SAP



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Because of Covid, we saw into each other's homes. We became more human.

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Pandemics - and other crises - need both pastoral and practical management skills. Bauer's experience of leading staff through the Covid-19 pandemic was a dual tale of morale and people-management.

Bauer said, "Not only did we have to ensure outputs were delivered for clients, but we had to lead a multinational staff body through a transition to home-working, and ensure that concerns - about personal safety, job security - were appropriately addressed. Our teams experienced shifts in culture and working practices."

“ In the beginning, people were worried about losing their jobs. Managers need empathy to give hope and confidence. This must be coupled with transparency and honesty as much as possible, in order to be pragmatic and realistic about crisis situations without demoralising staff.

We sent small gifts and personal letters to share empathy and boost morale with our people, but also needed to manage a mass pivot to working from home as it was deemed safest for those that could. This brought its own challenges and lessons, both in terms of managing teams remotely, and in terms of cross-cultural management. ”

Initially, Bauer and his teams struggled - not with outputs, but instead with ideas-generation and creative collaboration. "The biggest shift was to switch on the camera and adapt to virtual collaboration. The natural pollination of ideas was not happening as easily. However, we noticed no change in the performance of teams already working together pre-pandemic - indeed, staff were at times contributing more than ever out of concern for the state of the business."

Their experiences quickly dispelled the notion that you have to be present in a shared workplace in order to be productive; they were still delivering outputs efficiently while working remotely. "To work well remotely, we felt a shift was needed from an Eastern approach to management - more hierarchical and directive - to a Western approach, where staff more often act on their own opinions and interpretations of how to execute tasks."

However, more was needed to manage a remote creative process. Bauer said, "Our teams analysed how they were working, identified areas where we could improve, and instituted new and deliberate practices from agreeing shared terminology to using digital collaboration tools and more regular check-ins."

Despite this, he acknowledges the difficulty of fostering spontaneity and creativity in structured, scheduled settings - those that become more necessary when working remotely. Bauer believes that "Meeting up face to face, where this can be done safely, is key to creativity, and team and client satisfaction. We hope to continue the more caring culture that has been established among his teams as a result of the pandemic." Bauer continues to emphasise the business benefits of management 'soft skills' - transparency, authenticity, honesty, clear communication - and how the crisis has highlighted their value, even beyond times of social or business disruption.

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