

# Replacing Our Culture of More

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Words by **RANYA NEHMEH**



The changes we have been confronted with in 2020 have been life altering. Not only have we lost a sense of freedom that we previously took for granted – the freedom to plan ahead, to move from country to country, from home to office, and the freedom to interact with people and objects. We have moved through months of uncertainty, anxiety, loneliness, and hope. As a result, we have collectively, and personally begun to rethink the way we live our lives.

I believe that there is a silver lining in terms of what this pandemic has taught us, on both a professional and personal level. We are realizing that this culture that demands more can actually function quite well with less.

One of the positive developments I am hearing from my colleagues and friends at work over the last months, is how their workload has been compressed as a result of working from home. This doesn't mean they are working less; on the contrary, many are accomplishing more than when they were in the office, but they are working in a smarter way. There are fewer distractions, less meetings, and small talk by the water cooler. Also, with travel restrictions, a lot of business trips have been curbed, highlighting that much of what we thought were "crucial trips" could have very well been replaced by a virtual videoconference. A sifting process has occurred that

highlights priorities. We have begun to ask ourselves, is that meeting, or that trip absolutely necessary? As a result, we are experiencing a shift in mind-set to where the focus now lies less on doing more, and more on prioritizing efforts that will yield meaningful results. This is the concept of Essentialism defined as "less but better" (McKeown). As the author of *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, McKeown further elaborates, "It's about how to get the right things done.... about the wisest possible investment of your time and energy".


Leaders should therefore focus their teams on exploring the critical projects to be pursued, prioritize these and work in the most effective and efficient way to achieve these goals, instead of getting bogged down in working long hours, and wasting time on trivial tasks and unnecessary meetings. It is no longer about how to get the most out of your workforce but rather how to narrow your efforts and focus only on the most useful of tasks to get the best out of them.

The current pandemic is providing a timely opportunity to build or enhance a culture of trust. With remote working, employers have no choice but to empower their employees and to believe that work responsibilities and deadlines will be met. This is the ideal time for leaders to embrace Essentialism, and develop ways to work smarter, to reduce

‘tasks’, and stay in touch with the essence of the project at hand. Asking the question, ‘Is this Essential?’ will reframe and redirect the path forward.

Beyond work, this pandemic has also made us reflect on our personal needs and discover what is really important to us. We are constantly surrounded by shops and advertisements pushing the latest brands, gadgets, cars, etc, Consumerism is at an all time high. If that’s not overwhelming enough, we also have social media to reinforce this culture of bombardment. It can get exhausting and make our minds feel messy. But when the pandemic shuts us down, forces our movements to a standstill, and dictates the terms of our interactions we have no choice but re-evaluate and adjust to this simpler version of our life.

This concept of Essentialism has resurfaced organically as a result of a world crisis that has left us reeling and without control. Essentialism is something that can provide comfort by reminding us what is important and what we are able to let go of.

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She holds a Doctorate in Business Administration from the Swiss Management University and a Masters in Human Resources from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). She has over fifteen years of work experience in the areas of external relations and human resource management.

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