

# The power of human connection

By [Mushambi Mutuma](#)

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Much has been said about how the Covid-19 pandemic has permanently changed how we live - and how we work. There's been talk about how we will place more focus on a work-life balance. Even more has been said about how inner cities will empty and commercial landlords will struggle to fill offices as we work more and more remotely. Even the tech giants are fleeing cities and have told us that they will never return to fully face-to-face working.



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But I wonder how much will really happen in reality. I believe that there is something missing, that being apart and working remote will never emulate: the need for human connection.

From a personal point of view, I've been interested in seeing how our own team has managed remote working. The senior members have taken it in their stride – they have the confidence to be able to self-motivate and the experience to work largely independently.

However, the more junior members struggle - they are missing out from the learning that happens automatically when surrounded by their peers, from the spontaneous conversations that happen in the passageway, from the relationships that are formed.

## **We are communal beings**

It doesn't matter how many tools we build to help us innovate, drive productivity, monitor behaviour and work apart – Teams, Monday.com, Slack, Zoom, WhatsApp – we need the human connection. It's what makes us who we are as communal beings.

We will always need to find ways of coming together safely and we cannot work from our beds forever. In the creative industries especially, we need to collaborate in person to have the best ideas. We have also found that we need to look at new ways to build teams and form relationships – voice and video calls can only go so far, and much is lost in tonality and intent.



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As leaders, we need to create fresh ways to connect and find touch points to interact. Something as small as care packs and birthday cakes delivered to our employees' homes start to become more meaningful than they might have in the past.

Although tech can be an efficient connector, we time and time again come back to needing the human connection.

## **A hybrid approach to managing work and teams**

Moving forward, I believe that we will all need find a hybrid approach to working and to managing our teams. While we may never go back to 100% working 9-5 from our offices, we will also never go back to being 100% remote. An agile approach not only to employee preferences but culture building is necessary.

As business consultants and brand custodians we need to keep this in mind with how we work and the campaigns and strategies we develop. We have seen this already as we work with clients across the board – from retail to FMCG to banking – as they navigate how to find the right mix of remote and in-person contact both for their employees, as well as consumers.

A good example of this is the rapid shift that retailers have had to make to move online or expand their existing online offerings. They found that it is not enough to simply put their catalogue online, they also need to replicate the offline customer experience.



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Customer service needs to be as good as, or better, than brick and mortar stores, as this online space is the only space in which the business interacts now with their customers. The customer experience also has to be as unique, personalised and hyper convenient as other players in the market such as Amazon, Netflix or UberEats. In lieu of physical touch consumers expect that data is used to understand and connect with them further.

In other instances we've also found the benefit of intimate touchpoints even within digital connections. Over the past year we've transitioned to facilitating and hosting a number of online events for a brand. Whereas once this would have been a huge conference for hundreds of people, we now held multiple niche, intimate conversations with smaller groups of five or six. We found that these allowed us to avoid the disconnection that a speaker has before a large audience, instead allowing the brand to have focused conversations with attendee instead of lecturing them. The depth of connection and conversation

that occurs is invaluable.

This example, like others, reinforces my belief that there are some good things that will come out of this pandemic. A re-appreciation for a face-to-face conversation; a return to personalised customer service; and the focus on the small and niche instead of the large and generic.

All of this comes back to one thing – the power and impact of human connection.

Or as we say at Black Powder, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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