



## Why authentic informal leaders are key to an organisation's emotional health

**Tapping into the collective wisdom of key employees can help a company build the capacity to weather the worst crises.**

Businesses and governments are mobilising to fight COVID-19, and their top priorities have included stabilising the workforce's health, ensuring business continuity, securing liquidity, and maintaining supply chains. These are all efforts an organisation relies on to ensure the effectiveness of its systems. But one important factor is often overlooked: the emotional health and effectiveness of the organisation.

As New York governor Andrew Cuomo, who has emerged as a popular figure by virtue of his daily coronavirus press conference / therapy session, put it: "Call it psychological. Call it feelings. Call it emotions. But this is as much a social crisis as a health crisis." People's individual and collective feelings are the most powerful source of energy that exists in an organization – for good and bad. That's why it is vital for organisations and governments to get in touch with and understand the fear, anxiety, and worry the virus is causing, and to find ways to replace those negative emotions with love, empathy, and other positive feelings about the work itself. In recent months, we have all gained an appreciation for antibodies – the substances inside the body that rise up to fight viruses and ultimately act as protection. To cope in this new environment, organizations will have to focus on building up emotional antibodies.

This is no easy task. Leaders are often too far removed from the front lines to understand the feelings and emotions at work. Sometimes, emotions can simply get lost in the complexity of managing a crisis. But leaders have an important resource that, if developed, can generate organisational antibodies: authentic informal leaders (AILs). These people possess and exhibit certain leadership strengths, often without having formal titles or authority. AILs include those who model and teach desired behaviors (exemplars), those who connect with people across the organisation (networkers), and those who instinctively link peers' positive feelings with day-to-day activities (pride builders).



AILs have excellent emotional sensing and energising capabilities. They naturally detect feelings at play in any organisational challenge, capture and create positive emotions, and know how to influence and encourage people to engage in important behaviors. Management can mobilise them as a powerful resource to learn and identify how to respond in moments of crises. When appropriate, they can also counterbalance negative feelings.

As a case in point, take Emily Fawcett, a nurse at Lenox Hill Hospital who was a subject of a profile in the New York Daily News. She's a classic pride builder. To combat the worry, anxiety, and stress she saw among fellow nurses caring for COVID-19 patients, she started "hope huddles," in which nurses and doctors gather on either side of a hallway to cheer patients being discharged. "It really brings a smile to everyone's day and it gives them a little pep in their step and it keeps them going through another long shift," Fawcett said. These hope huddles make people feel better about their work and replace negative stress with positive emotion. The idea has spread throughout hospitals nationwide.

AILs such as Fawcett create the emotional commitment among colleagues necessary to achieve high performance. During the COVID-19 crisis, they can help foster positive emotions, connections, and empathy, especially as people are quarantined or working remotely.

At one of our European clients, AILs launched a virtual open door / coffee policy. Team members were offered a videoconference link they could use during the day to share concerns, ask for advice, or simply check in. When managers recognised it as a best practice, they created a dedicated crisis team and opened the videoconference link to external stakeholders daily from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. This provided a form of always-on virtual support to key remote clients. And these forums became a sounding board for addressing urgent priorities including business strategy, operating models, and culture-related issues.

Identifying AILs is not a complicated process. In fact, people all across the organisation, from management to shop floor employees, already know who these AILs are. They can be found in a variety of ways – through informal conversations, peer nominations, or even direct self-application. Some clients use organisational network analysis tools with emails, instant chats, and LinkedIn to identify employees with high degrees of connectivity. In most cases these efforts differ from the formal HR mechanisms used to identify top talent for promotion. It is important to ensure diversity in AILs – not only in race and gender, but in title, level, function, and geography. For example, in compiling a roster of AILs, one bank ensured that people from bank branches, call centers, and a variety of corporate functions were included.

At a different global client, we identified 10 AILs across several functions in a 45-minute working session. Three big easels were set up, each one labeled for a type of AIL. Next, the group wrote names on Post-it notes and put them on the easels. As they did so, they talked about how these individuals helped the organisation.

AILs can be engaged and activated in a variety of ways – many of them virtual. For example, emotionally intelligent AILs may be asked to launch an effort to understand and find ways to manage the organisation's fear and bolster individual confidence with respect to COVID-19. They can launch virtual small communities that meet regularly to discuss how they are motivating their teams. They can organise a Facebook group or another group to discuss topics informally.

Rather than mandate that AILs act in a specific way, formal leaders should ask AILs how best to engage and activate them. AILs can be tapped to identify best practices and test them in small areas before the practices are scaled up more widely. For example, AILs will likely best understand and model the ways in which people will remain socially connected while being physically distant.

The current crisis has forced companies to take greater stock of their mission and capabilities. As they look inward, organisations should realise that the collective wisdom of AILs is a powerful asset that they can lean on. By tapping into multiple cells of informal leaders across every organisation, formal leaders have the power to build and reinforce the organisation's emotional antibodies.

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- Measurement models – Non participating contracts
- Measurement models – Participating contracts
- Presentation and Disclosure
- Level of aggregation, transition, reinsurance and other topics
- IFRS 17 in practice – cases
- Link between IFRS 17 and Solvency II

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