

WORK HAS LEFT THE BUILDING by Jitske Kramer

How to reorganize work after the COVID culture shock



Jitske Kramer wrote *Work Has Left the Building* during the second Dutch lockdown in October 2020. About how we experienced a collective culture shock with COVID-19 and the impact on our work life. Our timing has been off for months, we are confronted with uncertainties, crisis decisions and the necessity to adapt and change. Working from home became standard overnight which requires more than 'playing online office at home with makeshift solutions'.

How do you adapt your corporate culture, how do you approach leadership at a distance, what can you do to reach the end of this period in a better position, how do you preserve the pride within your organization and the connection within your team if you haven't seen each other but virtually for months, do you consider this period a crisis or a transformation, what new rituals do you need to survive?

Drawing from anthropology, experiences in organizations from her readers and the many travels Jitske made across the globe, she offers some support for these strange times. *Work Has Left the Building* is an inspirational book, packed with valuable perspectives and practical answers for the questions we now have.

Over 10,000 copies sold within two months

#1 bestselling book

Nominated for Management Book of the Year 2021

“According to Kramer, our approach to online meetings is still too much with the mindset of a live meeting, captured in a computer screen. Truly communicating digitally requires a different approach, with different rules and skills. We need to accent the subtle signals we normally use with tone, facial expressions, things that are hard to pick up on through the screen. Online meetings require clear rules to make sure you can stay focused. The list for digital etiquette in the book is essential and the online check-in and check-out could immediately make for better online meetings. The book is informative, personal and engaged. The author and publisher succeeded in publishing a great book within six weeks, quite an achievement.” – **Rudy Kor, author and advisor on Change Management**



Jitske Kramer travels all over the world to learn from traditional healers, leaders, surprising innovators and random strangers. She is a corporate anthropologist, international public speaker, entrepreneur and facilitator. She wrote *Managing Cultural Dynamics*, *Deep Democracy – The wisdom of the minority* (over 20,000 copies sold), *Wow! What a Difference!*, *Voodoo* and *Jam Cultures* which received a recommendation in *The Financial Times*. She is co-author of *The Corporate Tribe* (Management Book of the Year 2016, published in English, German, Russian, Dutch and Vietnamese) and *Building Tribes*.

“Bullseye! Because of the sharp observations and practical advice, but also because she has involved her readers with writing this book and lets their voices speak at length.” – Ben Tiggelaar, bestselling author and behavioral scientist

“You need to read everything from Jitske Kramer.” – Joris Luyendijk, journalist and author from *Swimming With Sharks*

“Jitske asks the right questions, she offers practical tools for a positive perspective in these difficult times.” – Typhoon, rapper and entrepreneur

“I always assumed that change came with uncertainty and stress, but having read this book I now know great change offers great opportunities: a new vision, courage and even poetry.” – Dolf Jansen, author, comedian, presenter, marathon runner

“Jitske Kramer has popularized anthropology through her books and lectures and this book will release your inner magician.” – bol.com

“A book for under each Christmas tree and one of the ten best management books of 2020.” – Management Team Magazine

“It is impressive that she succeeded in writing so much relevant information on this actual subject. Many people will recognize themselves in the many examples and tips.” – Frankwatching.com

“The most beautiful things are created under pressure, this book – written in ten days – is a gem with an unexpected connecting aspect. Its message of hope and focus on how to perceive crisis as a driver for lasting change makes this book an ultimate recommendation.” – VOV Learning Network, Belgium

“Practical, useful, educational, lots of recognition and even more information. I bow deep for writing this book in such a short time, for writing it in co-creation, for the revealing examples. I have read the book with much pleasure, well-recommended.” – National Register

“Jitske Kramer uses an anthropological perspective to explain how the COVID crisis has changed our working lives and what the impact is for our working culture. How do you make working from home a success and how can you shape this new hybrid working culture as a leader and organization?” – Business Trainer

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1 WE'LL SEE, HOW MUCH CAN HAPPEN IN A FEW MONTHS?

Our work rhythms have been in scrambles for a year now. Meetings are being canceled or rescheduled to a later date and online setting. Some of us don't have access to the office, others have to find ways to continue working safely with all the COVID-measures. The location and work times were obvious until March 2020, this has changed. These changes are part of a global culture shock, one that has a huge impact on every corporate culture. I experience this period like a chaotic time which challenges me to continually develop different routines and skills. Lot of change for the short-term and a lot of doubt what this means for the long-term.

If you had told me that in 2020 I would need mask to buy groceries, restaurants and bars would be closed, I would do nearly all my lectures online (or in large venues with just a handful of people and complicated walking routes), that shaking hands (let alone kissing each other) would become a fearful gesture, health care would be under pressure because of a virus, schools would close and millions would experience a lockdown... I would have looked at you in disbelief.

Questions on cooperation

And we're stuck with it, whether we want to or not. Despite how you think about the virus, the measures and the politics, we are all confronted with questions like: How do I lead my team at a distance? How do you work together on a project when you cannot meet each other physically? How do you retain pride in an organization and connection in a team, even when you cannot see each other offline for a long period of time? How do you prevent that someone becomes lonely or is burning up with their work load? How do you train new employees? How do you say goodbye to those who leave the company? How do you discuss difficult subjects and keep a positive atmosphere while working at a distance? How do you take opportunity of the chances to improve the outdated ways of working and living? What should you do right now to reach a better result in the long term? How can you innovate in these times? Which new rituals are necessary? How do you adapt the corporate culture to this new context?

These are questions that I ask myself, as an entrepreneur, speaker for different organizations, as a human and as cultural anthropologist. Just like you I don't know what the world will look like in a few years' time. And seeing how 2020 turned out, I know it is impossible to tell which way we will go. But I do know that COVID-19 has shattered our routines. Some of us have to run to keep pace with their lives, others feel that their lives have come to a standstill. All kinds of activities have been put on hold and everyone has a different opinion about this and reacts differently to these sudden changes.

While I am writing this, a headline in *The Financial Times* reads: 'Loneliness is suffocating those who work from home', and the article said that in Spring 2020 there was an euphoria that companies were successful in facilitating working from home for hundreds of employees. By Fall 2020 the mood had changed. Everybody guessed that by September 1st there would be room to work from the office again, but currently there is no guessing when this will happen. Organizations say it will be June 2021, I have heard January 2022. The initial optimistic mood has evaporated, how will we manage the next few months and years together? And how do we integrated the sustainable changes we come to like in this period? According to the *Financial Times* article, two-thirds of the CEOs they interviewed thinks their corporate culture is sustaining damage right now. I hope that this book will help soften the worst blows now that the lack of social interaction is increasing all across the board.

A stranger in my own land

COVID-19 makes me feel like I am a stranger in my own land. Only by emerging yourself fully in a completely alien world, can you gain new insights. That is what I do when I travel for my work and get to know different cultures. And that is what I do in my own country when the old rules don't apply anymore. My anthropological view helps me immensely. It is this view that I used to write this book.

An anthropological view

Looking at the world like an anthropologist means that you postpone judgment. You don't assume that you understand what is going on, you take the time to live through and embrace the unknown. I do this by thinking about what the events happening in the world actually do to me. An anthropological view means that you try to feel through what is strange, without having your own personal opinion barging in all the time. This is not easy.

Especially when how things are going is surprising you, and certainly when they oppose your own values. Then you immediately have an opinion: nice or not so nice, beautiful or ugly, right or wrong. To have an opinion isn't wrong of course, but to have an anthropological view, you need to postpone your judgment. Otherwise you can never empathize with the story that is unfolding.

By disconnecting your interpretations (subjective) from your observations (objective) you can look and feel outside of your own frame of reference. Instead of thinking 'it is ridiculous that things have to be like this', you wonder 'what is it, that it makes me feel this way? What is so important to me?' Looking at the world without judgement requires that you really listen to the story of your colleague, the world of the teenager you have at home, slouching on the sofa, the arguments of your manager... Don't listen to them from within your own opinion or emotion, not in amazement of the other, but with the intention to really feel and understand the other. With willingness to really be touched and open to change your opinion.

Whether or not you really get to know the other remains a question. The anthropological view opens up a whole new world of possibilities which we desperately need in these

trying times. And by holding old rituals and habits up to the light, we can make new choices.

Work has left the building

This book is not about what I feel about the measures or what the impact of COVID-19 will be on our society, or about the risks of all kinds of conspiracy theories and political movements. My focus is smaller than that, more specific and more practical, I focus on its impact on our work. I think that with everything we are experiencing we will not return to a status quo where everybody works in an office building from nine to five, five days a week. I pose that work has left the building, and this will have a profound impact on our corporate cultures and how we communicate, lead and cooperate. Most of us have lost it. Smart organizations use this period to invest in making the shift to perfecting and professionalizing working from home, making them attractive companies for employees and customers. Throughout the book I share many tips and thoughts on how to do this.

This period also offers great opportunities to solve the things that we were not so happy with in the old situation in a in-depth and sustainable manner. This book will not offer clear-cut solutions, but does provide ideas on how we can use this unique period for the necessary transformations we have been struggling with for the last couple of years. Small transformations like a better work-life balance, more peace and quiet for ourselves and each other and less traffic jams and big transformations like restructuring healthcare and education, climate changes, refugees and animal welfare.

Work Has Left the Building is a collection of my thoughts, experiences and ideas on the current questions. About suddenly working together at a distance and coping with the many sudden and radical changes. Part of the book is based on articles I wrote previously, part of the book I wrote more recently during a self-imposed challenge to write this book within ten days during the second Dutch lockdown in October 2020. My publisher, the editor, graphic designer and printer joined my quest to get this book into the book stores as quickly as possible. What usually takes at least six months, we managed to realize within six weeks. Why this challenge? Because I noticed that many people were asking similar questions and I wanted to contribute to this search as soon as possible. And also to challenge myself to set a goal in this endless period where one thing after the other

would be cancelled from my agenda. I continually had to acquire new (online) skills and technical abilities to lecture and I could do with the peace, focus, purpose, motivation and healthy jolt of adrenaline it takes me to write a book.

Co-creation

I was overwhelmed by the enormous amount of reactions I received on my LinkedIn posts about the questions I was trying to answer with this book, and hereby I want to thank everybody that sent me a heartwarming message and contributed to the process of writing this book. I have included many examples in the book and marked them 'experiences from the field'. It is wonderful to see how we can learn from each other in these bizarre times and together is just more fun than alone, even at a distance and especially now that we are experiencing so much.

What a great way to write a book! My heartfelt message is that we dare to change collectively and that we help each other during this journey. –

Experience from the field

The book doesn't present a blueprint or a step-by-step model for solutions. It also isn't a complete analysis of all variables or interpretation of the figures. You could probably discover, analyze and tell more than what I will tell in these nine chapters. And I focus mostly on those who have to deal with working from home and less on people like public transport drivers, police, teachers, law enforcement, production workers and those working in healthcare. But I can imagine that they can also find inspiration from this book.

The effects of COVID-19 on our lives

When you look at the following table, you will see a summary of the reactions that I read on social media. This isn't a full-scale scientific research and it is undoubtedly incomplete. But the table does raise the question whether we really needed such a disruptive event to

relieve us from our obligations and create more rest for ourselves. I certainly hope we can find more benefits from this bizarre period.

| Positive effects from COVID-19 mentioned by people on social media | Negative effects from COVID-19 mentioned by people on social media |
|---|--|
| I made the house more cozy, our family is closer, we have more contact with our neighbors | Less income Less interaction outside of the family |
| I slowed down, I go to bed later, I sleep better | Sick children and sick parents |
| None of the usual 'three-kisses-distress' (a Dutch phenomenon) | Bad school results Loneliness, boredom, aimless |
| More acceptance of sign language – all Dutch press conferences by the government on COVID-19 measures were accompanied by a sign language interpreter | Stress from all the changing measures, fear for the virus Noise from all housemates and DIY-ing neighbors Operations postponed |
| Less social pressure, obligations are gone, I really have the weekends to myself, nothing scheduled | Aggression, collective fatigue and burnout No travelling, feeling locked up |
| Better meetings and dreaming away behind your laptop while nobody knows | No more pubs, festivals, theatre, singing together, church |
| Walking a lot outside, rediscovering the region, new hobbies like playing guitar, drawing, photography, cooking, a pet and plants in the house | Difficulty in dating while being single High workload, having to reach targets with a minimum in staff and working at a distance |
| Time to feel, re-evaluate what I have, spending less money | Many 'corona-kilos' added Lost trust in politics and doubting science |
| Cleaner air, less traffic, use less fuels | Insecure and hopeless future |
| Less burglary | Poverty increasing, more need for charity |
| Disabled and chronically ill feel more equivalent while more people work from home | Worse education for a whole generation Not being able to tend for dear ones when sick or passing away |
| We don't have to put a coin into the shopping carts (small happiness) | More domestic violence, children trapped in their parents' bad relations |
| More flexibility to schedule my own day | Business collapsing, impending unemployment |
| ... | Large strategic and creative processes are stuck while failing to progress online |
| | Leaders with less social qualities are failing and are taking team down with them |
| | Increasing polarization and new us-vs-them thinking, like those that can thrive in an online situation and those that cannot |
| | ... |

Reactions I read on social media – October 2020, not a large and scientific research

Traveling

I take comfort in realizing that a pandemic like this is new for me, but not for mankind. We have dealt with disasters, wars and pandemics before, survived them and we have adapted to new situations. I consider this a journey with lots of uncertainties, unpredictable moments, frustration, sadness and joy. A journey we haven't asked for, with a group of travelers we didn't necessarily choose. A journey that will change us either way, one that will go into the history books and that our grandchildren will ask us questions about.

The measures to prevent COVID-19 are temporarily, but how we deal with the pandemic will have a lasting impact on us as individuals and as a society as a whole. My travel advise is to embrace and accept that this just is how it is. Look with an anthropological perspective and investigate how you can support, inspire and challenge each other in these times. At a distance and up close. These times require a lot from everybody's flexibility, creativity, perseverance, loyalty and empathy. But we can do this.

Safe travels,

Jitske Kramer

Utrecht, the Netherlands, 26 October 2020