

NAVIGATING THE RETURN TO WORK

People and technology challenges post COVID-19

Introduction



The future of the workplace is likely to remain fluid for some time to come as businesses start to re-open after lockdown and with the threat of a second wave of infections not ruled out. Many of you will be planning phased returns to the office and working out how to manage a dispersed workforce, with some employees back in your buildings and others continuing to work from home.

We have put together a guide to the challenges you may have to overcome around your people and the technologies you use, as you navigate this new world of work.

Employee assessment

The needs of both the organisation and its people should be taken into consideration as you create a plan of action for a return to 'business as usual'. Not all of your employees might be able to return to their regular place of work - some may have to remain at home because they or someone else in the household is vulnerable, or there may be other reasons. You might also decide that you are happy for some staff to continue to work remotely on a part-time or more permanent basis - this is easily established through return to work interviews or a survey. Deciding the shape of your workforce in the weeks and months to come is an important step.

Employees

Decide who needs to return first - this could be management first, employees second

Consider which staff members are vulnerable and cannot return at this stage

Assess which employees you would allow to continue to work from home

Once written, the return to work plan, which should include details of how social distancing and hygiene procedures will be maintained on your business premises, should be communicated clearly, to all employees.

Workplace safety

Measures must be put in place to safeguard your employees if they are returning to your work premises. A deep clean of the building might be required before staff return, depending on the nature of the business. Social distancing and high levels of hygiene will need to be maintained. This can be achieved by installing signs to control movement, making sanitising products readily available and using screens for protection where necessary.

Workplace

Consider how staff and visitors will enter and exit the building

Alter work areas, break times and meetings to adhere to social distancing

Implement contactless payment facilities where possible to avoid handling cash

Use digital means where possible to transfer information

Even if they have agreed to return to work, some employees may still be very anxious about it so it is important to do everything you can to reassure them and check that they remain healthy.

Technology decisions

A large number of organisations rushed in technology solutions to support the move to home working when the lockdown began. With some people returning to the workplace, there could be a dispersed workforce for some time to come.

The possibility of a second wave of the pandemic has not been ruled out. That is why it is important to assess whether the technologies used at home could or should be incorporated into the new working environment. Should some employees hold on to some of the company technology they were using at home, just in case a full policy of remote working has to be implemented again?

Technology

Decide if employees should retain company technology

Assess whether all employees still need access to the VPN, Microsoft 365, video conferencing tools

Consider the infrastructure and technology changes needed to support a fluid working environment

Ensure critical company data created while working from home is safe and secure

The transition to a new state of normal is going to be a challenge, especially if the IT environment has to continue to operate across your corporate and your employees' home networks. Ensuring remote staff have saved company work to your corporate system, backing up critical data, ensuring the network has capacity and is secure, and reminding staff of secure working practices - all these things will be essential.

Security considerations

Regular corporate policies for security may have been bypassed as you raced to get staff working online at home. Now is the time to consider the next steps. An interim solution might do the job while you still have employees at home and some back in their place of work, but you also need to look at the long-term. What does the future look like based on the threats your organisation could be exposed to and the complexity of your IT estate?

Security

Consider how to monitor network activity from the home to the office

Decide if access policies need to be upgraded for personal and corporate devices

Assess the threats and vulnerabilities within your IT environment

Consider whether you have enough in-house expertise

Central management of access to the IT environment is just as important as securing your premises. Being safe and secure is as much about the digital space your employees inhabit as the physical environment they find themselves in.

Conclusion

The return to work after lockdown is not going to be straightforward. Attempting to get back to normal operations presents a variety of challenges around people, premises, technology and security, all of which require careful consideration.

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Together we can help you plan a successful return to work and get your business back on its feet.