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HOW TO WORK WITH YOUR PEOPLE IN THE NEW ERA

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PEOPLE CONSIDERATIONS FOR NOW

In this guide we cover the possible effects on current employees as organisations enter the new era of work, both now and into the future.

Topics include:

- Employee health and wellbeing
- Employee retention and maintaining morale
- The need for effective internal communication
- Importance of learning and development

The sudden shift in working arrangements as a result of COVID-19 has inevitably impacted your workforce. Wellbeing has never been more important and it has placed far greater emphasis on having a clear and transparent communications strategy to ensure you can maintain a healthy, engaged and motivated workforce.

Culture, health and wellbeing

Your employees will have varied experiences of COVID-19 that you'll need to be understanding of, including:

- Concerns about the health and wellbeing of themselves and loved ones
- The anxiety that may be caused by reduced social contact, being furloughed or concerns over job security, financial pressures, and general business uncertainty
- Harrowing experiences from working on the front lines, or providing care for a loved one
- The difficulties of juggling childcare and work

Provide support by:

- Acknowledging their fears and reassuring them about the measures being implemented to protect them
- Signposting access to mental health support and employee assistance programmes available
- Clear, transparent and regular communication

Refer to our checklist on the following page for some ideas.

Working arrangements

You should continue to support your employees throughout. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it will help to ensure they remain positive and productive, regardless of their working arrangements.

Use the time now to get feedback from your employees about what has and hasn't worked well during this period. Their input will help you identify barriers that need resolving to enable future hybrid teams of those in workplace settings and those working remotely to work cohesively and productively.

“Some members of your management teams may be equally concerned about returning to the workplace, so you'll need to work closely with them to agree a suitable approach.”

Leadership and management

Your leaders and managers may have stepped up almost overnight as the pandemic took hold, but as you plan for your return to work you need to support them to ensure they are equipped to further lead the changes.

Identify what you need from your leaders in this next phase and provide them with the training required. This should include topics such as **hybrid team management** and effective communications. You should also provide them with resources, including your updated HR and working policies, as soon as possible to help them facilitate a safe return to the workplace.

If any skills shortages have come to the fore during the lockdown period, evaluate your hiring plans for the coming months to ensure you and your team will be in a strong position for the ongoing changes.

Communications

Ensure that your communication with employees demonstrates trust and assurance that you have their best interests (health, safety and wellbeing) at heart, while setting clear expectations on roles, responsibilities and protocols during times of change.*

Any major change in working practices that you choose to implement should be supported with strategic internal communications to staff that clearly demonstrate why the changes are needed.

HOW TO INTRODUCE CHANGE

No matter who they are, when faced with change people go through a cycle of emotions before accepting a new normal. How you communicate and support your team during the early stages of a change will set the tone for how successful it will be in the longer term. When introducing a change to your wider workforce, remember to:

- Listen, then listen some more – acknowledge people's anxieties whilst also gently supplying them with the information they need to put their immediate fears into context and dispel unhelpful rumours and myths.
- Only say that you know to be true, but do it as speedily as possible – supply your team with as much information as you can making use of all channels you have – distribute videos internally providing business updates and send emails clearly explaining your reasoning.
- Make clear what support is available – make use of any employee assistance programmes you have available which could be anything from financial or legal advice to the provision of mental health support services. These allow your team to come to terms with the change and reach out for help in their own time.

[Read our guide](#) to leading your team through change successfully, which provides further practical advice to help you to navigate changes gracefully, efficiently and, most importantly, with the wellbeing of your employees in mind.

*Note if implementing changes that will have lasting effects, please consider using change management strategies and techniques.

CHECKLIST

Culture, health and wellbeing

- i. Focus on building a culture based on trust and transparency
 - Encourage leaders to follow a people first approach
 - Provide leaders with the tools and training to lead in times of change
- ii. Mental health
 - Consider mental health/employee assistance support for employees in key scenarios such as:
 - bereavement support
 - post-traumatic stress disorder counselling and support
 - financial support
 - anxiety support

Working arrangements

- i. Encourage managers to schedule informal meetings without a fixed agenda to check in with team members and enable a smooth transition out of lockdown
- ii. Consider training needs or resources required for managers to effectively manage hybrid teams, such as daily routines, protocols for staff on calls in and out of the workplace, dealing with personal requests etc.
- iii. Evaluate the benefits and challenges of remote working in your organisation and how to factor this into your plans and policies
- iv. Review and reassess your employee mobility strategy
- v. Evaluate whether you need to make any amendments to contracts as a result of changes to working arrangements
- vi. Ensure your team members are equipped with the skills and tools they need to work in these new hybrid teams effectively – visit [Hays Learning](#) for free online training

Communications

- i. Ensure national public health protocols and guidelines inform employee communication
- ii. Ensure communication reinforces a people first approach
 - Ensure that employees are aware of any changes to HR policies and are engaged with the overall business approach
 - Build trust in the decisions that are being made, by being transparent and clear about the reasons behind them
 - HR and Marketing should work closely together at this time to create a strong, company-wide narrative

Learning & development

- i. Identify the short-term training needed for your leaders, managers and employees. If it is new, empower them to work in hybrid teams. Direct them to useful resources, such as [Hays Learning](#) to support learning and development
- ii. Start planning for your longer-term learning and development requirements
 - Identify areas where employees need upskilling, both now and for the future, such as technology and digital skills
 - What training platforms do you need to invest in (such as e-learning) and what modules need to be created?
 - Incorporate agile and digital talent upskilling and reskilling into your learning strategy
 - Create training to upskill employees in soft skills like resilience, adaptability, and other traits (for example, personal growth) that strengthen your organisation's DNA

“Inclusion is more important than ever. Many employees are facing anxiety, stress and uncertainty and are looking to their leaders to provide support and guidance. How employers respond today and in the weeks ahead will have a profound impact on how they are perceived post-crisis. Employers’ responsibility should extend into offering mental health and wellbeing support that most employees are seeking.

“Leaders and managers should ensure that communication to employees is purposefully inclusive, regular and transparent. Employees who have family and care-giving commitments or long commutes, which severely impact on their desire for work-life balance, may not be inclined to work for employers that do not offer flexibility. Many will now have increasing evidence that they can perform their roles effectively while working remotely. The way employers respond to remote and flexible working requests will therefore impact talent acquisition and retention.

“We now have the opportunity purposefully build a culture of inclusion, trust and assurance. The workforce will want to feel supported and trusted to do the right thing, and employers must be prepared to integrate this into their future policies and ways of working.”

Yvonne Smyth, Group Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Hays



PEOPLE CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Organisations have an opportunity to build a culture where new working regimes and working patterns are the norm and not the exception. As the digital and physical world of work collide, how will you manage, motivate, and retain your workforce in the new era?

Longer-term working arrangements and options will raise new questions, not least the impact on your culture, employer brand and value proposition. Many of these aspects used to be based on the advantages of pleasant working environments, location and the benefits of collaborative working face-to-face, but the needs of the workforce will be different.

This crisis has already resulted in developments in telemedicine, the rise of virtual exercise classes and a much deeper understanding of mental health.

The lines between an employer's duty of care and employees' wellbeing will become ever more blurred and workers may start to expect more support from you in these areas.

Remuneration and reward approaches may also need to evolve, and if hybrid teams become commonplace, how will you encourage innovation?

The questions on the right may help you consider how to evolve your people and culture strategies if you decide to adopt new working styles.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN ASSESSING YOUR PEOPLE & CULTURE

1. How will you continue to build a culture against a backdrop of social distancing?
2. How can you drive a 'software' mindset amongst your teams so they remain agile and adaptable to change?
3. How will you manage a hybrid workforce that is more dispersed, partly remote and partly on-site?
4. What initiatives can you put in place to build a more engaged workforce?
5. What investments in technology and training will you have to make to enable your workforce to thrive in the new era of work?
6. How do your internal communications channels need to evolve? Will you need to invest in more digital engagement and collaboration tools to promote inclusion within your workforce?
7. How will the longer-term decisions you make relating to your workforce now impact your employee value proposition, if the workplace environment was once a USP?
8. What technical and soft skills will your workforce need in the future? Are there any skills gaps that will require you to expand your workforce?
9. How will you train and upskill a dispersed workforce? Will you need to invest further in technologies to support this?
10. How do your wellbeing programmes need to evolve?

Whatever you decide to do, rest assured that Hays consultants will be on hand to help recruit the people you need to make your business a success.

If you want to view more advice and tips on managing in the new era, please visit our management hub: hays.ae/manage-from-home. Or, if you have any further questions or concerns about hiring in the current climate, email: clientmiddleeast@hays.com