

Helping your employees to adjust

Leading successfully in turbulent times

No matter the business model, location or product, an organization's people are among its greatest assets. People are the core of customer service, innovation, solutions and reputation. Businesses must therefore be vigilant in handling employment matters when they are dealing with a crisis event or business slowdown.

In turbulent times, business continuity is the main objective, with the safety of people as the top priority. Businesses will need the support of their human resources and facility teams to identify where their people are, and where they need to be to ensure safety and enable business continuity. Once that is secured, thoughts need to turn to ensuring capacity for more remote-working and creating a supportive environment where employees can continue to thrive through challenging times.

Things to do now

Identify where your people are and where they need to be

When a crisis occurs, the first consideration is to assess where employees are and whether they are safe. The next step is to identify the people and teams who are critical to business continuity, and assess whether they can continue to operate effectively from their current location.

In the event it is not safe for employees to work from the office or main facility, a first consideration may be remote working. Management should assess if the business has the necessary remote working infrastructure, policies and mechanisms. Technologies such as email, virtual private networks (VPNs) and cloud computing enable employees to continue serving customers and operating critical business processes. For industries or organizations

in which remote working arrangements are not suitable, alternative working arrangements may be put in place, such as flexible working hours, shift work and physical separation to reduce the frequency of close interactions.

Ensure capacity and connectivity

Once you have identified critical roles and activities across the organization, you can map your current resource availability to those. Prepare contingency plans for the absence of key people, e.g. internal substitutions or rotations of resources across roles; short term contract resources, cross-training, etc.

Now is a good time to verify the "call lists" in your business continuity plan – the lists of which workers to call, and their contact information, in case they need to be informed on short notice regarding a change in their work location. Take care to include temporary workers such as students and contractors. You may also need to include vendors if they are expected to work at your location in the coming weeks and months.

Take advantage of remote working tools. Test your remote working tools for their ability to sustain a high number of remote workers. For example, ask half your team (or more) to log in remotely at a specific date and time. Publish instructions on how to take advantage of the features of remote working tools to make conversations easier (e.g. sharing documents on-screen). Provide senior managers with the ability to "sign off" digitally on decision documents. Designate "Super Users" who can

teach others and give advice on how to work effectively with such tools.

For business-critical teams, reduce risk of an entire team being affected by splitting them physically across two floors of an office or across geographic locations. Remind people of the need to avoid close physical proximity.

Take advantage of slowdowns in customer business to make progress on critical business improvement projects which might otherwise have lower priority.

Create a plan to promote well-being

Some people will face challenges in working remotely and others will adjust at different speeds. Encourage your teams to accept that remote working may be “the new normal” for a while. Be empathetic and understanding with people who have family responsibilities, e.g. child or elder care, which may make remote work more challenging – and take care to distribute workload equitably within teams.

Many workers may not be worried about risks to their own health, but rather, about the health of loved ones, or about the potential effects of an economic recession on the business and their own employment. Encourage sharing of personal experiences and feelings, and encourage managers to actively listen, so as to avoid making assumptions about why team members are experiencing stress.

If your organization provides access to an Employee Assistance Program, remind employees what it offers and how to access it.

Develop and communicate guidelines to maximize productivity and emotional well-being while working remotely. Some ideas might include: designating a quiet physical space in which to work, establishing a regular routine, informally checking in with colleagues by phone a few times a day or during an agreed “social break” time, and setting aside time to rest, eat and exercise.

If remote working is not the norm in your organization, you can prepare and communicate temporary policies for expense reimbursement of personal cell phone and internet charges if used for remote working.

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[Pandemic planning as a part of an overall resilience strategy](#)

[Business continuity in a COVID-19 world](#)

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Key considerations

- **Has your organization developed emergency management plans to be able to ensure employee safety and business continuity in the event of a crisis or economic downturn?**
- **Does your business have the capability to provide clear, effective communication and guidance to employees during a crisis?**
- **If you are considering cost-savings measures that affect employees (e.g. reduction of working hours), have you considered implications for employee relations and labour law compliance? Have you considered gathering suggestions from employees on cost-saving opportunities?**
- **Have you considered how various technology applications can better enable remote working and ongoing compliance with regulatory processes?**
- **Can your employees work legally and effectively from alternative locations, and are they creating additional immigration, personal tax or employer reporting obligations by working in those locations?**