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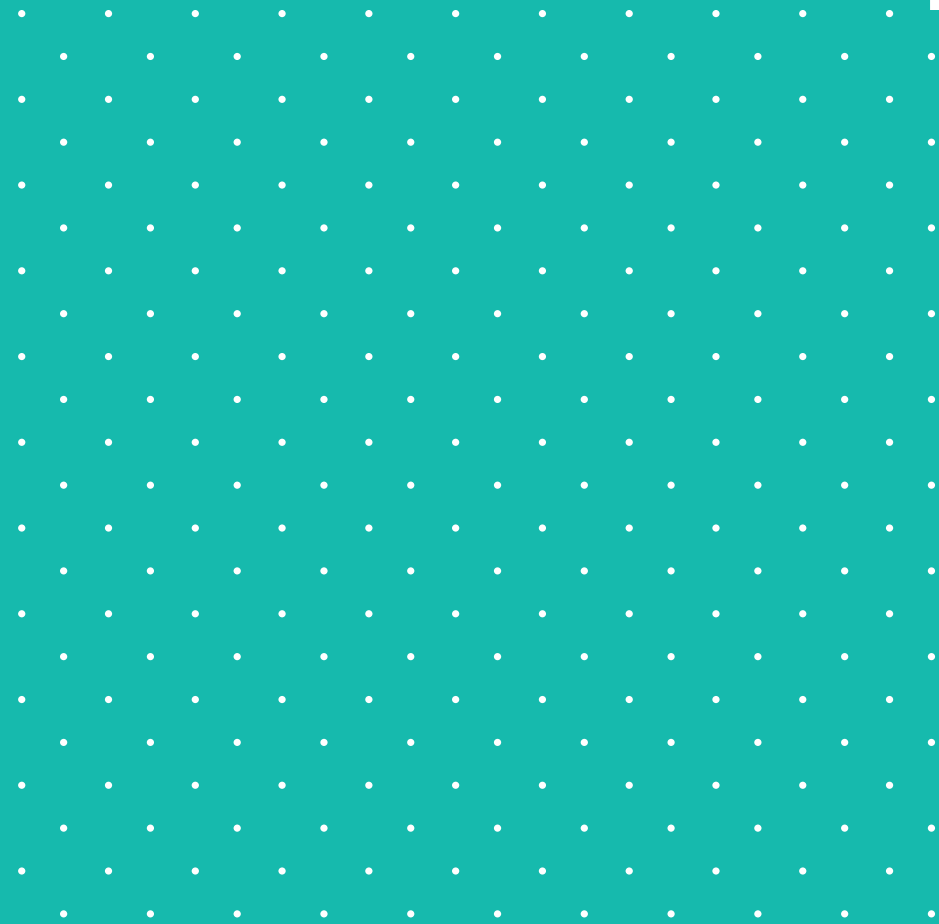
Emerging through Covid-19: The Future of Work

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
Introduction

We know that the global pandemic and the series of national lockdowns over the past year have significantly affected up to 60% of Irish businesses. Companies have faced major challenges in keeping afloat. Despite this, we have seen Irish enterprise demonstrate great resilience and an ability to adapt to rapid change. Many companies have pivoted their business model, innovated new products and services and entered new markets. In many cases this has been achieved while recruiting, engaging and developing employees remotely.

The nature of how we work with and engage our teams has shifted considerably. Some companies continue to work remotely while others are working within a hybrid capacity. Where employees continue to work face-to-face, health and safety and social distancing have become primary considerations.

This new landscape of work brings opportunities and obligations for you as an employer. As we move into a post-Covid era, you may be considering how best to address some of the medium-term HR and management challenges now facing your business.

Enterprise Ireland works with a broad range of companies. We see a number of common HR challenges across sectors and stages of growth. Companies are asking:

-  How can we successfully implement a hybrid or flexible way of working that fits with our business needs?
-  How can I best motivate my managers and employees if they're working from home permanently?
-  If we introduce 'working from home' as an option for staff, what will the function of our office be?
-  I'm concerned about the well-being of my staff – how can I help them?
-  What new leadership skills do I and my senior team need to develop to engage and motivate employees?
-  What are my obligations as an employer if staff are working from other jurisdictions?
-  What do I do if one of my team refuses to get vaccinated?



We have developed this guide to help you reflect on these and other HR challenges you are likely to face over the coming months. Its purpose is to help you understand how the world of work has changed and consider the impact these changes may have on the expectations and motivations of both current and prospective employees. Our intention is to provide insight into good HR practice and to encourage you to think about what approaches or responses may be right for your business.

We are all learning to adapt to this new landscape of work and, while there may be challenges ahead, there are also new opportunities for you to engage and develop your managers and teams. Enterprise Ireland has many people and management supports to assist you. Our team of People and Management Specialists can work with you one-on-one to understand the specific challenges your business is facing and help you address them successfully. Our leadership and management development programmes can help you plan and prepare for the next stage of your company's growth. Our range of financial supports can help you source expertise and recruit key talent.

As you consider the most appropriate options for your business, it is worth reflecting on what you have achieved over the past 18 months, understand what has worked and not worked for your individual company and use these learnings to help you identify and implement what is right for you. Whatever path you choose, Enterprise Ireland is ready to help you in any way we can.

**Karen Hernández,
Senior Executive – People & Management
Enterprise Ireland**

Context

Governments and economies around the world are continually developing structures and plans to navigate through the evolving stages of this global pandemic. This next phase is particularly critical as we prepare to reopen society and the economy as a whole. As business leaders, we too are preparing for the next phase, creating new and engaging workplaces that have transformed as a result of our experiences and learnings since Covid-19 first hit Ireland in March 2020.

Throughout the various stages of the Government roadmaps and health and safety protocols, companies have led their people and their businesses through the most challenging of circumstances. Now, many businesses are evaluating their priorities for this next period of easing restrictions and the anticipation of employees returning to a shared workplace and being together again with colleagues.

The growth of digital transformation across all businesses means that new technologies and new ways of working have been embraced, resulting in the virtual workplace being here to stay. Our priority now is to bring forward the best learnings from our experiences over the past 12-18 months and integrate these learnings and ways of working into a new vision of the future workplace.

This guide sets out some practical and easy-to-follow advice for all companies to consider in their planning and design of the new workplace. It looks at the journey leaders have come through over the last 18 months and how influential this journey will be in shaping the future environment for employees. The success of this can only be achieved through nurturing a culture of trust and flexibility that employees have come to expect. As plans for employees to return to the workplace continue to develop, the experience of employees and managers is hugely valuable in shaping and designing what that workplace will be and how employee expectations and needs can be accommodated in a manner that is sustainable and engaging for all.

The role of remote working and managing virtual teams must be embedded into any new workplace design, including the development of blended working models and supporting the management of dispersed teams, while protecting and nurturing the culture and values of the business.

Whatever stage of development your business is at in the design of this new workplace of the future, now is a good time to commence your planning, communication and collaboration with your employees and other key stakeholders.

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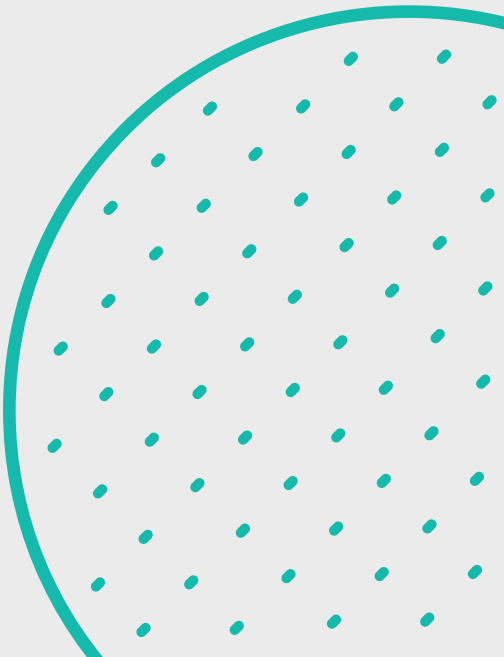


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1. Leadership at a Time of Transition

Effective leadership is vital at any time, but it is particularly important during times of change. We have witnessed how critical it is to have strong leadership during Covid-19 and we expect it will be equally important in a post-pandemic environment when businesses are focused on positioning themselves for consolidation and growth.

Effective leadership in an organisation can be the difference between that business surviving and thriving or experiencing decline. Leaders who can make difficult but informed decisions, guide their people through uncharted times, listen to what their customers are saying and comprehend the indicators in the market are better positioned to navigate turbulent market conditions and find ways to stabilise the business.

1a. Inspiring leaders

The need to inspire, advocate engagement and promote a good working environment has never been more important, particularly when many employees are currently working remotely – and may continue to so. We outline below some simple strategies for your business to consider as you move forward from the Covid-19 crisis:



Provide employees with what they need at the right time

Your employees' needs have changed during Covid-19, so engagement from leadership should reflect and emphasise this. Use a variety of different forms of communication, ranging from formal company communications to informal interaction with groups of employees. Ultimately, leaders should aim to connect their employees with a sense of purpose and emotional attachment to the organisation. Equip your leadership team with the right tools and training so that you can regain stability and consistency, which will help employees move away from feelings of change and insecurity, which can be common during a crisis



Communicate clearly, simply and frequently

At a time of crisis, our ability to absorb and assimilate information is strongly impacted. This is a time for simple, clear and repeated messaging that keeps your employees feeling safe, healthy and personally supported. And when you have communicated messages that deliver this, you need to repeat it again



Choose openness over charisma

Some leaders are naturally charismatic and can bring their teams along with their natural style and strength in communication; however, now is the time for honesty above everything else. Explain to your employees what has happened, where your business is going and how potential changes will impact them as individuals. Don't be afraid to show vulnerability – we have all been impacted by Covid-19. Talk about what has happened and tell your people about how you are changing your vision for your business and employees into the future



Revitalise resilience

We are moving from a global health crisis to a global economic crisis. As a leader, you need to re-set the focus. You should communicate the positives and bring your employees along by restoring their confidence in the business and how together you will weather this storm



Move from a crisis setting to a new setting

All crises end – and the Covid-19 crisis will end too. As a leader, you have the responsibility to help people make sense of all that has happened. Celebrate the contributions of employees, remember the losses, and then move everyone into a vision that will embrace the future and help you emerge stronger

1b. Effective teamwork

Leaders inspire and direct, but without effective teamwork, success will not be achieved. During times of crisis, leaders build teams around them to deal with the unforeseen and the immediate issues arising from a crisis such as Covid-19. As we move forward, strong leaders will continue to establish strong team engagement with a focus on the following areas of importance:

- ✓ **Make informed decisions quickly** – remove any decision blockers
- ✓ **Define your priorities** – identify and communicate the important priorities for your business. Early in the crisis, those might have included employee health and safety, financial liquidity, customer care, and operational continuity. As leaders, you now need to focus on business development, financial strategy and funding, and operational supports to re-shape and re-align the business
- ✓ **Make smart calls** – once you define your priorities, decide which of these are business critical and will have a major impact for employees and customers. Identify what the priorities are now, and what are urgent or critical. Instead of thinking about all possibilities, effective leaders will prioritise and enable clear decision-making processes and either push out or defer lesser priorities
- ✓ **Name the decision makers** – communicate clearly the individuals in your business who have control over decisions
- ✓ **Be supportive** – encourage and support the actions of decision makers. Don't punish mistakes, but instead evaluate them, learn from them, and move forward

1c. Effective communication and consultation

During Covid-19, we have all followed the direction and guidance of the Government, NPHT, and other advisory sources who have provided us with changing messages, information, advice and even the introduction of some new legislation.

As we now begin to exit the major crisis stage, leaders need to take back control of their business, understanding the continuing requirements for health and safety yet driving decisions and being clear about organisational plans. Your decisiveness and command of control will inspire others and the impact of this on your employees cannot be underestimated.

It is reasonable for employees to expect their leaders to provide them with appropriate internal instructions, advice and guidance, and to show empathy and understanding of their situation and circumstances, even though we know this can be challenging no matter the size of your business.

Employees look for strong leadership and clear communication, particularly in times of change and uncertainty. In a survey conducted by Edelman in 10 countries ([Edelman Trust Barometer 2021](#)), employees were asked what they considered the most credible source of information about Covid-19 – 63% said that they would believe information about the virus from their employer while 58% trusted government websites, and 51% trusted traditional media.



Communication tips for leaders

The value of effective communications from leaders has never been more important. Try these tips to improve communications within your business:

Provide clear, simple, short and actionable messages – communicate with your employees frequently and appropriately. Deliver a regular flow of information from both a health and safety and business perspective, so that employees clearly understand the direction of the business

Be positive – even where you need to impart negative messages try to focus on some positives where possible

Repeat, repeat, repeat – don't assume that all employees have absorbed important news. Sometimes they will have been distracted with what is happening around them so repeat key messages frequently

Be open and honest – this builds and creates trust with your employees and will be vital in a post-pandemic work environment

Use different forms of communication – these can include a mix of all-hands meetings, team meetings, email, text, messaging, Zoom, MS Teams and internal social media platforms. Consider what media is appropriate for different messaging. Different types of media will be more effective for different types of communication. This is even more important to consider in a remote or blended working environment

Focus on fact and data – employees expect leaders to provide factual data-driven information to back up decision making

Demonstrate vulnerability – acknowledge how the last year has affected you. This may be personal grief or perhaps a major crisis in the business. Sharing feelings of loss and sadness about the impact of changes will show empathy with what your employees have also had to endure during Covid-19

Be conscious of your personal brand, appearance and presence – it's important to be mindful of the personal situations your employees are experiencing and that their remote offices may not be ideal or even fit for purpose. As many employees are in less-than-ideal home situations be careful of the perception you are giving. Your presence, appearance and workplace set-up should not isolate employees further or separate and divide you. Leaders are scrutinised much more during a crisis, so really think through the messages you are conveying

1d. Shared vision and connection

Establishing a shared vision and connection among your employees is an important enabler to initiate progressive change and ensure there is real engagement and commitment within your team. Pull together as one team and view obstacles encountered as challenges that can be overcome.

The following practical tips will assist you, as a leader, to create an honest and credible relationship and real engagement with your employees:

- ✓ When holding meetings with your direct reports, ask them about their personal aspirations and goals for the future and how they might fit into the broader company strategy. Have their goals changed over the past 18 months? Have their personal circumstances changed or been difficult during Covid-19? Do you have a clear understanding of their situation and how this may impact on their capability and commitment in the future?
- ✓ Show your team how a shared vision can help them achieve their long-term ambitions
- ✓ Regularly check in with employees and speak with them about progress towards your company's vision of the future. Tell the story, describe how you see the future and how your business can get there. Talk about it frequently in order to enthuse your team

1e. Aligned strategy

Collaboration is crucial in ensuring that senior management are working to the same objectives. Check in with your senior team to ensure alignment and that everyone is 'on the same page'. It is vital that all your senior team are totally invested in the vision, goals, and operational policies of the company.

If any member has views that are in disagreement, or if they are just 'going along with you', you need to bring those views into alignment. Reinforce collaboration and aligned strategy by assigning and agreeing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with senior managers. These KPIs can then be cascaded and further defined for each manager's team.

1f. Building a culture of trust and empowerment

As leaders you need to enable empowerment, not just by delegating, but by training and mentoring. This will allow employees to succeed and even fail in a controlled environment. Trust is essential across the leadership team. Your leadership will be trusted more when you are approachable, listen to your employees, discuss your business and your plans, and encourage collaboration.

Good practice to help build a culture of trust:



Take critical decisions quickly and decisively:

You may have had to pivot and radically change your business model and practices due to Covid-19. Your experience of reacting and moving quickly as a business will have provided a valuable learning experience for you and your senior team. Take this learning to promote and consolidate a business model that enables change and agility



Continue to evaluate your business model and embed changes into your future strategies:

- Identify managers who have coped well with the dramatic change Covid-19 brought on your business and ensure you provide support for those who have struggled with the changes
- Keep a focus on the critical needs of the business
- Embed a crisis plan, not just for what has happened during Covid-19 but also for the future
- Embrace actions and don't punish mistakes. Crisis management must have flexibility and a central goal. Failure to act is much more detrimental than acting with occasional errors



Act boldly:

- Decide what not to do; prioritise and focus on the key activities that will grow your business
- Throw out previous rule books. This is a new world so review your management practices thoroughly and consider whether current practices are effective and appropriate
- Focus on the priorities of your employees. Review and reflect on the messages you are hearing. If you are not getting feedback from your employees, ask them directly via surveys or focus groups



Engage for impact:

- Connect with your individual team members with daily 'pulse' or stand-up sessions.
- Ask for help. You hopefully have experts around you who can excel in their particular areas of expertise, so avail of their skills
- Collect and amplify success. Proactively celebrate successes and achievements. This is a time for highlighting the success of individuals and teams, recognising and congratulating both large and small accomplishments



Finally, take your own company's advice:

Ensure you look after yourself. No leader can work effectively unless they are fit, eating healthily and looking after their own physical and mental well-being. Leading by example is more important than ever. All of us have experienced stress and personal impact from Covid-19. Take the time now to ensure that your physical and mental fitness is not going to impact on your ability to transition from crisis to success. Physical and emotional resilience is as essential for leaders as much as it is for their employees.

Summary

Strong leadership is more important than ever – we know that employees look to their leaders more during times of crisis (and post-crisis) than at any other time. Review your own leadership approach and style, consider some of the tips and suggestions outlined and discuss your leadership approach with your management team to ensure that there is a consistent and effective message going to all the organisation.

As a leader ask yourself the following questions:



Am I receiving the right data and information to make informed decisions?



Am I communicating clearly, effectively and often enough to all my employees?



Do employees trust me and my team – have I checked this recently?



Am I empathising as a leader with my employees?
Can they approach me through various media or in person?



Do I recognise employees who are really stepping up during and after Covid-19?



Am I developing and establishing a culture of openness, trust and success?



As a leader, am I giving my people the correct tools and supports to enable them to succeed?

2. The Evolving Workplace for the Future

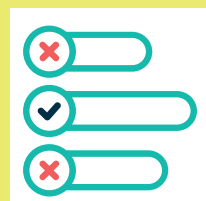
As we transition through the various stages of the reopening of society and the economy, we naturally will see the return of employees to the shared workplace. However, there is no denying that the workplace and what we want and expect from it has changed over the past 12-18 months.

2a. Understanding the role of the office/workplace for your company

Many of us transitioned during the crisis to working remotely from our own homes; now, we will need to transition back to working in a shared space. For some, this will be welcome, but for others, it may cause anxiety as it is no longer a familiar space and they might personally feel that they are returning to the workplace too soon.

We know that blended and hybrid working models will be a feature of the workplace for the future, but there is a lot to consider in getting the model right for your own business, and making sure it is working for your employees and the type of work performed. Before making any assumptions as to what your employees want or what might work for your business, gather data and input on what is needed for all of your relevant stakeholders – your landlord, your customers, your employees and your service providers.

Set up a working group to consider options with representatives from management and employees. Scope out its role and set expectations around its deliverables. The output from this working group will influence the design and plan for the new workplace for the future and ensure that flexible and blended working models, if appropriate, will enhance the experience of work for employees, contribute to collaboration and bring people together even when they are physically apart.



Survey your staff – ask your employees for their input on what they need and want. There will be some employees who are eager to return to work face-to-face with colleagues, and some who remain vulnerable and are concerned about their safety and welfare





Understand the expected output from the type of work performed

– review the work that is performed by your employees across the business. Ensure you have a good understanding of what tools, processes, stakeholder needs, and deliverables are required as well as any specific quality standards and delivery time frames

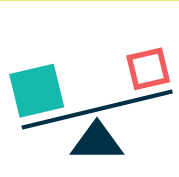


Analyse the challenges and successes of the past 12-18 months

– get a deeper understanding of what worked well when your employees worked remotely and identify the challenges that you encountered. By understanding what has and hasn't worked well you can identify potential new ways of working and adjust processes to fit



Identify your workplace options – study the various workplace options available, including the ideal home office set-up, the government's strategy for working hubs across the country, the regional or head office space you once had, and the serviced offices and coworking spaces that are well established and available across the country



Consider the facilities and services needed by your employees

– the various workplace options will have a range of pros and cons, from the availability of dining options, décor and ambiance, health and safety standards and shared workspaces, to individual workstations, collaboration studios and meeting spaces, storage for personal items, accessibility and mobility needs, technology and smart working tools, transportation and parking options, to their location and community settings. Be realistic as to what supports and services are available for employees for this next stage, as many of the current models used for remote working are not sustainable in the longer term



Consider the costs involved with the various options – as landlords adjust to the new ways of working, there will be varying rent and lease options available for businesses to consider. All options will have a cost factor to be considered in terms of the tools, technology and set-up costs that are required



Stay true to your culture and values – whatever workplace design you choose for your business, it should represent and align with your culture and values. This will help your company stay true to its core principles and facilitate the engagement of your employees

2b. Design and layout considerations

As we move through the next stages of managing the pandemic, the way we work, the way we utilise and engage in our physical workplace and the way we reimagine the use of floor space will be very different for all companies. Design considerations will likely incorporate plans to allow for good physical distancing, safe traffic patterns through offices, sufficient ventilation, and enhanced technology to ensure safety for employees and visitors, as well as collaboration studio and meeting areas.

Employees will likely feel safer returning to their workplace when they know their employer is providing a safe environment. This will enable them to focus on their work, instead of worrying about encountering a vulnerable colleague or putting themselves at risk of being unwell.

The extent to which the pandemic has permanently changed the workplace is yet unknown but there are a few areas you can start to consider as you plan for a return to the workplace:

Review your current workspace and layout

- ✓ How much and what types of space make up your workspace, for example, common areas, offices, storage and open desk space?
- ✓ Does your workspace support your company's culture? Does it inhibit or enable collaboration, knowledge sharing and mentoring?
- ✓ How does the traffic flow within your workspace? Are employees encouraged to move around and build their social network? How is this likely to change post-pandemic?
- ✓ What type of furniture do you currently have, and can it be used to create the right type of space or reduced to provide more free space?
- ✓ What kind of seating arrangements does your company use, for example, flexible seating, assigned desks or hot-desking?
- ✓ What shared resources are available and what teams need to access them, for example, printers, coffee areas, private phone booths or quiet spaces?
- ✓ How do different employees use the workspace? What roles require on-site attendance and what roles can operate remotely?

Consider ventilation needs

- ✓ We now know proper ventilation is fundamental to preventing the spread of Covid-19 and having an open floor plan where windows can be opened can quickly improve building ventilation. If you can't open your windows, or doing so won't ventilate the entire area, it may be time to invest in a climate control or air filtration system

Consider the role of technology

- ✓ Understand the many ways in which technology can be utilised to both manage and enhance the workplace experience. These may include desk management tools, room-booking systems, social distancing sensors, touchless exit/entry on doors, autonomous cleaning solutions and voice enabled technology
- ✓ Make use of remote collaboration tools, where appropriate. Many businesses will likely have blended working models, so ensure there are good collaboration tools in place to support both workplace and remote working. Good AV systems will enhance the effectiveness of collaboration tools

Educate and involve employees

- ✓ Good signage, emblems and floor stickers will all help educate and inform employees on how best to use the workspace, follow circulation guidelines and ensure safe use of common areas
- ✓ Employees will have become more comfortable with flexible working and physical distancing over the last year so involve them by asking for their feedback and ideas

2c. Collaboration and innovation space for sharing ideas with colleagues

Collaboration and innovation are even more important as we move beyond the Covid-19 crisis. Progressive organisations understand the real benefits of collaboration among their employees. Re-invigorating our employees is essential to improving morale and engagement after a very difficult year for many. A clear plan to improve collaboration will lead to natural innovation and better engagement.

Below are some ideas and tips to initiate collaboration and innovation with colleagues:

Cultivate openness and transparency – be open about the issues and challenges your company is facing and present incentives for employees to offer solutions

Ensure your culture encourages idea-sharing without judgement – one obstacle that often prevents employees from active participation and putting forward their ideas is a fear of judgement or rejection

Encourage cross-functional teams – establish work projects across departments and teams to enable innovation and interaction

Lead by example – leaders and managers need to be visible, approachable, and supportive. Get out there and be engaged. If you are working remotely get involved in cross-functional activities and be very visible

Set clear expectations and objectives – remember to acknowledge and reward positive outcomes

Ensure that your organisation has the technology to enable collaboration and innovation – whether you use SLACK for communicating, CRM for business development, or other technology tools, check that they are working for your business and are facilitating collaboration. If they are not fostering collaboration, consider other alternatives



2d. Coworking space – opportunities and benefits

There are an increasing number of public and private workspace options currently available, with additional options becoming more widespread throughout the country, in part motivated by public demand as well as government policy. In the National Remote Working Strategy and Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, the government sets out its plans to develop and invest in a network of remote working hubs and infrastructure across Ireland. These plans also include the re-purposing of hospitality spaces, which will have the dual benefit of providing working spaces and investing in local communities.

In a Global Coworking Growth Study carried out in 2020 by Coworking Resources, their findings estimated that almost 5 million people will be working from coworking spaces by 2024, an increase of 158% compared with 2020. This trend is already visible here in Ireland, with more and more businesses and individuals utilising coworking spaces and hubs.

The National Remote Working Strategy has a mandate that 20% of the public sector workforce will work remotely by 2021. In addition to that, the EU Directive on Work-Life Balance will soon legislate for the right to request flexible working arrangements by August 2022. This framework for parents and carers provides the right to request flexible working arrangements. Hubs and coworking spaces could become a possible solution to flexible working practices. Employers can begin to prepare for this by considering and developing a flexible working policy. Appendix 5 provides a list of items to consider when setting up a flexible working policy.

Hubs and coworking spaces can allow for a sustainable, social and productive way of working. They can provide a ready-to-go set-up for employees to slot into an established business community, which helps to counteract the risks of remote worker isolation and loneliness.

Some of the benefits and opportunities these remote working hubs offer include:



Flexibility – companies are not tied into long lease agreements and the space can grow or reduce with employee numbers



IT access – companies have access to a managed and comprehensive IT infrastructure, such as phonelines, internet and computer servers



Networking – employees can benefit from networking opportunities with workers from other companies



Cost savings – coworking spaces offer potential cost savings due to shared utilities, facilities, repairs and upkeep charges, flexible lease agreements and all-inclusive rates for fixtures and fittings, such as desks and chairs



Office alternative – these options provide a viable office environment for employees who cannot or do not want to work from home



Enhanced productivity – coworking can have a positive impact on employee productivity compared to a home office due to reduced distractions from family members and reliable infrastructure such as internet, printers and phones



Reduced isolation – coworking reduces the risk of isolation where an employee is working and living alone



Positive impact on work/life balance – this could be through shorter commute times or by giving employees the ability to relocate to areas of more affordable housing or closer family supports



Good local impact – hubs have a positive impact on regional communities and help other local businesses to thrive

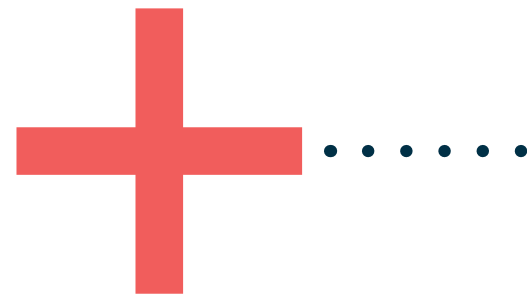


Positive environmental benefits – localised hubs can reduce commuter journeys and therefore lower carbon emissions

The list of benefits is many and varied, not just for the individual or business themselves, but also for family units and the wider community. Hubs provide a whole new option for companies to access business support, facilities, services, innovation, networking, and other services.

Summary:

There is no doubt that the function of the workplace is evolving. Establishing a framework that helps you understand your company's needs both from an operational and employee perspective is an important first step in deciding how you will utilise your working space. The evolving workplace should include design options that create purposeful and inspiring environments for your employees while at the same time providing the necessary services and tools to deliver business outputs. Involving employees as much as possible in the design phase will help them feel part of the decision-making process and support buy-in to whatever changes you make.



Key considerations in getting your workplace ready:

- ✓ Can the work that your employees perform be delivered to the standards needed and within the timeframes required by your customers if they are undertaking remote or blended working?
- ✓ Can you objectively and fairly define teams and roles that can accommodate remote or blended working models? Make sure you are consistent in your classification of what roles can be performed remotely, what ones can accommodate a blended model and what roles require employees to be on-site
- ✓ Do you know what your employees expect from their workplace going forward? If not, survey your employees and ask them what they would like and what model they feel will be best suited to the role they perform
- ✓ Do you have up-to-date knowledge of where your employees are physically located? Some employees may have moved location during the pandemic, within and outside of Ireland. Is it possible for employees to continue to work from their new location or access office space in local coworking facilities or hubs?
- ✓ Do you have sufficient information on the range of potential workplace options? Map out fully each option against a set criteria such as:
 - Local services needed by staff
 - New workplace layout requirements
 - Maximum number of employees that can be catered for onsite at any one time
 - Technical supports required
 - Opportunities available for team gatherings safely such as meeting rooms and collaboration studios
 - Costs of establishing suitable remote workspaces for your employees
 - Availability of coworking spaces in locations that could accommodate some of your current employees
 - Flexibility of terms from your landlord to accommodate
 - Accommodation requirements needed by visiting colleagues or customers
- ✓ What communication channels should you use to keep employees briefed on your plan for the future workplace so that you can manage their expectations effectively?
- ✓ When will your workplace be ready to accommodate employees and what adjustments or changes will be required?
- ✓ What new regulations and safeguards will you be operating and how do you think these will transition over the coming months?
- ✓ How will your company's values and culture align to the new workplace? What adjustments do you need to consider to ensure that employees stay connected and remain true to your company's guiding principles?

3. Remote and Blended Working



The arrival of Covid-19 has accelerated the move by many companies to remote, flexible and hybrid ways of working. This shift has provided many benefits for employers as well as employees.

At policy level, the government has launched a national remote working strategy Making Remote Work. This strategy includes an employee's right to request remote working, a mandate that 20% of public sector workforce will work remotely by 2021, investment in a network of remote working hubs across Ireland, and the national delivery of broadband. The strategy's objective is to ensure that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace in a way that maximises economic, social and environmental benefits.

According to an ERSI report in May 2020 Who Can Work from Home in Ireland?, before the Covid-19 crisis, 14% of employees in Ireland worked from home in some formal capacity, either sometimes or usually. This figure is expected to significantly increase by the end of 2021.

Remote working brings many benefits to employers, employees, and society. As outlined in the remote working strategy, these include increasing participation in the labour market, attracting and retaining talent, enabling balanced regional development, alleviating accommodation pressures, improving work/life balance, improving child and family well-being, reducing the amount of time spent commuting, and reducing transport related carbon emissions and air pollution.

3a. What do we mean by remote, flexible and hybrid working?

Remote working, also known as working from home, teleworking or mobile working, is a style of work that enables an employee to work outside of the employer's workspace, allowing them to essentially work from anywhere. Whilst a lot of employees have been forced into this working style during the Covid-19 pandemic, generally it is a work style that is put in place by an express agreement, permanent or temporary, between an employer and employee.

Hybrid working is a version of the above where employees will work part of their working week at a location remote from the employer's workplace. This can be at home or elsewhere, such as a remote hub.

Flexible working describes a set of working arrangements that could mean changes to the normal length of the working week, working day or location. For example, part-time working, job-sharing, and flexitime all fall under this category.

Ireland has an obligation under the 2019 Work/Life Balance Directive to implement the right to request flexible working by August 2022. This means that employers will need to prepare for flexible working requests from employees. You can prepare for this by assessing what will be suitable for your company and having a policy in place to inform employees about flexible working options. Appendix 5 provides for a list of items to consider when setting up a flexible working policy.

3b. Blended working models

Remote working is undoubtedly part of the future of work and so now may be a good time to design and develop a blended working model that will fit the culture, type of work and overall purpose of your company. Whatever option you choose, remote or hybrid working needs to work for both your business and your employees. As set out in the government's recent Making Remote Work: National Remote Work Strategy, some form of remote working will be a reality for many companies across Ireland beyond this pandemic.

The use of and access to remote working hubs and the acceleration of the National Broadband Plan will bring the remote working model to a new and more sustainable level. This will mean that remote working will feel very different to the experience of many during lockdown. This development will most likely lead to a rise in remote working models and see a greater number of workers relocating outside of the typical industry-centric hubs and becoming part of more rural locations.

Many employees are likely to favour increased flexible working options. This might mean combining working from the office with working from a remote location, varied working hours, and a focus on deliverables regardless of when or where work takes place. This may lead to workplaces extending to various locations and the office environment consisting of a mix of hot desk places and anchored workstations for those who prefer to make the office their workplace of choice.

This naturally will present a mixture of challenges and opportunities for companies as they establish and manage various workplace locations that provide effective and supportive work environments. Working options and preferences will vary depending on the business requirements and responsibilities of the roles. Businesses will need to ensure that facilities and training supports are in place to ensure a successful transition for everyone concerned.

Before you decide on the most appropriate working model for your business, you should consider the following elements:

- ✓ The effect that working from home or another location may have on the productivity and wellness of your employees and the team generally
- ✓ The impact that this new way of engaging may have on troubleshooting and collaboration in general
- ✓ How innovation and creativity can be harnessed and ideas shared to capture the dynamic contribution needed from teams
- ✓ How different working models increase or decrease access to talent
- ✓ How working practices and models can be tailored to each team's requirements – companies that develop a flexible strategy that can be adapted to various needs are likely to be more successful in attracting and retaining talent in a remote and blended world

3c. Remote office set-up and space

When setting your employees up for success in a remote or hybrid set-up, it's important to remember that remote work attracts all the same rights and responsibilities as office-based work in terms of working time, pay and benefits and health and safety. In preparation for this new aspect of work, a [Remote Working Checklist for Employers](#) has been developed by government. The following are considered both mandatory and good work policy:



Working time and rest breaks

One characteristic of remote working, and a reason why so many employees opt for it, is increased flexibility towards working hours. Remote employees are still governed by the [Organisation of Working Time Act 1997](#) and employers are required to record employees' work time and details of any leave granted to them. Employers should be clear on what is considered the normal working time for a remote worker, which may vary depending on the individual or job role, and to establish an appropriate method to monitor working hours, breaks and rest periods for this category of worker. It is important for employers to ensure that employees are taking the appropriate breaks and to remind them if they are not. Managers should pay particular attention to any signs of overwork.



Right to disconnect

Following on from the working time requirements, a [Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Right to Disconnect](#) was released in April 2021. This code outlines best practice in ensuring employees can switch off and disconnect outside of normal working hours. With lines between home life and working life blurring within a remote working set-up, employers should carefully assess how they can ensure employees are able to disconnect from work. A good remote working policy will cover how this will be managed.



Pay and benefits

An employee's pay and benefits are not altered by virtue of remote working. Employees are entitled to the same pay and benefits as they would if based at an office. Employers should be clear on what, if any, contribution is provided to employees toward household expenses such as internet, lighting, and heat.



Employment equality

Employers should ensure that the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 are being adhered to regardless of whether their employees are working remotely or not. Employers should also be aware of the Equality Acts when adopting remote working or relevant training within their organisation. For instance, an employee working remotely must have equal access to career development, training, and promotion opportunities as those working on-site.



Managing health and safety

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, employers have a responsibility to provide a safe place of work, and this extends to any remote working environments. An employee's workplace is anywhere their work is performed and this includes their home, hub, or office.

Review your general health and safety risk assessment for your organisation to make sure you factor in any potential risks that come with working environments outside of the workplace, such as those posed by using work equipment at home. The Health and Safety Authority provides good guidance on conducting a risk assessment. In addition, BeSmart is a free online tool to guide you through a risk assessment process.

An ergonomic risk assessment is important in the remote set-up. Employers should instruct employees in the correct assessment and set-up of their equipment. Requesting photos of the remote working workspace will give the employer a strong idea of potential risks.

There is a mutual responsibility to ensure health and safety at work and as such, employees have a duty to make their manager aware of any concerns, issues or questions relating to health and safety matters, so necessary action can be taken if needed. Accidents related to home working should be reported in accordance with a company's accident reporting procedure.

Remind employees about any well-being schemes or employee assistance programmes (EAP) in place; there is good information for employees at HSE's Healthy Ireland website.



Data protection

Inform employees about best practice for managing data and maintaining appropriate confidentiality to ensure that personal, company, client, and any sensitive data is kept confidential and secure for remote working. Have the appropriate technical measures in place to protect this data.

Any potential data breaches must be reported to the employer as soon as possible.

The Data Protection Commissioner has produced guidance on the protection of data under a remote working arrangement.



Tools and technology

Technology is the foundation of successful flexible working. With the right equipment, applications, and communications tools you can enable your employees to stay connected and work flexibly wherever they may be. Along with the right IT equipment, employees will need home connectivity and access to the company network and any company-required software.



IT security

Any business can become vulnerable to viruses and malicious attacks. When operating on a remote basis, we rely more heavily on the awareness of everyone to protect their own devices.

It should be noted that an employer cannot require employees to install programmes or applications on devices owned by employees, or to use these devices for remote services. Companies must provide appropriate equipment if employees are expected to access company software.



Employee commitments

Remote working is a two-way trusted relationship. For it to be successful, employees must also play an active role in its success. As leaders, you should be clear about your employees' obligations so that they know what they need to achieve. These include:

- Having an internet connection that is adequate for their job
- Having the ability to access and use all relevant systems and tools
- Staying in touch with managers and colleagues
- Managing their schedules to ensure that there is some overlap with those of their team members, as is necessary for all to complete their roles effectively, including those who may be in other time zones
- Maintaining the required standard of performance
- Complying with the standards, behaviours and policies laid down in the contract of employment and employee handbook
- Abiding by the health and safety requirements and working in a safe manner



Building a remote working culture

Whether we are communicating to our teams remotely or via face to face, communication is more than just words. It is also our tone, our presence, our voice, our accent, our mood, our intent and, of course, our body language.

- Mix your communication mediums – use phone and video, agree your non-negotiables such as when cameras should be on or off
- Review your team practices around trust, ownership and accountability
- Make an extra effort to create and provide shared context – at company, project and task level
- Use smaller teams and one-to-ones to connect with each other on a regular basis
- Allow some time at the start of each meeting or call for a non-work-related chat
- New employees need daily contact; ideally assign a buddy who will maintain very frequent contact and support

3d. Global workforce and jurisdictional considerations

With globalisation, freedom of movement and emerging businesses delivering cross-border provision of services, the possibility of employing a global workforce has gained more significance than ever before. These new opportunities bring new administrative obligations and responsibilities for employers. As tax and reporting obligations of posted workers or employed persons from abroad differ for each country, the proper setup of non-resident employment requires thorough strategic planning covering both local employment law and local tax requirements.

Location and employment rights

The employment rights that govern the terms and conditions of employment will be those of the country where the individual is physically working. Different countries have different thresholds for when employment rights are accrued, and employers will need to be fully briefed on the requirements of specific locations.

Entitlement to leave, statutory benefits and the employment remedies all need to be applicable to the right location. An employment contract covering all aspects of the employment relationship is an essential document to have in place and must be signed by both parties. In addition, customised policies and procedures that set out how the relationship will be managed must also be in place.

Right to work

Ensure your employee has the correct work authorisation documentation in the jurisdiction in which they intend to be employed.

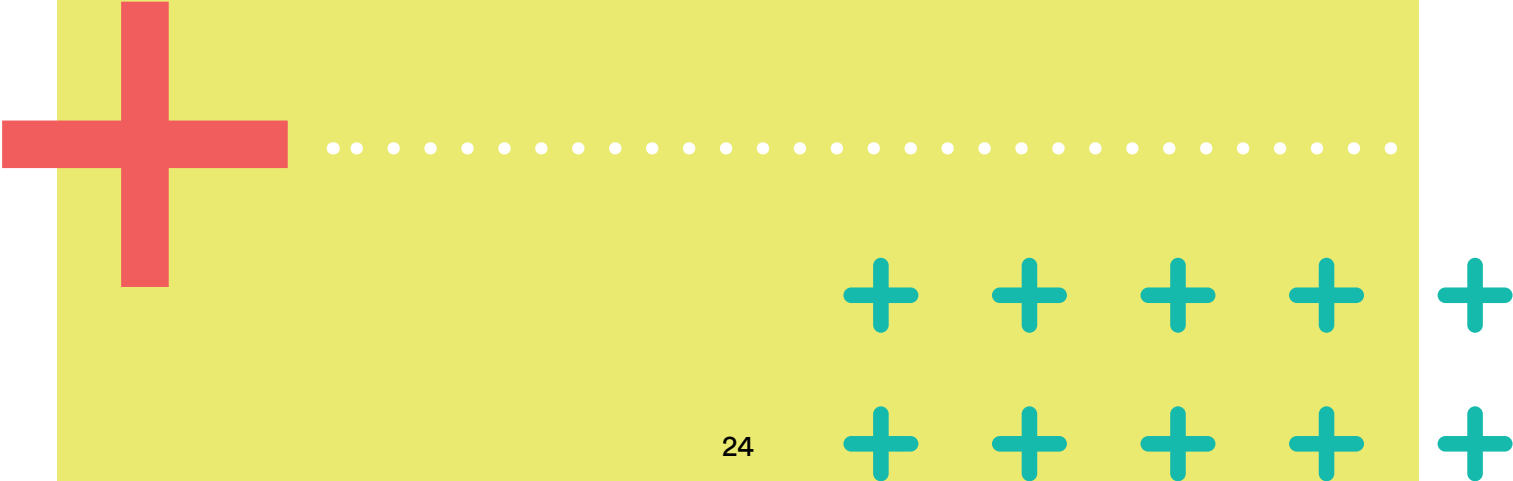
Tax Implications

A person is usually tax resident for a jurisdiction if they fall under the following rules:

- Has a permanent home in the country
- Is present in the country for a period (or more periods) exceeding a total of 183 days, during any 12 consecutive months, ending in the current calendar year

However, it is important to check the requirements in each jurisdiction as the rules may vary significantly.

There can be tax implications for both the employee and employer when an employee is either posted abroad or generally working from another jurisdiction.



3e. Managing remote teams

Regardless of where employees are physically located, it is important for them to feel connected, motivated, and productive. It is possible to have a very successful working relationship with remote teams if some basic rules are adhered to:

- ✓ Observe and listen to the needs of employees
- ✓ Have regular communication to keep your people engaged
- ✓ Remind your employees of your company culture and what is expected of them

According to a recent [Gartner HR survey](#), 41% of remote workers say they don't feel connected to colleagues when working remotely. These findings highlight that merely providing remote working is not enough. There are a number of other aspects that need to be developed and planned in order to ensure that remote working delivers sustainable and effective benefits for all, including the creation of an inclusive work environment for individuals to thrive.

Management activities

Managers play a fundamental role in their team's success as they have a significant influence on team engagement and productivity. Let your managers know how they can best support their teams:

- ✓ **Provide an opportunity for regular check ins** – have weekly one-to-ones if possible, and team check-ins daily or bi-weekly
- ✓ **Continue to provide motivation and feedback** – provide an opportunity for varied and interesting work, recognise and reward employee effort and offer opportunities for development
- ✓ **Set clear goals** – these should be short term (weekly, monthly) and long term (quarterly, annually)
- ✓ **Measure employee deliverables** – be clear about how the performance of employees will be measured
- ✓ **Prioritise contact with those who need it** – if you cannot fit in one-to-ones with everyone on your team, focus on team members who need more support during different times. For example, new employees or someone starting a new project may need more contact whereas a more experienced employee may need less
- ✓ **Monitor workloads** – remember that excessive workload can cause additional stress to employees and impact on their health and well-being

Setting clear expectations

- ✓ When do you expect individuals to be available during the working day? Do you have core working hours where all employees are expected to be accessible? Can you implement certain focus times where an employee does not need to be contacted?
- ✓ What tools do you expect the person to be logged into during core working hours, for example, Microsoft Teams or Slack?

- ✓ When will you be available as a manager? How does an 'open door policy' work remotely? For example, can you set regular times in the calendar for your team when you are not in a meeting so they can message or call you for a chat, help and guidance on working tasks or get answers to questions?
- ✓ Can you share calendars between team members so that everyone has a clear view on each other's availability?
- ✓ How do you intend to record working hours? Although working hours can be flexible with remote working, as an employer you still have a requirement to record them.

Conducting performance conversations remotely

When setting up a performance conversation consider the following:

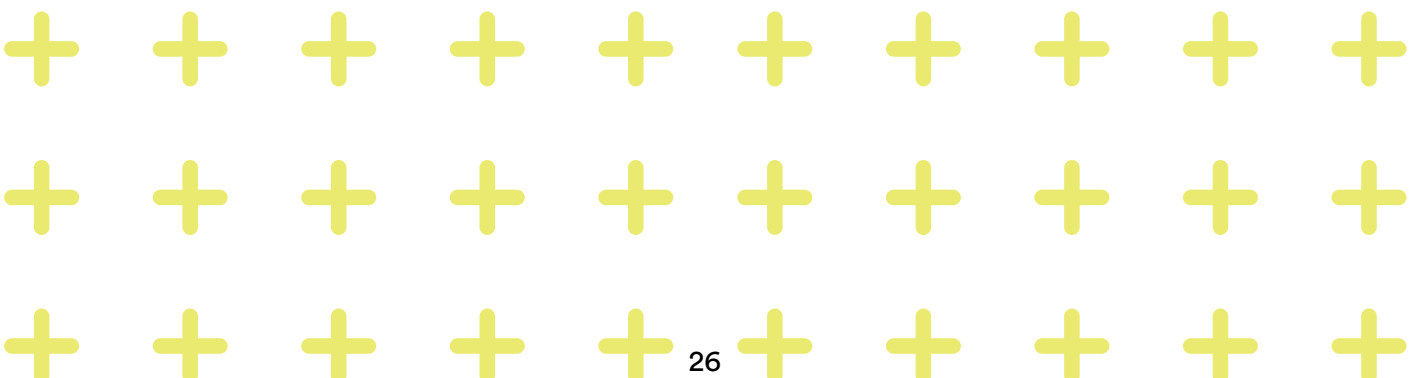
- ✓ Ensure that both manager and employee are in a private space, away from family or other distractions
- ✓ Consider the timing of the discussion – is there an optimal time in the day for this discussion to take place?
- ✓ Cameras should be on at all times – this helps both manager and employee to read and respond to body language signals
- ✓ Continue to follow the policies and processes outlined in your company handbook or contract

Training and development

It is important that managers and employees review individual learning needs at each stage of the employment relationship, from joining the company to continued professional development. You should review your training approaches to ensure they are fit for purpose or can be adapted to provide alternatives for remote employees. For example, employees working remotely may need to access learning through online learning platforms, webinars or virtual workshops.

Consider how learning and development can be adapted online for:

- ✓ Onboarding new employees
- ✓ Mentoring employees
- ✓ Ongoing development and upskilling of employees







Summary

Whilst many businesses have been operating some form of flexible working for the past 12-18 months, this has been largely unplanned and temporary. For businesses transitioning back into their workplaces, employees are likely to begin to request more permanent or longer-term adjustments to their ways of working. This now offers an opportunity for your business to put in place a well-thought-through flexible working strategy with supporting policies and procedures. This will provide clarity to employees on your company's policies and expectations in a remote or hybrid arrangement.

The right set-up in this area will vary depending on the type of business and industry in which you operate. However, regardless of your sector or industry, it is important to involve employees along the way and adjust practices as needed for a longer-term solution. Upskilling managers in areas such as communication, goal setting and performance management will aid the success of a flexible working strategy.

Plan what can work for your organisation

-  Who are the primary stakeholders who need to be involved in setting up a flexible working strategy within your company – these may include team managers, IT, HR and health & safety representatives?
-  How does the proposed flexible working strategy reflect the mission, vision and culture of your company?
-  How does the proposed flexible working strategy fit in with your company's business objectives? Do you need to consider future business challenges such as an expansion or reduction in workforce?
-  What are the cost impacts of implementing a flexible working strategy in your business?



Implement the approach

- ✓ If possible, trial the proposed flexible working strategy in one area of your business before it is fully implemented and make changes where needed
- ✓ Adjust appropriate policies to incorporate the flexible working approach: hiring, onboarding, training, performance management, meetings management and health & safety
- ✓ Communicate the flexible working strategy to the wider company
- ✓ Train or upskill managers in communication, feedback, goal setting and performance management



Review and monitor the success of the strategy

- ✓ Analyse available data such as performance reviews, business KPIs and absenteeism rates. Review whether performance targets have still been met or improved. Monitor absenteeism rates – have they increased or decreased?
- ✓ Survey employee engagement levels - have levels improved or disimproved?
- ✓ Survey manager feedback. How have managers found the transition to remote or hybrid working. Has their team's performance changed?
- ✓ Review associated costs to your business. Have they increased or decreased?



4. Employee Health and Well-being

Enabling and promoting good employee health and well-being to create a positive working environment where individuals and organisations can thrive can be a real source of competitive advantage. There is significant research to support the view that employees who are physically well and healthy are likely to be more engaged at work. Research also shows that health and well-being should not be treated as an ‘add-on’ or ‘nice-to-have’ activity. When companies place employee well-being at the centre of their business model and view it as the vital source of value creation, the dividends can be significant.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought concerns about employee health and well-being to the forefront of businesses. The pandemic, along with the changing nature of work, the workforce and the workplace, is making the focus on individual well-being even more critical to broader organisational health and sustainability.

The **CIPD Wellbeing Pyramid** shows that to truly achieve a healthy workplace an employer needs to ensure that its culture, leadership and people management are the bedrock on which to build a fully integrated well-being approach.

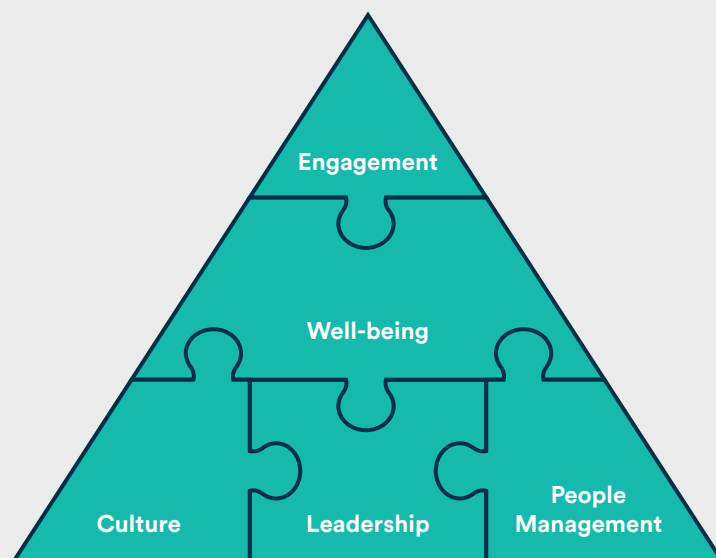


Figure 1: CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development) Wellbeing Pyramid

4a. Employee well-being strategy

While Covid-19 brings potentially serious physical health consequences for many employees, there are also equally challenging mental health implications, such as anxiety, stress, fear and uncertainty. Those returning to work or continuing to work remotely may be experiencing anxiety about the ongoing risk of infection, changes to their jobs or the workplace, juggling family or childcare responsibilities, struggling with ongoing isolation from family (particularly employees from overseas) and experiencing financial and relationship pressures. Others may have experienced the serious illness or death of a relative or friend during the pandemic.

As an employer, you should ensure that your company has a holistic framework in place to support people’s physical and mental health, and offer sources of assistance such as counselling, an employee assistance programme and occupational health services (OHS) where possible. You should ensure that line managers in particular have the ongoing guidance needed to support their teams, so they can have sensitive conversations with individuals and know where to signpost help where needed.

Mental health issues have a significant impact on employee well-being, are a major cause of long-term absence from work and can have a significant impact on employee productivity. Mental health issues will affect one in four employees at some point in their working lives. Employers have a crucial role to play in supporting their employees’ mental health. As a leader, you play an important role in developing and implementing a holistic employee well-being strategy that supports both physical and mental well-being in the workplace.

It is important to remember that all approaches to well-being should treat people as individuals with varying needs who require tailored support.

A holistic well-being policy should:

- ✓ Set out a clear commitment to nurturing a working environment that promotes employee health and well-being
- ✓ Be championed by senior management
- ✓ Clearly outline the responsibilities of crucial stakeholders for example, senior management, HR and employees
- ✓ Set out the available advice, supports and training to enhance employee well-being
- ✓ Incorporate the process and metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of all well-being initiatives
- ✓ Be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains relevant and up to date



4b. Employee well-being and supports



How can I support and enhance employee well-being?

There are many ways in which employers can support and enhance employee well-being in the workplace

- Check in regularly with employees – ideally face-to-face or online with cameras on
- Create an environment where employees are comfortable discussing mental health at work
- Look for possible early signs and symptoms of poor mental health, for example, a change in an employee's usual behaviour, increased absence, poor performance or tiredness
- Confront unhealthy working habits
- Ensure managers are trained to understand the importance of supporting and enhancing employee well-being and can raise concerns sensitively with employees
- Proactively review workloads and discuss the distribution of work with employees, therefore providing an opportunity for them to raise any concerns
- Actively promote work/life balance
- Adjust working hours, if required – and, if possible, offer flexible working arrangements
- Know when, where and how to signpost to expert support services
- Promote well-being initiatives and organise regular well-being sessions
- Provide frequent information and updates on available supports
- Provide access to an employee assistance programme or occupational health service
- Act as a role model and lead by example
- Review your own management/leadership style
- Be mindful of employees who continue to work remotely as signs of stress can be more difficult to identify in these employees

Consult with employees and encourage feedback

- Encourage your employees to talk to you if they feel work pressure is putting them or anyone else at risk of ill health
- Invite employees to suggest ways in which their work might be organised to alleviate any stress
- Ask employees to inform you if they are suffering from a medical condition that appears to be long term and is affecting their ability to carry out day to day tasks, including memory and learning
- Be open to discussing any reasonable adjustments that could be made to assist them in performing their job

What external supports can I tap into?

There are a wide range of supports available to promote and encourage well-being both outside and inside the workplace:

Work Positive is a free state and stakeholder supported psychosocial risk management process that helps organisations identify ways to improve employee well-being.

The Government's Keep Well campaign is aimed at showing people of all ages how we can mind our own physical and mental health and well-being by adding healthy and helpful habits to our daily and weekly routines. It provides guidelines, information, and tips on things that will help us keep well through the coming months.

A range of supports and advice is also available from the Health and Safety Authority on work-related stress.

4c. Vaccination roll-out and returning to the office

With the Covid-19 phased vaccination programme well underway, it looks like the latter half of 2021 will see a return to a somewhat normal life, and with it, a possible return to the workplace.

What do I need to do now?

Employers should start to consider what impact the vaccine roll-out will have on employees' return to the workplace. As employers have been reminded repeatedly during the pandemic, they have an obligation to provide a safe place of work for their employees and the vaccine roll-out is likely to present both opportunities and challenges in the provision of that safe place of work.

The revised Work Safely Protocol incorporates updated advice on the Public Health measures required to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace. It provides guidance on ventilation and vaccinations as part of the range of measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 as well as information on how to approach the use of antigen testing in the workplace. It is important for all employers to read the Protocol as it reflects the most up-to-date public health advice for the workplace.

It is likely that many health measures and obligations on employers will remain with us for some time. Here are some tips to help you plan and prepare:

- ✓ Review and update your **Risk Assessment** in light of the availability of vaccines and consider whether additional measures are required to control and minimise the risks for employees who do not want to receive a vaccine, such as continued compliance with social distancing guidelines and use of face coverings. (See Appendix 1 – Risk Assessment Template or use Besmart.ie – a free online tool to guide you through the process).
- ✓ Your **Risk Assessment** may need to incorporate workplace health and safety measures where some employees have had the vaccine and others have not.
- ✓ Monitor government and public health guidance on how to manage a safe return to the workplace and update your policies and procedures accordingly.

- ✓ Provide regular and clear communications to employees on any updated health and safety measures.
- ✓ Consider whether you intend to allow employees to continue to work remotely, to allow employees to return to the workplace when this is possible, or to provide for a hybrid of remote and office work. We recommend that employers set out a clear policy on remote working guidelines and expectations well in advance of any potential return to the workplace. See the section on Remote Working for more details on this topic.

It is important to note that while an employer can strongly encourage their employees to receive the vaccine, they cannot mandate that their employees receive it.

4d. Diversity and inclusion

While Covid-19 has put a heavy focus on the health and well-being of employees, it may have resulted in the de-prioritisation and slowing down of other initiatives such as diversity and inclusion (D&I) programmes. A diverse and inclusive workforce is crucial for businesses that want to attract and retain top talent. According to Forbes' Innovation Through Diversity report, companies with above-average diversity produced a greater proportion of revenue from innovation (45% of total) than organisations with below average diversity (26%).

However, research by McKinsey (2020) found that while workers across all demographic groups experienced challenges during the pandemic related to mental health, work-life balance, workplace health and safety, a missing sense of connectivity and belonging with colleagues, and concerns about job opportunities, underrepresented employee groups, such as women, LGBTQ+ employees, people of colour, and working parents, have experienced the most challenges during this time.

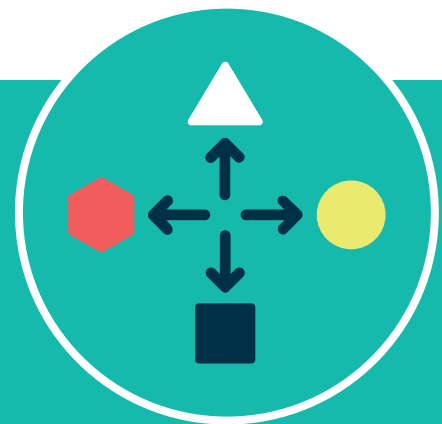
How do I build Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in the workplace?

Diversity and Inclusion strategy

- ✓ Develop (or update and strengthen) your D&I strategy to ensure it takes account of the evolving workforce and workplace
- ✓ Champion this by leadership/management

Work/life balance

- ✓ Support work/life balance – increase flexibility where work is performed
- ✓ Ensure work is evenly and fairly distributed



Remote/blended working policies

- ✓ Give all employees (where possible) the opportunity for flexible work
- ✓ Provide equal access to career development, mentoring and support
- ✓ Consider that a virtual-only work model may exclude many employees from your business for example, more junior, lower paid employees may not have additional space to work from home

Communications

- ✓ Use communications tools that take account of diverse circumstances, for example, some employees may not always want their camera on if working from their bedroom
- ✓ Try rotating meeting hosts so that everyone gets a chance to talk. Quieter employees can often get overlooked during virtual team meetings
- ✓ Try different communication tools for different meetings – some meetings may mandate cameras on while others may use phone calls or direct messaging
- ✓ Consider the timing of company and team meetings to accommodate employees in different time zones or those with caring responsibilities

Recruitment

- ✓ Broaden your hiring remit – look beyond your regular sources of talent
- ✓ Regularly test and review your hiring tools, processes and technology as they can inadvertently contain bias against specific characteristics including race, gender and socioeconomic background

Well-being initiatives

- ✓ Ensure well-being initiatives are inclusive and accommodate the needs of diverse employees to take account of physical ability, mental health, chronic illness, religion, family demands and language
- ✓ Understand the link between D&I and well-being – employees who feel included are more likely to experience greater well-being. Equally employees with high-levels of well-being are more likely to be inclusive of others

D&I calendar

- ✓ Raise awareness and create a sense of inclusion by planning and publishing a D&I calendar to highlight important dates for underrepresented groups, for example, LGBTQ+ events, Mental Health Week, International Women's Day, national holidays for overseas employees

Summary

Employee health and well-being should form a core element of your return to the workplace strategy. Whether you operate a fully remote, hybrid or on-site approach it is important to ensure that employee physical and mental health remains a priority. A holistic employee well-being strategy supporting employee physical and mental health will be a core enabler of employee engagement and your company's performance. To achieve a healthy work environment, you need to ensure that your company culture, leadership and people management are the bedrock on which you build a fully integrated well-being approach.

- Consult with managers and employees around your return to the workplace to ensure that their views are listened to and incorporated in your decision-making process. This will help alleviate stress for those who may have concerns about returning
- Offer a range of employee well-being supports to help employees navigate their return to the workplace, considering that many will be apprehensive about their return
- Review existing health and well-being supports to ensure they remain appropriate within a remote, hybrid or on-site environment, and make changes if necessary
- Continuously evaluate ways that you can create a supportive and positive employee well-being culture in your company
- A diverse and inclusive workforce is business critical, so it is important to ensure that well-being and any return to the workplace policies support and promote diversity and inclusion



5. Resource Planning in a Virtual World

Reviewing your hiring process on an ongoing basis is always a good idea. Taking a strategic view of talent acquisition in your business will help you prepare better for the evolving nature of how candidates engage with companies. Considering variable terms of employment, such as different types of employment contracts, where employees may be located, and what compensation and benefits you wish to offer has become even more important as Covid-19 has changed both employer and candidate considerations and requirements.

Your resource plan should consider a number of different elements to ensure you have identified the appropriate skills and capabilities you will need for the future. These include:

- ✓ the number of new opportunities you expect to create
- ✓ the promotional and development opportunities on offer for your current staff
- ✓ the budgetary factors that need to be considered
- ✓ the locations of your registered offices
- ✓ the technological and security supports for remote working
- ✓ the hiring tools available to manage virtual interviews and onboarding

At a time when hiring is for the most part being conducted virtually, it's even more important to review how your current talent acquisition process operates. Consider what adjustments are needed to ensure you have the right structures, capability and technology systems to be effective at the various stages of the selection process of each recruitment campaign you run.

When considering your hiring process, think about the experience you would like candidates to have as they engage with your company. Having a strong employer brand is important as it helps candidates understand what's good about working with your business and will help you attract the right talent. A positive employer brand increases the job pool of potential candidates, improves how your company is perceived on social media and can often reduce the time and budget required to hire the right people.

Your employer branding will encompass your Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and give you an opportunity to present yourself as an attractive employer. It will also incorporate the candidate experience, ensuring it is positive, lasting and engaging throughout the hiring process. It will help you to attract and retain your top talent for the long haul.

5a. Hiring in a virtual world

Converting your recruitment process into a digital experience broadens the scope and nature of your candidate communications. Sharing what it is like to work in your organisation via videos, photos and employee testimonials can help you to build and communicate your unique employer brand. During the selection process it is important that you provide candidates with a good indication of what it is like to be an employee so that they can make an informed decision of whether they are a fit for your company and culture.

Some of the same challenges experienced in sourcing and recruiting great talent will still exist when hiring virtually, such as:

- ✓ Promoting the role to your target audience and connecting your company's promotional collateral in an engaging manner
- ✓ Making the application process easy and straightforward to use – don't have too many steps for the candidate to follow in order to submit their CV for consideration
- ✓ Positioning your employer brand and presenting the opportunity in the right light so that it is compelling to your audience
- ✓ Capturing the culture and essence of what it's like to work in your company and the opportunities for progression and development candidates can hope to experience when working there

Some of the essential principles for effective hiring using virtual channels are:

- ✓ Develop comprehensive and easy to understand job descriptions that clearly set out the duties and responsibilities of the role. Clarify where the role will be based, and if it will be fully remote, hybrid or on-site. If the role is based remotely, outline the jurisdictions that will be considered. Also communicate whether you are open to a flexible working model
- ✓ Ensure your interviewers are trained to conduct online interviews using video and other online tools
- ✓ Enable hiring managers to make informed decisions swiftly so that you keep talented candidates engaged throughout the process and through to offer stage
- ✓ Explain the selection process to candidates from the outset so that they know what to expect at each stage
- ✓ Explain the technology that will be used and encourage candidates to test their internet connection in advance of the interview time. Develop a guide for candidates so that your time is well spent, and candidates are prepared
- ✓ Explain the dress code and interview process, how many people will be on the panel and the expected duration of the interview
- ✓ If a technical or an aptitude test is required, give candidates sufficient notice of the submission date
- ✓ Be responsive and engaging in all communications with candidates, making it easier for them to stay connected with the process
- ✓ Try to avoid the distraction of the background setting of the candidate's screen and ensure there is no unconscious bias in the decision-making process
- ✓ Establish a scorecard matrix of how to assess a candidate's skills and cultural fit

Smart technology can assist you to manage the recruitment process in a time-efficient manner. There are a number of well-designed applicant tracking systems (ATS) on the market that can be used as stand-alone tools, as well as modules within HR Information Systems (HRIS) that you may already have in place.

Once a decision has been made, follow up with references and background checking as promptly as possible and ensure all the company preconditions are clarified before getting the documentation with the final offer sent to the candidate.

When discussing any job offer with a candidate, explain the workplace set up that is currently in place and set expectations. This is especially important if there is an extension of remote working or a period of office-based working, or if there is a hybrid working model in place from the outset. It is also a good time to explain the onboarding process and what candidates can expect as they progress to the joining stage with your company.

5b. Onboarding virtually

An employee's first impression of an organisation has a significant impact on their integration within the team and their overall level of engagement. The onboarding process is critical to the successful integration of any new employee. Any existing induction programmes should be adjusted to ensure new employees can be effectively onboarded to a virtual workplace and yet still feel connected. Providing an onboarding experience that is as stress-free as possible will help the new employee feel connected to both their team and your company while working remotely. This will ultimately enable them to be more productive.



Inducting a new employee online

Virtual induction should be more condensed than traditional face-to-face or on-site-based induction sessions; however, employers should ensure that all relevant information is shared with the new employee as early in the process as possible. Use a variety of communication channels, such as sending information by email, or providing access to the shared drives or the employee portal. The advantage is that the onboarding and induction information will always be there as a good source of reference.

Where possible, try to use a combination of video, slide presentation, guest speakers and interactive activities with the various induction sessions. Try to limit the sessions to a maximum of two hours with a break of 10-15 minutes in between. This will avoid the new employee becoming overwhelmed with too much information at once.

Develop a virtual tour of the workplace or site, so that new employees have a sense of what the workplace looks like and the location of the various departments and facilities. This will help to develop a deeper connection between employees and your company and set expectations for when they will be able to attend the office or site sometime in the future.

Another onboarding suggestion is to have short video clips of various employees in the organisation speaking about their role, what their experience has been and how employees in their department stay connected while working remotely.



Develop a work from home “Buddy System”

Buddy systems are always helpful to welcome and integrate new employees, and this is certainly the case when you are welcoming a new employee to a virtual team. It is important to identify the skills and capabilities needed as a buddy and select a team of buddies across the organisation. You should provide buddies with the necessary training and support, so that they can be effective and dynamic in their role. A new employee should be introduced to a buddy in the same team or function, with the buddy playing an essential role in helping them settle in, especially in the current circumstances where they are starting their new role remotely.



Preparing for the new employee

Engage in a series of communications with new employees before their start date so they are already looking forward to joining the team and have some information and material to familiarise themselves with your company. Set out the induction programme so that they know what to expect and introduce them to their buddy so that they can connect with them early in the process.

It is critical that new employee induction is well planned, that they can access all relevant drives and accounts that are needed for their role, and that time is scheduled to help them navigate the various systems and sites. You should provide new employees with information on how your company operates in relation to the sharing of information and collaboration between teams. This is also a good time to explain the cyber and system security protocols that are in place and their duty of care in safeguarding company confidential information.



Connection points

Establishing regular check-ins and staying in touch with a new employee is really important and a good investment of your time and attention. Not only will it go a long way in building an engaged relationship, but you will also understand how employees are getting on early in the induction process and if they need any additional supports. Schedule meetups with colleagues over the first few weeks and establish an opportunity to meet as many colleagues as possible in a proactive and structured way. This will help with relationship building and create an environment for collaboration and networking internally. Developing an internal networking toolkit will be very beneficial for everyone throughout their time with the company. The more support a new employee gets at the early stages of their employment, the more engaged they will be and have a better chance to contribute and add value.

Tips to consider:

Communications: Consider what information you need to share with your employees. Try to avoid sharing information that the new employee is unlikely to need, especially in the first few months, so they don't get overwhelmed. At the same time make sure they get the important information as early as possible. Getting the communication and information flow right is critical

Relationships: Establish contact points early on so they get to build a healthy connection with their manager and key individuals such as the go-to person for all employment and payroll matters

Company information: Try to pitch presentations at an appropriate level and ensure they are tailored to take account of the area the new employee is joining and the industry they will be working in. Relevant company information such as company handbooks and policies and procedures that will apply to them should also be covered early in the process

Culture and values: From the outset, create a connection to the culture of the organisation. Communicate your company values so that they can become anchors from the outset. Setting expectations regarding performance without overselling the opportunity will set them up for success

Engage and reassure: The first few days and weeks of any new job can be unsettling and stressful; therefore it is important to design the induction programme to be engaging and to reassure the new employee that they have made the right decision in joining your company



5c. Graduates and internships

Opportunities and access to intern and graduate roles may have changed for your business because of the pandemic. Given the uncertainty of the workplace, you may have put intern and graduate roles on hold. However, it is important that you continue to access talent and invest in graduate skills to build a talent pool for the future.



Offering internships and graduate programmes can be hugely beneficial to your company as they allow access to a talent pool that could be significant contributors to your business in the future. Graduates and interns can bring fresh thinking, increased diversity and new skills into your company. Your business may also benefit from an increased understanding of the academic environment and the programmes of study that the students and graduates are undertaking. And of course, it is a chance to engage in the local community and build relationships with local colleges and the local pool of students.

Supporting candidates to access and engage with internship and graduate opportunities may be challenging within a remote or hybrid working environment. The process therefore needs to be a positive experience. Continue to engage and build relationships with colleges, universities and other third level institutions, sharing details about your company and the opportunities that exist both virtually and on site. Your company can still host career fairs and make the digital experience efficient, informative and engaging. Candidates need to have sufficient information and access to job descriptions, understand the experiences of others in the company, and have a deeper understanding of what the organisation stands for, especially on topics of diversity and inclusion, sustainability and ethics, the environment and community in which they are located.

Whether you choose remote or hybrid working, it is important that you continue to create opportunities for interns and graduates to engage formally and informally. This is important for new recruits in general, but especially when employees are entering the workforce for the first time. All talent initiatives such as induction training, probation management, performance reviews, mentorship programmes and general job training will need to reflect new ways of working. Training will be very different, so establishing new channels for collaboration and networking with peers needs to be structured and monitored. Buddy and mentoring programmes will now be more important than ever to ensure knowledge gaps are addressed and new employees are able to contribute and thrive in the new workplace environment.

As you monitor and review your company's policies and procedures when adjusting to new working practices, it is important that they continue to reflect current and developing employment legislation. Your business should provide access to opportunities and progression in line with equality legislation, and address the current health, safety, and well-being of employees and their work environment. That includes undertaking a review of workstations, even where employees are based at home. Some graduates or interns may be in rented accommodation with limited space and so it may be a challenge to set up a workstation that meets the correct ergonomic standard and security safeguards. It is also important to address the overall well-being of employees, as mentioned in section 4, and ensure that supports are in place for all employees to access well-being initiatives.

5d. Career progression and succession planning

The Covid-19 pandemic has transformed every aspect of our working experience and has impacted the financial position of many companies. It is therefore no surprise that it will have had an impact on opportunities for progression and on the career paths that were already established. However, progression and growth won't have stalled completely; every experience and challenge encountered is an opportunity for personal development, growth and adaptability. Your company should continue to build and develop new skills and provide opportunities for employees to gain new experiences. You should encourage employees to network and build relationships across the business, regardless of whether they are working on-site or remotely.

Even if new roles or promotional opportunities are not immediately apparent, it's important to continue to plan and focus on professional development so that you have the relevant skills available to deliver future business growth. Covid-19 has been a disrupter in so many ways, but like all disrupters it also creates opportunity. While career development is likely to look and feel different for the next while, it is still important to identify and address developmental needs within your business.

It is important to keep employees focused on their development so that they are ready to embrace opportunities within the business when they arise. Virtual learning technologies offer new opportunities for professional development, regardless of whether employees are in the workplace or working remotely.

Try this advice to help keep your employees motivated:



Through your performance management process, encourage your employees to identify their personal goals and how they wish to develop. Take some time to discuss with them where they want to go in their career and what they might like to do in the next 12 to 18 months



Help your workers assess their current skill set and identify with them the skills you will need to have in the business in the future. Encourage them to attend webinars and workshops on subjects of importance and try to facilitate them putting their new skills into operation when the opportunity arises



Consider using 360 tools where your high potential talent can get feedback and input from colleagues, mentors and managers so that they are realistic in their endeavours and can identify the support they need



Encourage and facilitate your employees to move beyond their comfort zone and put themselves forward for some challenging assignments or a body of work that will really test them. Maybe consider a global assignment, or the chance to join a working group to look at a new process flow within the organisation. These are all good learning opportunities



Encourage employees to generate new ideas and not to be afraid to pitch them to the business. This can be achieved virtually through structured collaboration and innovation hubs. Innovation and creativity are always important – so provide ways to let employees showcase their ability



Sometimes it can be helpful to recommend a mentorship programme for an employee or for them to become a mentor and join an inhouse mentor panel



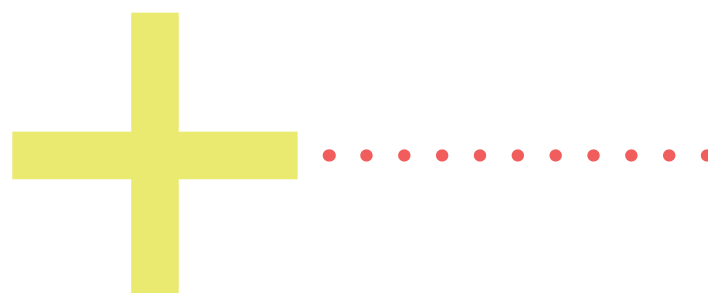
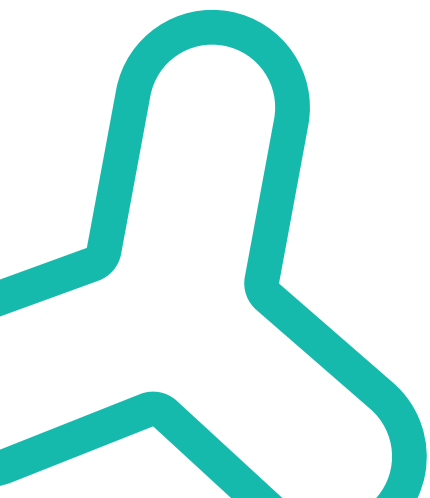
This might be the time too for employees to consider taking up some voluntary role outside of work or identifying ways that they can apply their skills for the enhancement and development of others less fortunate

Developing structures to support employees stay focused on developing their careers and realise their aspirations within your company is always a good philosophy to follow. Now at this time of a changing landscape, it is important that your top talent see a future with your business and remain passionate about the opportunities that may arise in the future.

Summary:

Talent is critical to the success of all businesses. Having a structured acquisition and retention strategy that embraces the new virtual landscape will allow you to access a broader talent pool to grow your company.

- ✓ Adjusting how you search for talent and how you bring candidates through the selection process is the first step in designing a resource plan for the future
- ✓ Embrace the digital and virtual tools available to get access to the talent you are seeking
- ✓ Prepare your selecting team so that they have the skills and competencies needed to operate within the evolving talent acquisition environment. Interviewing and assessing candidates virtually is not the same as the face-to-face experience
- ✓ Onboard employees using smart and effective virtual tools
- ✓ Don't forget the human factor, build your new processes to allow for new ways of engaging and building relationships
- ✓ Ensure you have a strong and impactful employer brand that is meaningful to your current employees and makes a positive impact on the candidate experience aligning with your culture and values throughout
- ✓ Have an onboarding process that is effective for employees working in both a blended and virtual capacity. Make all relevant information easily accessible and communicate as often as possible
- ✓ Consider the skills and capabilities that your business needs over the next 18 months and develop a company-wide training plan to address any gaps
- ✓ Even where promotional opportunities are not immediately available, continue to offer employees access to developmental activities – these can include formal training, new projects, business coaching and internal mentoring



6. Frequently Asked Questions



Is my company required to pay the cost of some household bills where employees are working remotely?

Currently, there is no legal entitlement to provide an employee with an allowance or additional benefits to work from home. Employers should confirm in the contractual arrangements if the employee is expected to cover their costs or if the employer will contribute towards these costs.

There are some tax reliefs for employees who qualifies as an e-worker. An e-worker is:

- working at home either on a full-time or part-time basis; or
- working some of the time at home and the remainder in the workplace

Revenue has listed out the conditions for an employee to qualify as an e-worker:

An e-worker may claim:

- Electricity and heat – 10% of cost of electricity and heat apportioned on the basis of the number of days worked from home over the year
- Broadband – 30% of the cost of broadband apportioned on the basis of the number of days worked from home over the year. This concession, commencing in tax year 2020, will apply for the duration of the pandemic

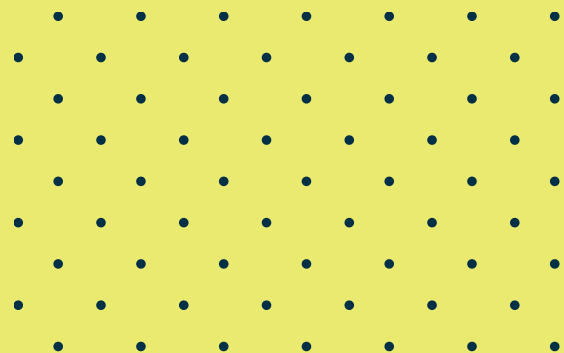
There is also an option for the employer to pay up to €3.20 per day tax free to employees who satisfy the conditions for the relief. An employee cannot both claim tax relief and receive this payment. It is one or the other. Any additional payment an employer may choose to make towards home working, is subject to tax, PRSI and USC as normal.



Will employees still be required to work the same hours when working remotely?

There may be greater flexibility with working hours in a work from home arrangement, but the important thing is that a set of normal working hours is still agreed and documented.

Remote employees are still governed by the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 and employers are required to record employees' work time and details of any leave granted to them. Employers should be clear on what is considered the normal working time for a remote worker, which may vary depending on the individual or job role, and to establish an appropriate method to monitor working hours, breaks and rest period for this category of worker. It is important that employers ensure that employees are taking the appropriate breaks and to remind employees to take such breaks. Managers should pay particular attention to signs of overwork.





How do I monitor my remote workers?

Trust is paramount in the employment relationship, and this should extend to remote workers. It is not so much about excessive monitoring, but more about setting the right expectations for your workforce.

Be clear about your expectations for your employees:

- What are the core hours of your business?
- Is there additional flexibility afforded to the remote working model?
- What clear goals are in place?
- When and how should employees check in? For example, should they attend a morning / evening meeting or send an email to update their manager on their plan / progress for the day?
- How will the performance of employees be measured?



What should I include in my Remote Work Policy?

Having a remote working policy in place is very important. It should set out the process of applying for remote working, an analysis of the work that will be carried out, the schedule and rota of working remotely, the essential set-up facilities and tools and the management model that will be used to ensure there is no impact on engagement or performance.

Key aspects to be considered are:

- IT infrastructure
- Data protection
- IT security
- Employee expectations around working hours and contact
- Health and safety requirements
- Company financial support for home working, if applicable



Can an employer make vaccination mandatory for all its employees?

As it currently stands, the vaccination programme is a public health programme so employers will have no control over or involvement in which of their employees are vaccinated or when they will be vaccinated. Even if employers could mandate vaccination, there are issues and considerations in terms of data privacy, and the constitutional right to bodily integrity, together with potential equality discrimination issues, for example, employees who do not agree with vaccination on religious grounds. While an employer can encourage vaccination and educate on the potential benefits, it is highly unlikely that an employer will ever be able to insist on mandatory vaccination. Employers will also need to ensure that where an employee chooses not to be vaccinated, that their rights are respected by the organisation and its employees.



Can I ask my employees to confirm if they have been vaccinated?

While employers may be keen to confirm whether employees have or have not received a vaccine, it is important to remember that employers' duties under data protection legislation remain the same. The Data Protection Commission has issued guidance that clarified that GDPR provides a legal basis for processing health data where the data processing is necessary and proportionate. Employers should ensure that the legal basis for processing data is clearly explained in any policy that may require vaccination data. In addition to this, employers should monitor the necessity and proportionality of processing employee information in line with government guidance.



Should I think about management training at this time or wait for everyone to be back in the workplace?

Ensuring your management team have the skills and competencies needed to be effective in their roles is always important. Managing people is challenging even when everyone is working from the same location; however, it is even more challenging to manage a diverse team who are working remotely or in a hybrid model. Providing your managers with the skills and capabilities they need to be effective will be important and should be under constant review. Give managers the skills to be successful and support them through coaching or individual mentoring to help them use these skills effectively and build high-performing teams, no matter where they are working.

Management training can be delivered virtually, with various tools and online support available to engage employees via workshops and team building exercises.



How can we continue performance reviews when some of our employees are working remotely?

Performance reviews should be scheduled as normal even if employees are working remotely. Ask for cameras to be on at these meetings and ask employees to do some pre-work and preparation as they would if they were in the workplace. The meetings should be of a shorter duration - therefore managers need to have them well structured, sharing the necessary information in advance with employees and aiming for a positive engagement throughout.

Consider the KPIs and goals being set – do they need to change in a remote working environment? You may want to reward different behaviours and outcomes, so discuss these with your employees too. Remember that remote working adds to isolation, and performance review meetings can be extremely important as they allow for the manager and the employee to have a completely different conversation to the normal work discussions.





How can I support employees who continue to have vulnerable family members at home?

Even with the ongoing vaccination programme, many employees may still be very anxious about returning to the workplace, particularly if they have a vulnerable family member at home. The first step is to engage with your employee to understand how their personal circumstances may impact on their return to the workplace (if they have been working remotely). Then you should try to reassure them that you are putting measures in place to mitigate the risks in the workplace and to try to understand what type of additional supports they may need, such as increased flexibility, reduced working hours etc. If you have an employee assistance programme in place, now is the time to remind employees of its benefits.



My managers find looking after remote teams difficult - is there anything I can do to address this?

Make sure you support your managers to be effective during this period of transition and help them to adjust their management practices to take account of the new working models of their teams. Identify the areas that are particularly challenging for your managers and develop customised training that will support them to develop new skills or adjust existing ones. This will give them greater confidence, increase their awareness of the areas they need to focus on, and provide them with a toolkit for effective management. Give them time to adjust their practices, encourage ongoing communications across the teams, and consider providing them with a management buddy to help them through the challenges they are experiencing.



Should we bring candidates into a face-to-face interview at the final stages of the selection process?

When considering your hiring process, it's important to ensure it is time efficient and that you don't delay your decision process and lose top talent. On the other hand, it is very important that you source new talent that not only have the skills and ability to do the job, but who are also a good culture fit within the organisation. The tools and screening processes you use will determine how much you learn about the candidate through the selection process.

It may not be feasible to meet the person face-to-face before making a final decision due to a range of different factors such as their location, travel restrictions, or concern over health and safety requirements. Therefore, having a robust selection process in place will be important for you to make an informed decision. In addition, the onboarding process will be a very important stage in assessing if the employee is a good fit, so set goals and objectives each month for the first six months and assess their performance not only on output but also on attitude and behaviour.

For some roles it may be necessary to have a face-to-face interview as part of the final selection stages; this can be facilitated by following good health and safety protocols. However, be sure to progress the candidate through your process in a timely manner so that it does not become too protracted and you risk losing the candidate.



What do I do if an employee says they now need to work from their home country because they have family caring responsibilities?

Every business should be developing a clear policy on remote working that will – or will not – allow for employees to work abroad. It can be an extremely costly and difficult decision to allow employees to work abroad so many companies are taking the view that this is not a policy they will offer at this time. A company is also still responsible for the health and well-being of the employee if they are working abroad and this may be very complex to manage.

Any decision to allow an employee to work from another country should be decided very carefully with very clear parameters. At the time of going to print, quarantine for many countries remains in place for returning travellers coming back into Ireland – this makes an employee returning to Ireland very difficult and costly and subsequently makes the return of any such employee more unlikely.



If an employee is not comfortable returning to the workplace, can I insist that they do?

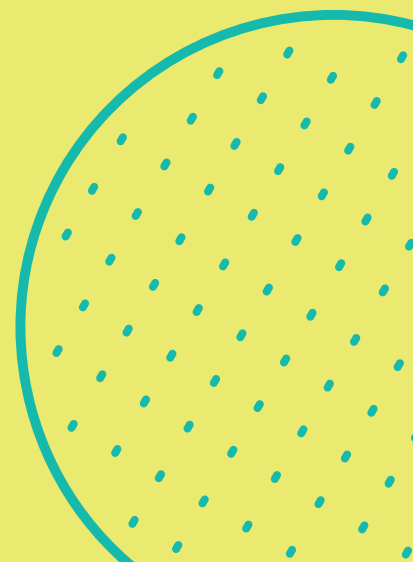
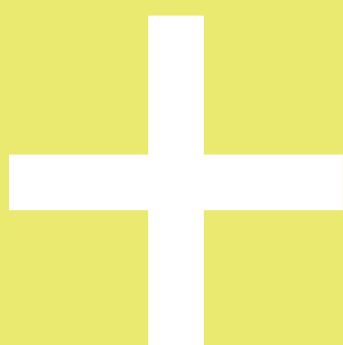
In the first instance, you will have asked an employee to fill out the Return to Work form. If they clearly state that they have an issue (such as a vulnerable relative living with them or a health condition that would make them at risk) then you will need to discuss this with the individual to get a clear understanding of any potential risks. You may need to complete a full risk assessment and then revert back with a decision.

If they say that they want to wait for their vaccination(s), this is not something that you can agree with, as it is not within the role of any business to insist on their employees receiving a vaccination. What you – as an employer – must do is offer a safe and well organised working environment that complies with all the government and health regulations. You can then ask an employee to return to work on that basis.



What do I do if employees don't like the new workplace layout and their workstation set-up?

When you are planning your new workplace, get the views and inputs from your employees early on so that they feel consulted and that their voice is heard. Consider the logistics of the workplace both from an operational perspective as well as from an employee experience viewpoint. Make sure that employees are involved at all stages of the planning process and that they know what to expect when they return to the workplace. Remember that creating stimulating and pleasant workplaces will contribute to how employees work and how they perform.



Appendix 1 - Risk Assessment Template

RISK ASSESSEMENT TEMPLATE

This is a draft copy of a generic Risk Assessment for dealing with the current Covid-19 situation in the workplace. It is not likely to cover all scenarios and each employer should consider their own unique circumstances and business. For some sectors, such as that for health care workers, the assessment may look quite different although many of the principles would still be relevant.

Company Name:	Carried out by:
Date carried out:	Date of next review:

What are the risks/hazards?	Who might be impacted?	Controls required	Additional Controls	By who	By When	Done
Spread of Covid-19 virus	Staff, contractors, visitors, cleaners & anybody else who comes into physical contact with your business	List here all the measures you need to put in place e.g. handwashing procedures, cleaning procedures, social distancing procedures etc.	List here any additional measures e.g. daily checks, reminders, communication plans, frequency etc.	Assign owners	Assign timelines	

Appendix 2 - A guide to establishing an Employer Branding Programme

An employer brand is effectively a set of attributes and qualities – often intangible – that makes an organisation distinctive, promises a particular kind of employment experience, and appeals to those people who will thrive and perform best in its culture. It helps to engage and retain your talent and showcases how you will support employees as they develop and grow their careers in your company.

- Agree the principles of why your company should invest in an employer branding programme
- Define your employee value proposition – what does it include and why?
- Integrate your employer brand programme into other digital and marketing initiatives and ensure they are aligned to the overall strategy of the business
- Consider the candidate experience you want to create and how you can deliver that. Be clear about the message you want to give candidates and how you want them to promote your company
- Identify your top performers and key talent who are critical for your company's success. They will help you stay competitive and win the war on talent. Find ways to retain them through providing relevant development opportunities and recognising and rewarding good performance
- Be inclusive in the development of your strategy, invite input from your employees and ask for feedback from candidates so that you are using relevant and meaningful data to make decisions.
- Promote and encourage diversity and inclusion across the company and ensure your employer brand reflects this in an authentic way
- Demonstrate strong and impactful leadership competencies in the messages and strategies you deliver
- Continue to review and monitor the effectiveness of your employer branding and make the necessary adjustments to ensure it remains current and relevant for your business

Companies that set themselves apart from their competitors have a better chance of attracting and retaining skilled personnel. Attracting candidates to your company and retaining employees means that your company is committed to valuing and supporting employees throughout the employee's entire work environment. That includes everything from workspace design, compensation, and career development programs, to advanced training and career opportunities.

Through Covid-19 and beyond there will be significant resizing of the workforce, so it is worth continuing to invest in your employer brand and to show authentic leadership.

Appendix 3 – A set of sample employee surveys

Sample questions for an Employee Engagement Survey:

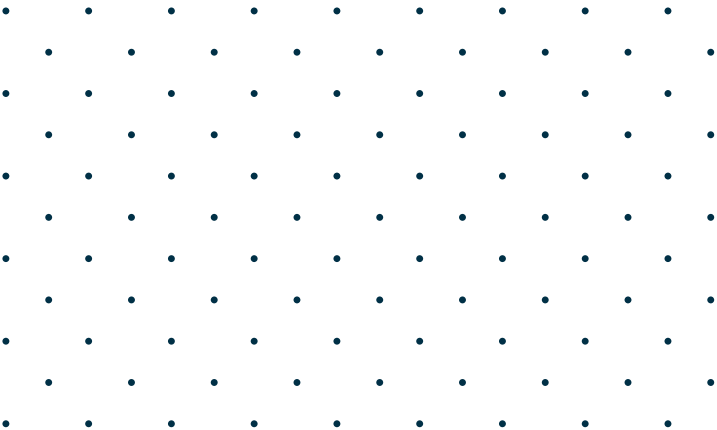
- I am proud to tell my friends and family that I work for this company
- I am interested and motivated about the majority of the projects and customers I work with
- I have all the tools and supports I need to consistently do my job well
- The vision and culture of the company continue to inspire me to do my best work
- I feel recognised for my hard work and the successes I achieve
- I believe my workload and responsibilities are reasonable and sustainable in my role
- I plan to continue to remain with this company for at least the next two to three years

Sample questions for an Employee Wellness Survey

- I feel supported to adjust my work schedule to accommodate my caregiving needs if required
- My manager has effectively responded to my needs in the current environment
- My manager has checked in on my well-being within the past two weeks
- I am able to maintain meaningful connections with my work colleagues
- The company offers flexibility for employees who need it during this challenging period
- My workload and stress levels are manageable
- I like the way my company is handling internal communications during this crisis
- I am encouraged to take time for myself during the workday
- I have the hardware and software I need to work effectively during this time
- I know who to go to if I am experiencing stress or anxiety and can speak confidentially

Sample questions for an Employee Remote Working Survey

- I am satisfied with working from home
- I have the all the equipment I need to effectively work from home
- I have a suitable workspace
- I can access all the company systems needed to fulfil my role to the usual standard
- I have the support I need from the company to successfully work from home
- I have regular contact with my team and my manager
- I am clear on my work goals and tasks
- I am taking regular rest breaks
- I feel that I have a healthy work and life balance when working from home
- I have established a good routine for working remotely



Appendix 4 – Conducting an audit of your remote working practices

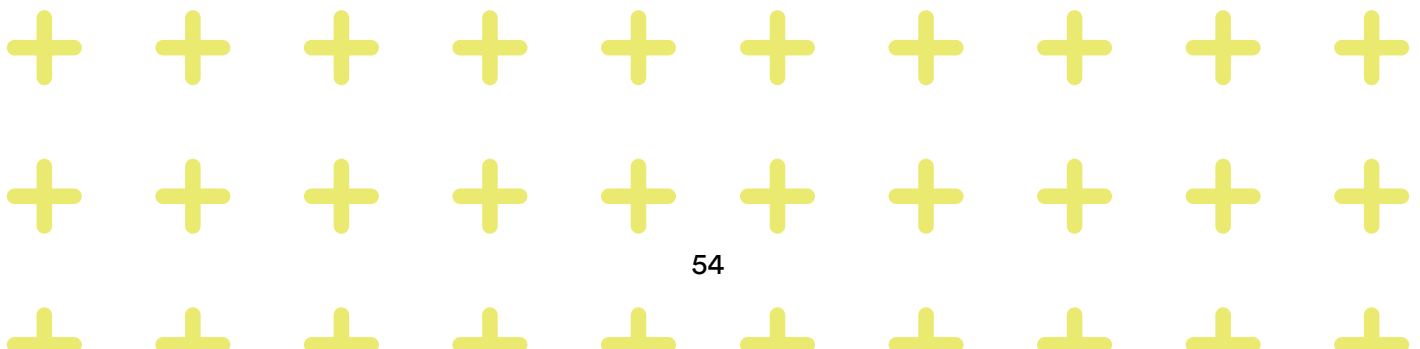
Conducting a full review of your current remote working practices and policies will be very helpful in identifying the areas that are working well and the areas that are proving challenging for your employees, the company or your customers – and therefore will need to be adjusted and changed in order to create a more viable and effective model for the future.

Here is a list of the areas your audit review should assess:

Audit category	Details
Company culture & values	Understand fully your current company culture and the relationships that exist across the business which will reflect your company's values
Leadership	The role of leadership, skills and capabilities, team effectiveness, challenges and gaps
Work performed	Productivity, flexibility, metrics and KPIs, standards and regulations
Communications	Company information channels, communication forums, meetings and structures in place
Staff engagement & well-being	Overall engagement and motivation of staff, well-being supports and structures, knowledge and insights
Knowledge and competencies	Expertise, skills and competencies, development opportunities and access to learning
HR practices and policies	Hiring process, onboarding and orientation, progression and development supports
Remote readiness	Overall strategy, developed and matured structures, know-how and adaptability, expectations and reality of what's in place and what is needed

Appendix 5 – List of items to consider when setting up a flexible working policy

- ✓ What types of flexible working can your company support – for example, remote working, job sharing, flexitime, compressed hours?
- ✓ What factors will your company need to consider when reviewing a flexible working request? For example:
 - Ability to meet customer demand
 - Ability to organise or redistribute work among existing staff
 - Ability or availability to recruit additional staff
 - Impact on quality
 - Impact on performance
 - Availability of work during periods the employee proposes to work
 - Cost factors
- ✓ What eligibility criteria does your company want to put in place – for example, length of service, job category?
- ✓ Who in the organisation will make the final decision?
- ✓ How do your employees apply for flexible working – do you provide an application form?
- ✓ When will employees receive a reply to their request – 2 weeks/1 month/6 weeks?
- ✓ How often can an employee apply for flexible working?
- ✓ What is your appeals process?





About Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland is the government organisation responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. We work in partnership with Irish enterprises to help them start, grow, innovate and win export sales in global markets. In this way, we support sustainable economic growth, regional development and secure employment.

About Voltege

Voltege Management Ltd is a leading Irish HR and Management Consultancy. Voltege's ethos is to effectively partner with and deliver support and advice to clients to meet the needs of their business. Voltege supports scaling start-ups, entrepreneurs, SMEs and undertakes larger organisation design and complex projects with major corporates.

Disclaimer

Enterprise Ireland has made efforts to ensure the information in this general guide is accurate at the time of publication. However, Enterprise Ireland will not be liable for actions taken on the basis of this guide and advise all clients and businesses to take professional advice in these areas.