

The Next Normal Workplace: Transitioning from Pandemic to New Workplace Best Practices



A Practical Guidebook

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating the evolution of work and creating opportunities for companies/organizations to retool their workforce policies and practices and redesign their product/service offerings to continue to succeed and thrive in the “Next Normal.” In this new environment, employers will need to make critical workplace and workforce decisions to determine what is best for the company/organization, clients and customers, partners, vendors and, most importantly, their employees.

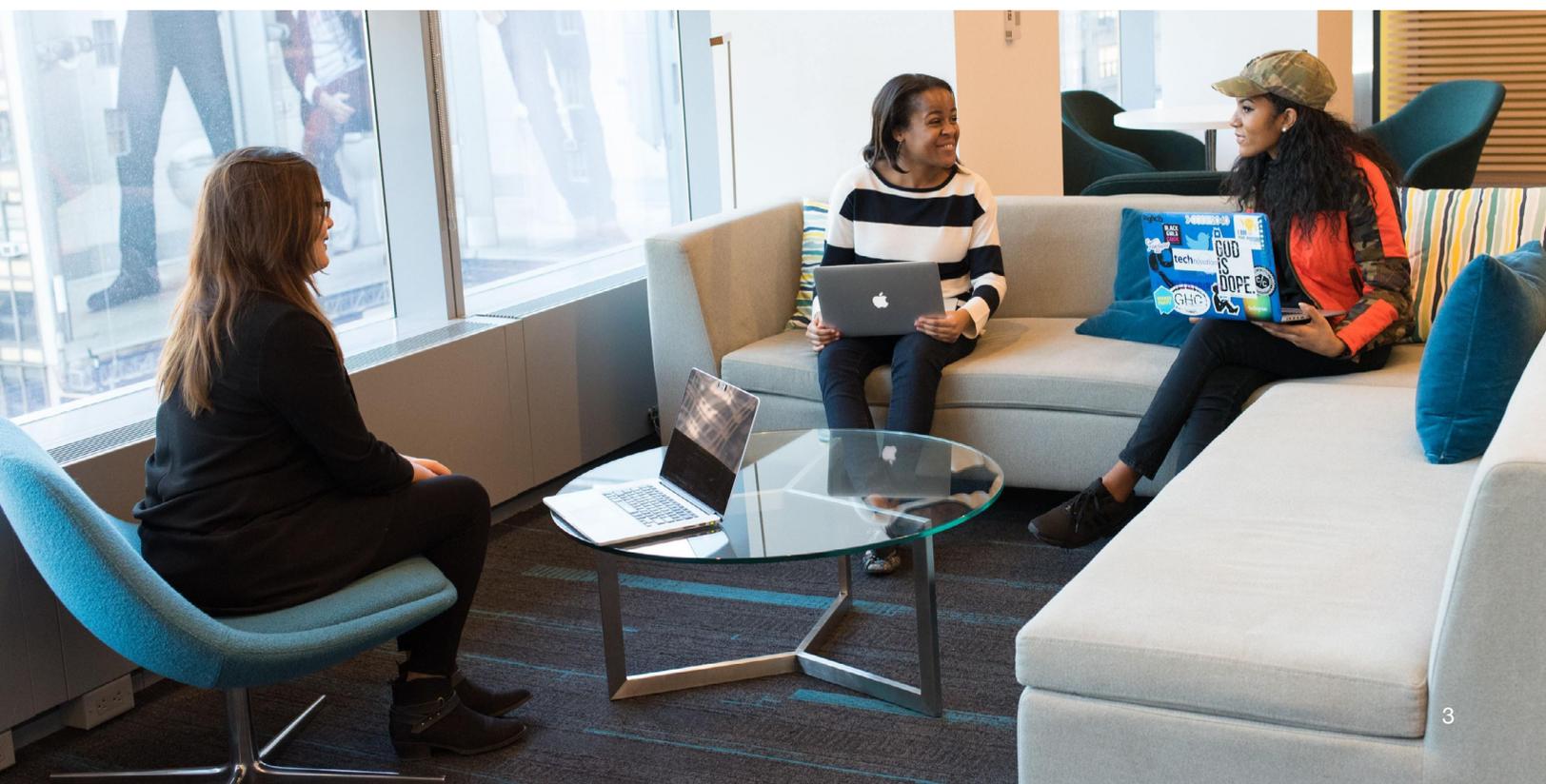
Companies/organizations must be aware of the challenges employees may have faced during the pandemic. People may have lost coworkers, family and/or friends. Individuals may be mourning, not only the loss of loved ones, but also a sense of normalcy. Several people may have endured financial difficulty during this period, while others may have wrestled with anxiety and their mental health.

The “The Next Normal Workplace: Transitioning from Pandemic to New Workplace Best Practices,” created by Enspira, features key employer considerations as employees begin to return to the office, including social distancing, travel, facilities and infrastructure, digital and technological capabilities, workforce resourcing and overall management. To ensure the safety and health of all employees, it is strongly recommended to continue referring to guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) and adjust as needed.

Please note: All references to HR throughout this document refers to the Human Resources (HR) team or whomever handles HR responsibilities within an company/organization.

General considerations when addressing returning to the office:

- Position as 100% voluntary: Each employee should consider if returning to the office would put them or a loved one at risk (i.e., if an employee lives with someone who is elderly or has an underlying health condition or if they, themselves do).
- Position as non-binding with no repercussions: employees can change their mind at any time and the employer must protect against peer pressure.
- Clearly outline which roles require working on-site and which can be done remotely.
- Require employees to review and sign company/organization policy stating their return to work is voluntary and they agree to abide by the required safety parameters.
- Employees and their household should be free of any flu-like symptoms for 14 days before returning to work. A normal temperature should be maintained prior to traveling to work and no recent travel to hotspots.
- Employees and their household should continue to follow social distancing recommendations as outlined by their home state and localities, as applicable.
- Provide information and relevant materials to employees about proper personal hygiene, social distancing and other measures they can take to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



Workplace

1. COVID-19 Testing

Refer to shifting guidance from the CDC, WHO and OSHA and adjust as needed.

a. If an employee is being tested for COVID-19:

- i. Employee to inform Manager and/or HR.
- ii. HR should stay in contact with employee.
- iii. HR request list of those employees in contact with over the previous 14 days.
- iv. HR to notify those employees who were in contact; send them home to quarantine until their test results are confirmed; work from home in the interim.
- v. DO NOT disclose the name of the employee.

b. If an employee's COVID-19 results are negative after experiencing symptoms:

- i. HR and/or Manager should notify those who were in close proximity and give them the option to return to work or remain in self-quarantine for balance of the 14-day period.
- ii. DO NOT disclose the name of the employee.
- iii. Sick employees stay off work until cleared by the doctor to return to work.

c. If an employee's COVID-19 results are positive:

- i. HR will work with affected employees to initiate appropriate leave / PTO / sick leave.
- ii. Infected person should stay home until cleared by doctor to return (minimum 14 days).
 1. Consider requesting employees to provide confirmation / certification from a doctor that they no longer pose a risk of transmission by being in the workplace such as discharge papers, doctors' notes, fitness for duty document. Legal counsel should advise on whom the doctors' notes should be provided to ensure Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) compliance.
- iii. HR and/or Manager should personally notify employees and/or clients/customers in close proximity, request them to stay self-quarantined for 14 days and encourage them to seek medical advice.
- iv. DO NOT disclose the name of the employee.
- v. Facilities to sanitize affected and nearby workstations. As recommended by the CDC, if a confirmed COVID-19-positive employee has been in a certain area of the workspace or a particular room, air out the area as much as possible to try to disperse and eliminate respiratory droplets for a period of 24 hours prior to commencing cleaning. This is, of course, dependent on the workspace structure, geography, layout and number of employees.
- vi. Facilities may engage a commercial cleaning service to deep-clean and disinfect site, including but not limited to: door handles/knobs, light switches, surfaces (e.g., desktops, counters, non-upholstered chair arms, etc.), sink handles, computer keyboards/mouse, phone handsets and restroom facilities.
- vii. Unless a large number of employees are impacted, the company/organization should send premises-wide communications regarding each instance an employee has a positive test for COVID-19.

d. Other Considerations

- i. **Presumptive Positive:** This means no confirmation of the virus, but healthcare professionals are instructing the patient to self-quarantine and the individual to be treated as if they have COVID-19. In this case, respond in the same way as if the patient has been diagnosed with COVID-19. For employees with underlying health conditions, which makes them high-risk, seriously consider their request for accommodation and engage in an interactive process if their request cannot be granted outright.

e. Vaccinations

- i. During a pandemic, employers can require vaccinations, per the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). An employee may be entitled to an exemption if the vaccine would interfere with a medical condition or violate that person's religious beliefs.

2. Facilities Considerations and Common Spaces

- a. **Consider making open work spaces at least 6 feet apart and encourage all employees to maintain social distancing of 6 feet apart.**
- b. **If there are any shared / flexible work spaces, encourage people to continue using the same workspace (e.g., same desk, chair, et al.) for the foreseeable future.**
- c. **Limit the number of people in the cafeteria, break rooms and other widely shared common areas. Include stanchions, tape markers and other ways to signal 6 ft spacing.**
- d. **Clean and disinfect high traffic areas several times per day (e.g., main entrances, elevators, stairwells, cafeteria, bathrooms, conference rooms, kitchenettes, break rooms, coffee stations, water fountains, surfaces, and other regularly-used equipment such as microwaves, water coolers, photocopiers, mail areas, etc.).**
- e. **Place signs up re: personal hygiene.**
 - i. Maintain 6 ft distance wherever possible.
 - ii. Avoid touching face or eyes.
 - iii. Wash hands often with soap for 20 seconds.
 - iv. Utilize anti-bacterial hand sanitizers.
 - v. Cover coughs and sneezes with elbow or tissues and promptly discard.
 - vi. Recommend no shaking hands and limiting overall person-to-person contact.
 - vii. Wipe down workspaces with cleaners / wipes often.
- f. **Consider kick-touch pedals / door stops so employees don't need to touch door handles.**
 - i. Automation and voice technology could also play a role in slowing the spread of viruses. Technology like Amazon Alexa for Business, for example, could become a new interface and remove the need for physically pushing a button or touching a surface in an office.
- g. **Consider the addition of copper fixtures (copper has recently been registered in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as the first solid antimicrobial material), antimicrobial textiles and fabrics that can more easily be cleaned.**
- h. **Some companies/organizations use UV lighting to disinfect offices at night or meeting rooms in between uses, a practice that's increasingly common in hospitals.**
 - i. If implemented, be sure to take all the necessary precautions when using.

- i. Consider assessing the configuration of every floor plan to look at distancing and safety.**
 - i. Commercial real estate services firms are testing new design concepts like “6 Feet Office” which offers unique foot traffic routing in the office to keep people the recommended 6 feet apart.

3. Personal Health

- a. Have disinfectant stations at high traffic areas (i.e, main entrances, elevators, cafeteria, etc.) - no touch dispensers are recommended, when possible.**
- b. Order masks - CDC recommends using masks as they would be effective in preventing the spread of the virus.**
 - i. If an employer requires masks this will trigger OSHA regulations and require a respiratory protection program, including policies and instruction on care, maintenance and proper storage of the mask.
 - ii. If masks are voluntary, the employer must provide certain literature that is a part of the OSHA regulatory guidelines on respiratory protection. Check OSHA & CDC guidelines regularly, consult with Legal Counsel.
- c. Provide employees with cleaning products or disposable wipes and encourage regular wipe-downs of their offices / workstations.**
- d. Employee temperature check considerations:**
 - i. Consult with Legal Counsel before implementing temperature checks.
 - ii. Per the EEOC, it is necessary to show a business necessity to avoid a direct threat of harm to conduct a temperature check.
 - iii. Consider a consistent process of how and when to conduct temperature checks. Temperature checks should be conducted on all individuals before they enter the premises, regardless of level or Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) status.
 - iv. If it is feasible for the temperature check to be conducted privately, employers should take those measures.
 - v. Tests should be conducted by someone adequately trained to perform the check consistently and safely.
 - 1. Some employers are hiring trained, 3rd party companies/organizations to conduct the temperature checks for them.
 - vi. Personal protective equipment must be provided to individuals conducting the checks.
 - vii. Choose what type of method: e.g., temperature scanners, temperature monitors (oral, ear, forehead) and ensure the method is adequate, accurate and consistent. Use the same method for all employees.
 - viii. Documentation from the temperature scan should be secured and kept separate from the general employee file. The information should be limited to the employee and should only be provided on a need-to-know basis specifically in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.
 - ix. Information should not be kept in a log book as it would not be possible to sequester an individual's medical data and maintain confidentiality.
 - x. Employers must have an objective cut-off point for elevated temperature. The policy can align with whatever the CDC guidelines are. All persons who exceed the cut-off generally should be excluded from the workplace regardless of their status. Consider all options: sending individual home, working remotely, paid sick leave, etc.
- e. Consider implementing a Health Screening Questionnaire in conjunction with temperature screening.**

4. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- a. **Provide every employee with the proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including but not limited to masks, gloves, gowns and reusable face shields.**
- b. **Align on what PPE will be required in the office space. PPE requirements can include:**
 - i. See section above about required or voluntary masks.
 - ii. Help remind everyone not to touch their face.
 - iii. Gloves required to be worn at all times to help protect others and help remind everyone not to touch their face.
 - iv. Hands must be washed before and after mask adjustments - new gloves to be worn after each hand washing.
- c. **Tips for managing PPE:**
 - i. Ensure adequate supply of PPE and hand sanitizer in all work and common areas for employee use (workspaces, entryways, restrooms, cafeteria, etc.).
 - ii. Ensure adequate supply (minimum 2 weeks supply) of PPE.
 - iii. Re-assess reorder points weekly to ensure a continuous supply of PPE.
 - iv. Ensure PPE is properly disposed of or sanitized after use.
 - v. Provide gloves for use in office space to avoid door handles and other frequently touched surfaces (consider making these gloves and lab gloves different colors to avoid confusion).
 - vi. N95 masks should be available for lab procedures in which a 6 foot distance cannot be maintained.
- d. **Provide training to employees on what PPE to wear in their specific area and proper usage of PPE.**

5. Cleaning

- a. **Deep cleaning to take place after normal hours, including disposal of any protective equipment (review any CDC guidelines).**
- b. **Cleaning products to have on hand (bleach and Lysol are effective at killing the virus on surfaces):**
 - i. Hand sanitizers.
 - ii. Disinfectant wipes.
 - iii. Face masks.
 - iv. Gloves.
 - v. Disinfectant spray.
 - vi. Lysol.

6. Food

- a. Consider contact-free food delivery.
- b. Avoid using common serving utensils in shared dishes.
- c. Continue using social distancing practices during meal time in shared spaces.
- d. For buffets, sneeze guards should be installed.

7. Visitor Policy

- a. Do not allow visitors and guests onsite; only contractors for essential work.
- b. Monitor to ensure only authorized personnel are accessing the facility.
- c. Require that all employees enter and exit from the main entrance or a single-entry point.

8. Travel and Transportation

- a. **The difference between a reasonable response and overreaction seems to change hourly. To help employers make responsible decisions, Enspira recommends the following:**
 - i. Frequently check travel advisories from the CDC and WHO.
 - ii. Update internal travel approval procedures to make sure Managers know where all employees are travelling.
 - iii. Communicate clearly with employees about travel decisions and listen to any concerns they might have.
 - iv. Be prepared to be flexible.
 - v. Employers are obligated under the Occupational Safety and Health Act to provide a workplace free of known safety and health hazards, and workers have a right to refuse work that they consider to be dangerous under certain circumstances. That could include travel to destinations that have been or continue to be at higher risk for COVID-19.
 - vi. Consider decentralizing in-person events, for example, replacing global kickoff events with multiple regional events, or replacing a large in-person event with multiple small group video conferencing sessions.
- b. **Transportation**
 - i. Consider enhancing transportation benefits for employees, like offering parking benefits.
 - ii. Discourage employees use of public transportation or Uber/Lyft.
 - iii. Encourage employees to discuss transportation alternatives with HR.

9. Meetings and Events

- a. Consider no in-person company/organization-wide large gatherings until early 2021; leverage virtual engagement where possible (e.g., new employee onboarding, summer internship training, town hall meetings).
- b. Engage non-essential visitors or non-employees virtually.

Phasing Employees' Return to the Office

1. Establish a COVID-19 Task Force

- a. Consider a multi-disciplinary task force to prepare and monitor the reopening of all physical workplaces. Members of a task force should include individuals from HR, legal, facilities, operations, and leadership.
- b. Identify a "Chair" who is an effective leader and has experience with project management and execution.
- c. Ensure the team is highly nimble so it can meet often and pivot as necessary.

2. Create a "Work From Home" Policy

- a. For those who communicate a discomfort with returning to the workplace, allow them the flexibility to work from home (WFH). Note: employees may / may not provide a reason.
- b. Consider adding flexible work arrangements to accommodate dependent care responsibilities (e.g., childcare and/or elder care). These arrangements can include ongoing WFH, abbreviated work hours, etc.
- c. Consider providing employees with the equipment needed to efficiently work from home (e.g., dual monitors, docking station, etc.).

3. Staggered Work Schedules

- a. Create options for staggered work schedules to help limit the amount of people in the office at one time. Staggering options can include:
 - i. AM / PM on-site shift.
 - ii. Specified days of week on-site and remote.
 - iii. On week / off week (i.e., one week on-site and one week remote).
- b. Tips for implementing and maintaining staggered work schedules:
 - i. Keep the rotations consistent with the same people in each rotation / shift.
 - ii. Ensure appropriate expertise in each shift to avoid overlap or gaps.
 - iii. Consider not overlapping shifts to eliminate large gatherings during the shift change.
 - iv. Pay particular attention to shift changes – offices should implement enhanced cleaning between shifts so personal contact between shifts is eliminated.



4. Create a “Social Distancing” policy

- a. **Consider max capacities for large office spaces and conference rooms.**
 - i. Workplace teams should customize COVID-19 capacity limits based on the size and layouts of each of their conference rooms.
 - 1. Consider requiring additional approvals for large meeting spaces and conference room usage.
 - 2. Consider requiring protective equipment (e.g., masks) when using conference rooms.
- b. **Where appropriate, use stanchions, floor markers or other tools to signal 6 ft social distancing.**
- c. **Limit seating in break rooms and cafeterias.**
- d. **Limit number of people on elevators.**
 - i. Recommend that people face the walls of the elevator rather than facing each other.
- e. **Utilize in-office videoconferencing for “all hands gatherings,” conferences and / or other large meetings.**

5. Determine Which Employees will be Prohibited from Returning to the Office

- a. **All such decisions should be made after careful consideration of any guidance from the CDC and local health officials.**
- b. **Prohibited employees should include:**
 - i. Those who are currently experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or who have tested positive.
 - ii. Those whose household members are currently experiencing COVID-19 systems or who have tested positive.
 - iii. Those who are still under in-home isolation due to actual or potential exposure due to COVID-19.

6. Requirements to Return to Work

- a. **Determine requirements for being able to return to the office.**
 - i. Align with and refer to ongoing guidance from CDC.
 - ii. At least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery defined no fever without the use of fever-reducing medications and improvement in respiratory symptoms (e.g., cough, shortness of breath); and, at least 10 days have passed since symptoms first appeared.
 - iii. Employers may choose to pursue temperature or symptoms checks (consult with legal counsel). [See Personal Health Section for more details.](#)



7. Handling Employee Safety Concerns

- a. **As employees are asked to return to the physical worksite, it's likely that some may raise concerns for their safety and ask for a longer or permanent remote working arrangement.**
- b. **When considering such requests, always ensure the decision is compliant with local, state and federal laws and regulations. Examples of laws and regulations to be mindful of include the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the OSHA, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), etc.**
- c. **Consider how to handle higher-risk employees.**
 - i. The CDC has identified a list of individuals who may be at higher risk and local health officials may have additional guidelines or restrictions for such employees returning to work.
 - ii. Be thoughtful about accommodating any concerns from such employees and prioritize their health and well-being, while also being compliant with local, state and federal laws and regulations.
- d. **Consider how to handle employees with caretaking obligations.**
 - i. It is possible that employees may have family members whose schools or care center facilities have not yet reopened.
 - ii. Be thoughtful about accommodating any concerns from such employees and prioritize their well-being, while also being compliant with local, state and federal laws and regulations.

8. Create a Plan to Return Employees to the Office

- a. **The COVID-19 Task Force should align on possible office return date options (e.g., June 1, July 1, August 3, etc.).**
- b. **Use a survey tool to assess the employee sentiment regarding returning to the office. Below are examples of multiple choice questions to include:**
 - i. I would feel comfortable returning to the office in the next:
 - 1. 0-1 months.
 - 2. 2-3 months.
 - 3. 3-4 months.
 - 4. I am not sure when I would feel comfortable returning to the office.
 - ii. Please select all that apply:
 - 1. I am a high-risk individual.
 - 2. I am not a high-risk individual.
 - 3. A household member(s) is a high-risk individual.
 - 4. No household members are high-risk individuals.
 - 5. I prefer to not disclose this information.
 - iii. I am interested in the below schedule when returning to the office (select all that apply):
 - 1. Regular schedule.
 - 2. Staggered AM / PM schedule (i.e., Mornings in-office, afternoons remote).
 - 3. Staggered weekday schedule (i.e., one day in-office, one day remote).
 - 4. Staggered on week/off week schedule (i.e., one week in office, one week remote).

- c. **Assess the workforce and divide employees into ~4 phasing groups based on essential workers, vulnerability and sentiment re: returning to the office.**
 - i. Essential workers: Can be defined as individuals who cannot work remotely due to the nature of their role and critical responsibilities.
 - ii. Vulnerability: Leverage any current HR data re: age and health and responses to the employee survey.
 - iii. Sentiment: Leverage responses to the employee survey.
- d. **The 4 phasing groups can be defined as follows:**
 - i. Phase 1 Employees: Essential workers only.
 - ii. Phase 2 Employees: Remaining essential workers, employees who are not vulnerable, and employees who identify as comfortable returning to the office within the given time period.
 - iii. Phase 3 Employees: Employees who are least vulnerable and remaining employees who identify as comfortable returning to the office within the given time period.
 - iv. Phase 4 Employees: Remaining employees returning to the office.
- e. **Create a new spaced-out seating plan. While using every other desk may cut office capacity in half or more, you can increase seating capacity while maintaining a safe physical distance by leveraging conference rooms, focus rooms, learning labs, break out spaces, etc., as dedicated seating areas.**

9. Schedule Employees to Return to Office

- a. **Communicate return to office plan to employees.**
- b. **Implement Phase 1 return, which should include:**
 - i. Essential workers only (continue with majority of staff WFH).
 - ii. Abbreviated office hours.
 - iii. No team meetings / gatherings.
 - iv. Restricted business travel.
 - v. Only opening select floors or sections of the office building.
 - vi. New spaced-out seating plan.
- c. **Implement Phase 2 return (3-4 weeks after launch of Phase 1), which should include:**
 - i. Remaining essential workers, employees who are not vulnerable, and employees who identify as comfortable returning to the office within the given time period (continue with remaining staff WFH).
 - ii. Abbreviated office hours.
 - iii. Staggered work schedules (e.g., AM/PM, specified days of the week, on week/off weeks, etc.).
 - iv. No team meetings / gatherings.
 - v. Restricted business travel.
 - vi. Only opening select floors or sections of the office building.
 - vii. Continued spaced-out seating plan.

d. Implement Phase 3 return (3-4 weeks after launch of Phase 2), which should include:

- i. Employees who are least vulnerable and remaining employees who identify as comfortable returning to the office within the given time period (continue with remaining staff WFH).
- ii. Abbreviated office hours.
- iii. Staggered work schedules (e.g., AM / PM, specified days of the week, on week / off weeks, etc.).
- iv. Limited team meetings / gatherings.
- v. Restricted non-essential business travel; limit essential business travel.
- vi. Open remaining floors or sections of the office building.
- vii. Continued spaced-out seating plan.

e. Implement Phase 4 return (3-4 weeks after launch of Phase 3), which should include:

- i. Remaining employees returning to the office.
- ii. Regular office hours.
- iii. Staggered work schedules (e.g., AM / PM, specified days of the week, on week / off weeks, etc.) as desired.
- iv. Limited team meetings / gatherings.
- v. Restricted non-essential business travel; limit essential business travel.
- vi. Continued spaced-out seating plan.

Technology & Digital Capabilities

1. Technology Solutions to Work Remotely and in the Office

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating the need for companies/organizations to retool and strengthen their digital capabilities using new technologies to transform their processes, reduce silos, expand their product/service offerings, and ultimately enhance the customer experience. Once companies/organizations begin their digital transformation, it's never truly over. A true digital transformation is a state of mind for a company/organization, enabling them to continually evolve and adopt new digital solutions internally and externally. One of the first goals of digital transformation is to break down internal silos to create a seamless internal experience. When a company/organization works well internally, it greatly affects the external customer experience. Every area of the company/organization has a role to play in digital transformation, and they each impact the customer in unique ways. Lasting digital transformations are customer-focused with an eye towards the future. When done right, digital capability or transformation allows companies/organizations to provide unprecedented value to customers.

- a. **Ensure employees have the tools needed to continue work remotely or to interact with other employees who are in office / remote (e.g., laptop, dual monitors, VPN, access to shared drives).**
- b. **Remain flexible with those who remain WFH vs. in-office regarding impromptu team meetings; ensure information exchange is still occurring by scheduling regular virtual 'check-ins'.**
- c. **Acquire / enhance in-office video conferencing capabilities where necessary (e.g., in conference rooms, webcam-enabled laptops and monitors, wireless / bluetooth headsets).**

2. Employee Learning and Development

Five best-practice actions outlined below, ranging from the immediate and tactical to the strategic, can help maintain the momentum and benefits of more formal workplace-learning programs and help build a new foundation for effective virtual learning.

a. Learning Response Team

- i. Build a cross-functional team to create a comprehensive picture of learning offerings and how to adapt them to the new environment.
- ii. Define clear decision points and be transparent about the criteria for canceling or deferring a program.
- iii. Set priorities for what will be necessary to adapt to a virtual or digital-only format, then prioritize what to build.
- iv. Consider giving priority to must-have programs like employee onboarding, then roll-out topical programs such as remote-working skills, remote management skills, etc.

b. Protect employees participating in in-person programs

- i. Following guidance from the CDC & WHO, and for any in-person programs, communicate in advance the precautions you will take such as social distancing, cleaning, etc.
- ii. For those participating remotely, ensure they have and are familiar with virtual collaboration tools.

c. Adapt in-person learning delivery

- i. If travel restrictions mean in-person facilitation teams are unavailable, consider using local employees or alumni of previous programs. Prepare them by using a train-the-trainer approach.
- ii. Recognize there are limits to what can be addressed virtually. To address the shortfall, consider what you can do before, during and after the session to maximize its benefit.

d. Promote and enhance digital learning

- i. Consider promoting existing digitally enabled portfolios of learning offerings as a way to help colleagues during challenging times. Targeted communication that reminds employees that learning doesn't stop when travel is curtailed, for example, may boost attention to available digital offerings.
- ii. When possible, include social-learning components, including discussion boards or participant journeys that include cohorts of people taking programs together. Consider small group projects to drive engagement, connectivity and application.
- iii. Have senior leaders model desired behaviors through active participation in digital courses.

e. Explore alternative digital learning strategies

- i. Consider a more fundamental rethinking of the learning experience to enable collaborative, interactive social-learning experiences for groups of learners.
 1. Digital learning providers recognize that COVID-19 is a catalyst for this transition and are looking to help their corporate customers accelerate their transformation. Some are even offering reduced or complimentary services to help encourage new customers to accelerate such a transition.

3. Client-Facing Digital Capabilities

With many people quarantined in their homes and/or continue to work from home after the pandemic, digital experiences matter more than ever. Leading companies/organizations will identify the ones that matter most and improve upon them to build new and stronger customer relationships. In other words: Follow your customers during the pandemic, then lead them out of it.

- a. If you were providing a service in-person, consider how you could do this virtually. For many months after the pandemic, clients may prefer not to engage with your business in-person.**
 - i. How could you expand your reach or adapt your service?
 - ii. What other skills or expertise do you have that could be offered in an online setting?

- b. Virtual Client/Customer Outreach**
 - i. Consider a virtual location (ie: Zoom, Skype, etc) for customers to meet with you. Include the ability to book virtual appointments with you online.
 - ii. Host an online event or webinar - Even if you weren't planning an in-person event, hosting an online webinar or interactive workshop can prove to be extremely helpful and beneficial for your audience. Note that many webinars offer a discounted product at the end and typically convert quite well.

- c. Marketing Considerations**
 - i. Website - Because recent buying behaviors have been forced to change, the way people are searching for things online may also have changed. Consider the following:
 - 1. Ensure you're staying up to speed on the most highly searched keywords relevant to your product or service, and brainstorm ways that you can tweak your website content to align.
 - 2. Do you have easy to navigate, intuitive pages and easy-to-find information?
 - 3. Other things to consider:
 - a. Test your contact page forms to ensure your funnel works and you are receiving requests for information.
 - b. Ensure there is sufficient content on all the pages to provide the necessary information and convince the user.
 - c. Double-check responsiveness and friendliness of the site on mobile.
 - d. Test, test, test. If you were a user, where would you click? What information would you need?
 - e. Consider writing additional content, supplementing the "About Us" page or even expanding the portfolio collection of product or service photographs.

- d. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**
 - i. Is your SEO properly set up for your website and e-commerce aspects?
 - ii. Consider going through your Google Search Console and Google Analytics to see what customers search for when they find your website and how your website is performing.
 - 1. Keep in mind that not all numbers will be 100% accurate. If your employees are working remotely and accessing your site, your analytics data may be skewed. Request your employees to share their home IP addresses and use those to set up a filter in Google Analytics to avoid counting their visits as sessions to the website for more accurate reporting.

e. Social Media

- i. As you begin creating new content or decide to host an online event or webinar to engage with your audience, sharing this material on your social media platforms can have a huge effect on your digital reach.
- ii. People are spending a lot more time on social media now, and it's the perfect time to put your information in front of them. In regards to paid social ads, you can get higher reach on your sponsored posts than usual since more people are on their devices. Fewer people are advertising now so you can get a great reach at a lower cost too.
- iii. Not sure what to post since you are stuck at home? Consider featuring personal stories or even highlighting the different team members of your business to create personable content. The founder or CEO of the company/organization can post as well, welcoming discussions of challenges and building a community. Now is the time to educate and help solve problems.

Communication Plan

1. Communications Methods

Communication is evolving as employee needs and pandemic information do. Frequency is still key and empathy matters. Consider having more conversations and meetings with people managers, checking in on employees with pulse surveys and using the results to craft messaging and policies.

- a. **Weekly all-hands calls and videoconferences.**
- b. **Employee portals for updates, information and resources.**
- c. **Tools and guides for effectively working remotely on networks such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Slack, Skype for Business, Yammer, Workday and company/organization-only Facebook pages.**
- d. **Tools, resources and portals specific to parents and/or caregivers.**
- e. **Videos explaining company/organization benefits, unemployment and government assistance.**
- f. **Emergency communication system.**

2. Best Practices for Communicating During and After a Crisis

- a. **Begin all communication, whether written or verbal, with a statement of values: Don't dive directly into the facts. Create an emotional connection.**
- b. **Show you care. Calibrate communication with empathy.**
- c. **Be direct, no euphemisms: it can be confusing and causes unnecessary stress.**
- d. **Tell the truth, the whole truth: Approach your stakeholders as if they are in this for the long term.**
- e. **Address all relevant dimensions of the crisis: a narrow lens is inadequate.**
- f. **Remember that expectations are dynamic. Calibrate current expectations.**
- g. **Provide consistent communication through multiple levels and channels.**
- h. **Align on values: provide detail appropriate to each level and circumstance.**
- i. **Convey a positive yet realistic attitude; convey urgency short of provoking panic.**
- j. **Express emotion, vulnerability and humility. Effective leaders do.**

3. Other Helpful Communication Tips

- a. **Communicate early and often at the company/organization-wide level.**
- b. **Provide Managers with consistent talking points to communicate with their teams.**
- c. **Provide company/organization wide communications about overall phased approach to reopening business, also update prior to the launch / completion of each phase.**
- d. **Provide any key company/organization news via intranet and/or via company/organization-wide emails that is related to COVID-19 and is relevant to employee base.**
- e. **Consider highlighting the positive aspects the company/organization is doing (e.g., charitable donations, volunteering, ongoing flexible working arrangements, wellness focus, etc.).**
- f. **Consider hosting informal "coffee chats" where employees have an opportunity to both hear and share tips, advice, stories and resources to continue navigating through and post pandemic.**

Culture Shift

1. Compensation Implications

Performance Management Process

The purpose of performance management is to follow a process that contributes to the effective management of individuals and teams, in order to achieve their goals and success. Effective performance management should create alignment and a shared understanding of what has to be achieved and what individuals or teams have to do, learn and develop to be successful.

For the majority of companies/organizations, performance evaluations are the key measurement tool for performance management and they heavily rely on set goals and objectives. However, during a pandemic, goals and company/organizational priorities are likely to change.

- a. **When deciding what to do during a time of crisis, answering these two simple questions can help guide you while you decide whether you will continue your performance evaluations, or abbreviate your approach for the time being:**
 - i. Is your performance review process fairly established (i.e., have you conducted at least two cycles)?
 - ii. Is a large part of your employee population still working?
If you answered “yes” to the both questions, in terms of workforce continuity, your company/organization is running close to business as usual. You might be able to schedule your performance evaluations as planned.
If you answered “no” to either of the questions, you may want to consider an abbreviated approach to evaluations that focuses on iterative goal setting throughout the crisis, with a strong concentration on continuous, ongoing feedback.
- b. **During a crisis, it’s often necessary to adjust company/organizational, team, and individual goals, for both workforce and market-related reasons. Managers and employees can set adjusted individual goals in a collaborative fashion, then agree on what has to be accomplished while considering what’s realistic for an employee to achieve.**
- c. **One final crucial consideration when deciding to take a pause on employee evaluations is to ensure that employees still have a framework in which they can provide each other feedback and continue to learn and grow during the crisis period.**

Performance-related Bonuses

Many company/organizations pay out bonuses to further incentivize high performance and tie these to individual and/or company/organization performance. During a pandemic, bonuses can be a lever to pull, either to support your employees by giving everyone a bonus, or to save and reallocate funds for other critical priorities by canceling / postponing incentive payouts. Companies/organizations should consider the implications of pursuing either or similar options.

- a. **Paying bonuses at target.**
 - i. If financially able, proceed with paying employee bonuses according to their target bonus.
- b. **Giving everyone the same rating and the same bonus.**
 1. While the desire to take this approach is understandable, we believe it could have a negative impact on employee motivation and performance.

- i. Not giving out any bonuses.
 1. While we can understand the desire to take this approach, this can have a negative impact on employee motivation and performance.
 2. Research conducted on companies/organizations that previously had to respond to a crisis – specifically, the 2008 recession – found that cutting back on bonuses tied to both company/organization and individual employee performance had negative effects on both effectiveness and employee commitment during the crisis.
 3. In order to maintain employee effectiveness, it may be critical to honor a commitment to bonuses if they are a normal and expected part of your compensation system.
 4. If the option of giving out bonuses is not financially viable, it is crucial to be transparent in communicating why that decision was made and what employees can expect in the future.

** If you are considering providing financial support, such as an Employee Relief Fund, to employees during times of uncertainty, we recommend clearly communicating that any monetary aid is not tied to performance or considered a bonus.*

Suggested language “We are providing extra compensation, separate from the performance-related bonus, to support you and your family during this unprecedented time.”

2. Community Outreach

- a. Consider creating a philanthropic award for employees going above and beyond in their community during the crisis.
- b. Find creative ways to reward external “heroes” in the community who are fighting or fought for the good of others.

3. Caregiving Benefits

With a growing number of employees taking care of both their children and aging parents, employers are increasingly making caregiving benefits one of their top priorities. Experts say embracing programs and benefits such as paid caregiving leave can help make an impact for caregiving employees. Without support, those employees often experience absenteeism and presenteeism, reduced employee engagement and productivity and higher healthcare costs—all of which take a toll on employers.

- a. As the COVID-19 pandemic shines a light on caregiving responsibilities, the number of employers who focus on support and add and / or improve such benefits may grow.
 - i. Consider increasing support for caregiving employees by providing more back-up help resources, flexible working hours and access to expert resources.
 - ii. Some companies/organizations are also providing relief funds to help with expenses.



4. Leadership

A vision for work of the future

The gravity of the pandemic cannot be overestimated. The role of company/organizational leaders to provide direction and vision in moments of calm and crisis are both critical, and COVID-19 readily highlighted areas of opportunity and lack of leader preparedness across industries.

- a. **Leaders who manage the day-to-day and lead with vision will emerge from the crisis with companies/ organizations that are stronger and more resilient than they were before. Considerations include:**
 - i. Spend time envisioning the future. Ideally, leaders should dedicate 10 to 20 percent of time on a weekly basis over the next few months to exploring and envisioning where they want the company/organization to be when the crisis passes. This aspiration, of course, should be consistent with the company/organization's longer-term vision.
 - ii. Develop a strategy to walk back your envisioned future to today. Working backwards, lay out a path from long-term aspirations to the mid-term (the post-crisis focal point), and from there to today. Reverse-engineer a series of benchmarks and milestones at regular intervals along the way. The reason to start in the future and "walk" backwards is that (1) it allows for a "clean-sheet" of what could become without being overly constrained by the way things are today; (2) it forces leaders to think concretely and in terms of dollars and cents, which (3) helps decide which investments should be given priority.
 - iii. Be prepared to learn and pivot. Given the rapidly changing environment that we are working in, make sure to measure, monitor, and formally review progress. Initially, leaders will be working off assumptions. As those assumptions are tested in the real world, they will have more data and experience to prove or disprove them. Based on what is learned, an adjustment to both vision and strategy may be necessary.
 - iv. Rally the team around your vision. Your people and stakeholders will have to make sacrifices, so you want them to believe in your view of the better future that they can achieve. While a business can succeed without having an explicit mission, there is a close association between missions and margins.
 - v. Consider these suggested LinkedIn Learning courses to bolster leader's skills to succeed in this Next Normal:
 1. **Building Resilience as a Leader**
 2. **Advice for Leaders During Crisis**

5. Diversity and Inclusion

Leaders are under extraordinary pressure right now. They are expected to make decisions quickly with incomplete and rapidly evolving information. And unfortunately, being in crisis mode can cause even the most intentional and well-meaning leaders to fall into patterns of bias and exclusion. Research shows that when we're stressed, we often default to heuristics and gut instincts, rather than making deliberate and goal-oriented decisions. And yet, leaders must prioritize inclusion right now, more than ever.

Companies/organizations are much more likely to be innovative in the face of this crisis if they seek input from a diverse group of employees who approach problems from a variety of perspectives.

When the world gets to the other side of this pandemic, the goal should be to learn to lead inclusively and with empathy, not only in crisis but also in calm.

- a. **Below are specific tactics leaders can take to prioritize inclusive behaviors in the workplace during this crisis and beyond:**
 - i. Ensure all employees have equal access to technology for remote work.
 - ii. Make virtual meetings equitable by turning on closed captioning, sending documents and collecting input in advance.
 - iii. Begin meetings with acknowledging everyone in the room, not just those with high status or privilege.
 - iv. Understand how gender bias may show up.
 - v. Check in with employees who may be disproportionately impacted by this crisis (e.g., death in the family, known health issues).
 - vi. Show compassion.
- b. **There is a possibility that people may use terms such as “Chinese virus” in the workplace or terms that may be perceived as targeted against specific racial backgrounds or national origins.**
 - i. Be vigilant to ensure there is no discrimination, harassment or retaliation and provide immediate feedback if these types of terms are used or observed.
- c. **Consider this suggested LinkedIn Learning course to bolster leader’s skills amidst this next normal:**
 - i. [Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging](#)

6. Health and Well-Being

Current circumstances could be extremely challenging for employees, keeping an eye on the physical and emotional well-being of the employee population is critical.

- a. **Managers play a key role in being diligent and aware of employee concerns. Managers should consider these guidelines:**
 - i. Be supportive and empathetic to your teams.
 - 1. Some employees will be eager to share, while others are more private. Be respectful of individual differences.
 - ii. Do not share any health or personal information that was shared with you during one-on-one conversations with peers or others on your team.
 - 1. If you have any concerns, please reach out to HR.
 - iii. If available, encourage employees to use the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
 - iv. If your employee is sick but insists on working (virtually or otherwise), make sure the underlying reasons are clear.
 - v. Often employees are driven by fear of retaliation or using up sick days; consider allowing additional recovery time for any COVID-19-related sickness.
 - vi. Work with HR to determine if short-term disability is a viable resource employees can leverage.
 - vii. Often HR will be there to assist, but Managers should typically be the first line of defense and closely understand the needs of their employees.
 - viii. If available, recommend telehealth resources.
 - 1. Most telehealth benefits include access to care and connection with board-certified doctors and pediatricians via video or phone 24/7 / 365 days a year.

- b. Work-life integration has become much more difficult during these unprecedented times. Some employees may be hesitant to take days off or disconnect because they feel a requirement to be readily available since they are “just at home.”**
- i. Understand the individual situations of your employees and what schedule works for them. Encourage them to be vocal about what they need.
 - ii. Agree on set hours. Hours may vary from employee to employee.
 1. Some employees will work “standard” hours and others will need to flex between kid’s schooling, caring for elders, etc.
 2. Leaders and Managers may get to emails late at night, and it is critically important employees understand that unless it is an emergency, it is not an expectation to respond.
 3. Make sure Managers understand and support the working hours needed by employees.
 - iii. Employees should take time for lunch.
 - iv. Please allow and encourage employees to disconnect, if they are sick, on vacation, or if it’s beyond their agreed-upon work hours.
 1. Sometimes it may need to be stated directly: “Please disconnect and enjoy your time with the family. If I need anything urgently that can’t wait, I will call you.”
 2. If that is not possible, be open about expectations: “I want you to have an opportunity to disconnect, but would appreciate it if you can check your emails around noon to see if there is anything urgent that needs immediate attention and I will be there to help you.”
 - v. Vacations and days off are allowed and encouraged.
 1. Consider extending or implementing vacation day carryover policy from 2020 into 2021.
- c. Dr. Russ Harris, author of [The Happiness Trap](#), created a practical guide on how to think about and deal with the COVID-19 crisis, called [FACE COVID-19, step-by-step](#).**
- i. **FACE COVID-19** is a set of practical steps for responding effectively to the crisis, using the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT).
 - ii. Here’s a quick summary of the key steps:
 1. **F** = Focus on what’s in your control
 2. **A** = Acknowledge your thoughts & feelings
 3. **C** = Come back into your body
 4. **E** = Engage in what you’re doing
 5. **C** = Committed action
 6. **O** = Opening up
 7. **V** = Values
 8. **I** = Identify resources
 9. **D** = Disinfect & distance
 - iii. View the [FACE COVID-19](#) video for more detail.

Workforce

1. Considerations for Hiring and Staffing Needs

Over 30 million Americans have filed jobless claims in the wake of the pandemic, impacting the financial well-being of individuals and their families. Many employers across industries, geographies, size and scope have made difficult decisions to decrease employee pay, to furlough or layoff workers in the wake of the crisis as it has created significant financial pressures on businesses.

Other companies/organizations, however, have witnessed a surge in consumer demand and top-line growth, increasing their hiring needs. In both instances, HR and business leaders have, or will need to, consider what their ongoing talent situation will look like as current employees, consumers, customers, clients, vendors and job seekers are able to enter re-opened spaces and workplaces.

- a. **Where hiring needs may have increased beyond the capacity of in-house recruiters, consider engaging with an external recruiting firm to augment staff.**
- b. **Where hiring is “business as usual” across staff and executive positions:**
 - i. Conduct virtual interviews with candidates / interview teams.
 - ii. Ensure the interview and overall recruiting process is consistent across candidates, maintaining the integrity and procedural fairness of the process.
 - iii. Hold virtual onboarding for new hires, including virtual appearances by executives and leaders, deep dive videos about company/organization history and culture, virtual happy hour as well as other best practices previously included in your new hire orientations.
 - iv. Communicate often with candidates and new hires, providing key updates to their status in a timely manner.
 - v. Share guidance and policies with new hires for how the company/organization will be preparing for employees’ return to offices.
- c. **If the company/organization has furloughed employees, consider the following as you re-engage the workforce:**
 - i. Flexibility and creativity in allocating workforce across contingent workers, part-time vs. full-time and exempt vs. non-exempt employees as business needs continue to evolve.
 - ii. Phased re-entry, aligned with consumer demand, social distancing safety, internal change management capacity or other key financial indicators.
 - iii. Internal job share programs across teams or functions to create additional job opportunities.
 - iv. External job share programs with partner companies/organizations (e.g., vendors, clients) to create additional job opportunities and/or leverage critical capabilities amid evolving demand.
 - v. Retain and redeploy top talent in critical positions.
 - vi. Offer early retirement options for select roles.
 - vii. Be comfortable taking risks; some talent may work out in the short term vs. long term, or vice versa.
- d. **If the company/organization underwent layoffs, consider the following for future talent needs and capability building:**
 - i. Evaluate how consumer demand during and post COVID-19 may have shifted company/organization outlook and priorities; reassess roles against outlook before rehiring for positions.
 - ii. Consider where might you further downsize or maximize efficiencies given how the company/organization operated and performed during the height of the pandemic.
 - iii. Consider where might you increase hiring in the company/organization given how the company/organization operated and performed during the height of the pandemic.

e. Concerns & considerations for executive and leadership positions

- i. Consider temporarily halting difficult executive searches until the current environment settles; difficulties may include financial implications, lack of strong candidates, significant change management, board and other stakeholder considerations, etc.
- ii. For vacant leadership roles, consider dividing job responsibilities across other existing senior leaders.
- iii. Seek opportunities to promote from within the company/organization (on an interim or permanent basis).
- iv. Consider contracting out for roles.
- v. Postpone planned layoffs or request planned retirements be placed on hold for any critical positions to maintain business continuity.
- vi. Begin preparing or revisit succession plans across senior management; consider creating succession plans for other non-executive, but critical roles in the company/organization.
- vii. Create interim succession plans and considerations — identify who can be responsible for urgent decisions should a role without a successor become vacant in the near-term.

f. Summer Internships

Summer internship programs can continue to provide invaluable experiences and return for both students and employers. Employers who are able to build a meaningful internship program can help raise their employer branding and create a pipeline for talent as students evaluate future employers. Summer internships also provide opportunities for manager development and can increase employee engagement and retention as they invest in developing early career talent.

- i. Virtual Summer Internships.
 1. Consider moving forward with summer internships, shifting to virtual engagement, where appropriate.
 2. Create best practices to share with Intern Managers to prepare them to be effective in their role, while also supporting their intern(s) to have an enjoyable and rewarding experience (e.g., holding 1:1 weekly conversations, providing actionable feedback, setting up virtual meet & greets with key stakeholders to encourage networking).
 3. Ensure the proper infrastructure is in place to accommodate students and managers (e.g., onboarding guidelines, technology capabilities such as laptop, access to drives and company/organization platforms).
 4. Create engaging onboarding and social experiences, utilizing video conferencing, pre-recorded videos on key topics like culture & values, inviting speakers and panels across functions to share stories or provide deep dives about their role, conducting virtual happy hours or networking sessions etc.
- ii. In-person Summer Internships.
 1. If your company/organization elects to hold in-person internships, intern guidelines can mirror guidance that is provided to all employees returning to offices.
 2. Consider creating as much continuity as possible for the intern (e.g., pairing interns with Managers who are also in the office).



2. Additional Considerations

Consider your company/organization's response to COVID-19 and how that applies to:

- a. **The optimal number of “non-essential” employees in the workforce.**
- b. **A new definition of “business-critical” roles and functions.**
- c. **Employee’s skills and adaptability to reskilling.**
 - i. Can include cross-training within the team to mitigate work standstill or falling behind on deadlines.
- d. **IT department expansions**
 - i. Can include having a team who helps distribute training on new technologies being used as companies/organizations strive for more effective and efficient technology.
 - ii. Increasing the security team and vetting software / applications employees may want to download (and maintaining a list of “safe” downloads) can help mitigate security concerns as employees seek new software to make remote working more efficient.
- e. **Changing to full- or part-time remote work**
 - i. Consider offering a part-time remote schedule for non-essential staff.
- f. **Carrying some cost-saving measures forward to remain more efficient in the future**
 - i. Consider using this “virtual” time to participate in more virtual career fairs and refine your process—they tend to be more cost effective and can have a wider talent pool than traditional in-person career fairs.
- g. **Decreasing travel in the near future, especially for internal meetings.**
- h. **Expanding new business functions, such as Learning and Development (L&D), that have arisen out of need**
 - i. Consider engaging L&D when building out team training sessions as job-sharing and cross-training continues to expand for critical job functions.
 - ii. Creating training groups to develop informal training videos / SOPs can help alleviate the pressure on L&D to produce all training materials.
- i. **Bolstering manager capability to manage virtually and staying engaged / connected with direct reports.**
- j. **Making new employee morale and engagement programs -- team-building, well-being programs, informal meetings and social networking – permanent.**
 - i. Engagement programs / team-building can include:
 1. Incorporating “Kahoot” or other trivia question games at team meetings (i.e., this can be used as an icebreaker for new employees to engage with the team or for a team to learn broadly about a topic discussed at the meeting).
 2. Creating a “Steps challenge” to encourage employees to connect each day as the contest is underway.
 3. Virtual team lunches / coffee breaks / happy hours can be a great way to connect on a personal level.

Additional Resources

- World Health Organization
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration
- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Guidance on COVID-19
- Coronavirus Tips: Frequently Asked Questions and Advice

Enspira is Here to Help

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