

TOPIC: How should employers prepare for the ‘Return to Work’?

STATE OF PLAY: WHAT’S THE LATEST

[As more states ease restrictions on daily life](#), many businesses face questions of when and how to return to work. While the pandemic lasts, restarting a business also poses health risks to employees and customers. During this period of ongoing turbulence, leaders in the private sector will show resiliency and adaptability.

THE BIG PICTURE: WHY IT MATTERS, WHAT MIGHT BE NEXT?

The post-pandemic world may actually offer opportunity; companies that invest in their employees and proactively adapt to new societal standards will have a competitive advantage after the downturn. Companies will need to be receptive to feedback and to empower leaders to deal with issues locally and quickly in order to earn employee trust. Companies must make concentrated efforts to work with employees as they return.

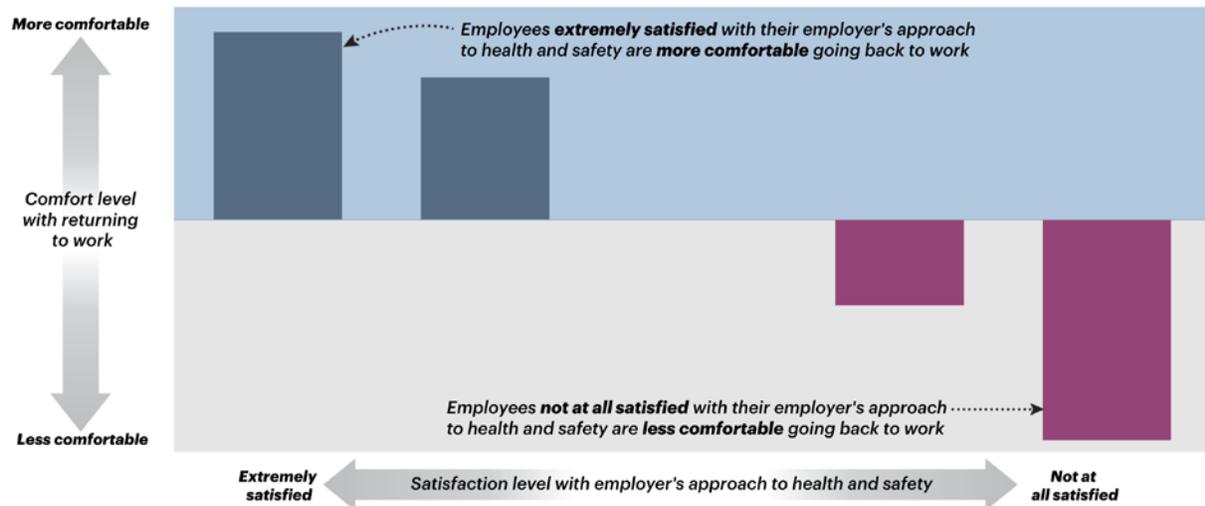
Below is one framework employers can use as they consider how best to return to work: advance, retreat, adapt, and repeat.

- **Advance:** Companies should return workers in waves over time (ex. certain employees come into office on Monday and Wednesday and other employees come in on Tuesday and Thursday). By advancing workers in waves, companies will be more agile to adapt to changes in community conditions
- **Retreat:** Companies should prepare for changing conditions, which might lead to reductions in the workforce (ex. an outbreak in one community may require a company retract or shrink a wave of workers that have returned to the office)
- **Adapt:** Companies should create fast feedback loops to immediately apply lessons learned (ex. regular check-ins should be scheduled with organizational leaders and best practices shared with all)
- **Repeat:** Companies should be resilient and willing to retreat, adapt and try again

POTENTIAL IMPACT FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

Executives should expect employees to be wary of reentering the workplace and must take steps to establish trust as ‘Return to Work’ begins. Recent research from Bain & Company indicates that workers are much more comfortable returning to work [if they believe that their employer is taking employee health and wellness seriously](#).

Workers are most comfortable returning to work for companies that they believe take their health and safety seriously

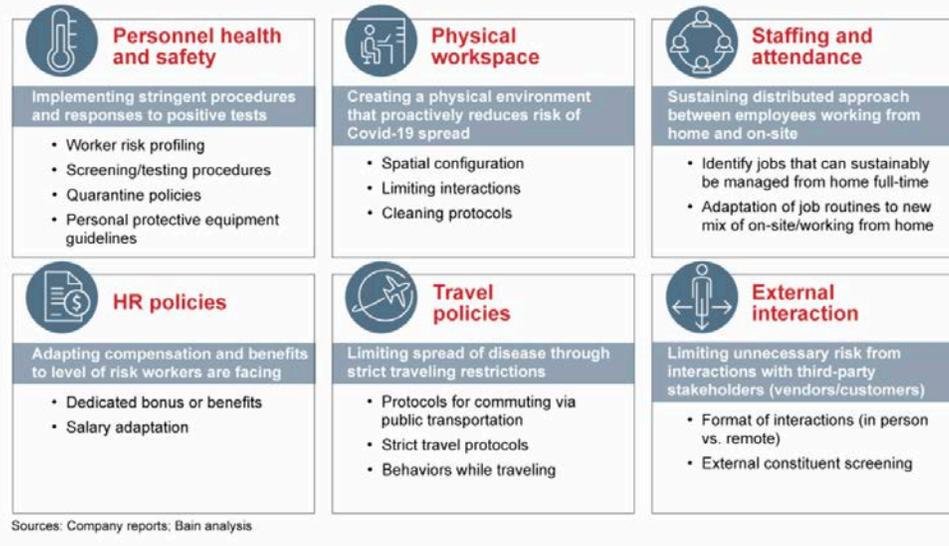


Before companies bring employees back to work, they must determine customer demand, staffing levels, and appropriate employee locations. Then, companies should assess worker health risks for their workers. Five factors – which vary by company – determine how the virus spreads and how it can be prevented. Employers can translate these factors into a risk-score:

- **Proximity:** How physically close are workers to each other?
- **Nature of Contact:** Do workers touch common items, other workers, or customers?
- **Duration:** How long does a typical interaction last?
- **Number of Different Contacts:** How many interactions occur in a day?
- **Ability to Screen and Remove:** Are there screening points or protocols that protect your workers (and customers) from contact with contagious people?

Next, employers can use the risk assessment to put the right disease spread prevention strategies in place. Among the various safety measures that companies are deploying, access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and disinfectants, as well as physical distancing protocols, are most critical in increasing employee comfort. To alleviate stress, companies can introduce flexible working policies and communicate consistently with their employees.

Mitigating risk to workers as they return requires new policies, infrastructure and personal behavioral changes tailored to work sites



Finally, as COVID testing becomes cheaper, faster, and more accessible, companies may take on testing responsibility. Yet, employer testing raises privacy issues, even if employees advocate for workplace testing. Larger companies, in particular, will need to collaborate with unions, legal teams, and human resources departments to ensure health privacy standards are met.

WHAT STS IS DOING ABOUT IT

STS, along with its network of CEOs and leaders, is working to identify strategies for businesses as they consider how to bring back their workforce. Further, STS is working with several testing initiatives to help increase testing capacity to further support a return to the new normal. STS will continue to publish research on these topics to support the post-pandemic recovery.

STS has also joined forces with impact investing firm, ImpactAssets, to connect promising COVID initiatives with investors through the ImpactAssets Stop the Spread Fund.

LEARN MORE: OTHER EXPERTS AND SOURCES

- Bain's [Back to Work brief](#) - reach out to Nate Anderson, Dianne Ledingham, or Hernan Saenz at Bain & Company for more information.
- The CDC has prepared a [set of resources](#) for businesses to utilize as they return to work
- The Department of Labor also has compiled [various resources](#) for businesses to review that relate to potential issues associated with the return to work