A Roadmap to Business Recovery:
Don't Wait Till the Pandemic is Over

Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, more US workers switched to remote work than ever before. While working remotely offers increased safety, the gradual change in the working environment raises alarming mental and emotional health concerns.

Moreover, it's hard to find a person who would not want to "get back to normal." To make the return as safe as possible, employers need to consider several factors, including employee mental health, workplace flexibility, and investments in corporate culture. It is also important to understand that it's never too early to talk about the restoration of work at a pre-pandemic level. However, many factors can start moving us towards the desired "new normal."

Workplace re-arrangements for different categories of workers

OSHA's Occupational Risk Pyramid divides workers into four categories, based on the risk they may be exposed to during working hours. The four different categories define worker risk from very high to low.

Workers at *very high* to *high-risk* work jobs include healthcare workers, laboratory personnel, healthcare delivery, and support staff, medical transport workers, and mortuary workers. Re-arrangement of their workplace can require the availability of isolation chambers for and grouping of COVID-19 patients, medical monitoring, special training of the employees, as well as providing them with PPE.

Those at *moderate risk* have jobs bringing them into frequent contact with the general public, such as teaching and working in high-population-density environments. They can benefit from such measures as limited access to certain areas, provision of PPE, minimal contact, and contact from behind physical barriers, like sneeze guards.

Workers in the *low exposure* category would benefit from regular updates about the COVID-19 pandemic and effective communication and collaboration strategies.

Measures Companies are Legally Allowed to Take for Workplace Safety

The [measures](#) companies take will determine business continuity and employee wellbeing until the pandemic is fully taken under control. A significant precautionary measure is implementing employee screening before entering the workplace. If companies can, they should make SARS-CoV-2 testing available to their entire workforce.

Monitoring state and local public health communications for updating employees is another important step companies should take for a safe return to work. They should offer flexible, non-punitive paid sick leave and customized work schedules, plus constantly remind employees to stay home if they develop any related symptoms.

In the workplace, arrangements should include:

· Social distancing
· Use of masks
· Cancellation of group activities
· Installation of physical barriers that minimize contact and transmission

An orderly activation and continued practice of these measures is easier for businesses that already have a written COVID-19 policy. Such a framework minimizes confusion and misunderstandings regarding workplace safety requirements.

Flexible Workplace Organization

Pre-existing physical and mental disabilities necessitate considering flexible work schedules (28%) and remote working (23%). For some employees with qualified disabilities, working remotely may be needed as a permanent solution, i.e., it would have to continue after the pandemic. Streamlined and consistent communication is crucial in all cases.

Reorganization of work schedule

A reorganization of the work schedule will involve staggering the arrival and departure times of employees. Likewise, with staggered lunch breaks or alternating work shifts, companies can ensure employees will not congregate in one spot while working on-site.

Cybersecurity

Remote working has its advantages but also carries its own risks. One source of great urgency concerns cyber-awareness and security. When employees use their own internet connection or devices to log in for work, they leave sensitive information open to cybercriminals. Companies should have clear, transparent, and readily available cyber policies in place to prevent data leaks and losses. Many companies should conduct training dedicated to cybersecurity for the best results.

Manager training

[39% of employees](#) report lower productivity during the pandemic. To address this concern, companies need to open the way for [additional emotional and mental support](#). Other employees are not dealing well with the forced isolation they must undergo. Consequently, they may spend less time working and more [checking up](#) with their co-workers, friends, and even family.

Managers should set up regular check-ins with their employees to minimize the effects of these problems. Guidance on home-office organization, division of tasks for efficiency, and other tips can help bring the performance levels back up.

Improved and seamless communication

Communication acts as the lifeline for on-site and remote teams throughout the pandemic. Through this, virtual meetings have also enabled the opportunity for employees to connect. They serve a double purpose of getting work on track and allowing employees to connect with other team members. Socially-distanced meetings can also be the playgrounds for culture-building and team-bonding exercises.

Help Employees Manage Stress and Mental Health Issues

Proactive approach towards employee wellbeing

With training, HR professionals, managers, and supervisors can learn to identify employee distress signs. Checking if an individual is putting in irregular work hours, is unresponsive for a long time, or does not meet company deadlines would be helpful in pointing out distress signs.

Mental health resource hubs

Companies should continue providing and highlighting additional resources available for employees or even create their dedicated hub. Essentially, such a hub should be an easily accessible page that refers employees to somebody who can help them manage their stress and wellbeing.

Educational workshops

About 84% of employees face stress, depression, and other mental health issues that are compounded by work. Companies need to focus on employee mental wellbeing. Conducting educational events that discuss and create awareness of the different aspects of mental health is a great start to improving your employees' wellbeing.

Early detection

[Algorithms](#) that help managers deal with situations caused by mental health issues are currently underway. Managers should spot employees who might benefit from extra support and individual adjustments, by remaining attentive to these signs:

1. Emotional responses
2. Erratic behavior
3. Irritability
4. Being teary, angry, or tense

Expand Rewards and Recognition Programs

Having a mobile-first rewards and recognition program will help maintain positive relationships, make employees feel seen and appreciated, increase the number of positive interactions, and prevent company culture from erosion.

"Social distancing doesn't mean social disconnection"
- Peter Kelly, Senior Psychologist HSE Health and Work Unit

Bringing employees together

Since many employees work remotely, they miss the positive emotions they received from direct communication with colleagues. A rewards and incentive program has a tremendous power to connect a dispersed team and return a sense of belonging. A socially accessible and interactive program can be quickly adopted across all teams and departments, bringing the organization closer together.

Easy integration

A well-constructed rewards and recognition app is easy to integrate with the software you already use. Consequently, you'll see an increase in program participation and improvements in company-wide communication.

Increased transparency

A switch to a mobile-first platform enables, among other things, peer-to-peer recognition to increase transparency. Everyone can publicly recognize achievements and help receive feedback from their colleagues. This helps build employee trust and removes suspicions about favoritism.

Future-proofing your company

Reward and incentive programs help businesses become more flexible and future-proof. A modern recognition app is essential if you want to keep employee morale high, even during stressful times.

Monitor current attitudes and opinions across all your employees

Returning to workplaces causes a lot of anxiety among people. WorkProud allows you to be constantly updated on your employees' top concerns. This helps to prepare an action plan that is indeed tied to the specifics of your organization and achieve the best results.

Turn to experts for help!

At WorkProud, we use the latest technology to build company cultures that connect and inspire. Our creative and digital solutions are always custom and in complete alignment with the objectives of our clients. With our rewards and incentive program, companies can reward creativity and loyalty as well as encourage inclusiveness.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is workplace wellbeing?

All aspects of the working life are part of workplace wellbeing. These include how safe the physical environment is, how an individual employee feels about their workplace, work, and co-workers. Workplace wellbeing plays an integral part in an organization's long-term effectiveness.

What is mental wellbeing?

Mental wellbeing entails knowing how well their abilities can help individuals cope with the stresses of life, maintain or improve productivity at work, and contribute to their community.

What is PPE?

Equipment that will protect an individual from getting hurt or injured during work is called Personal Protective Equipment or PPE. Safety goggles, face masks, and respirators are some examples of PPE. The type of PPE a worker would use will be determined by the risks they will be exposed to.
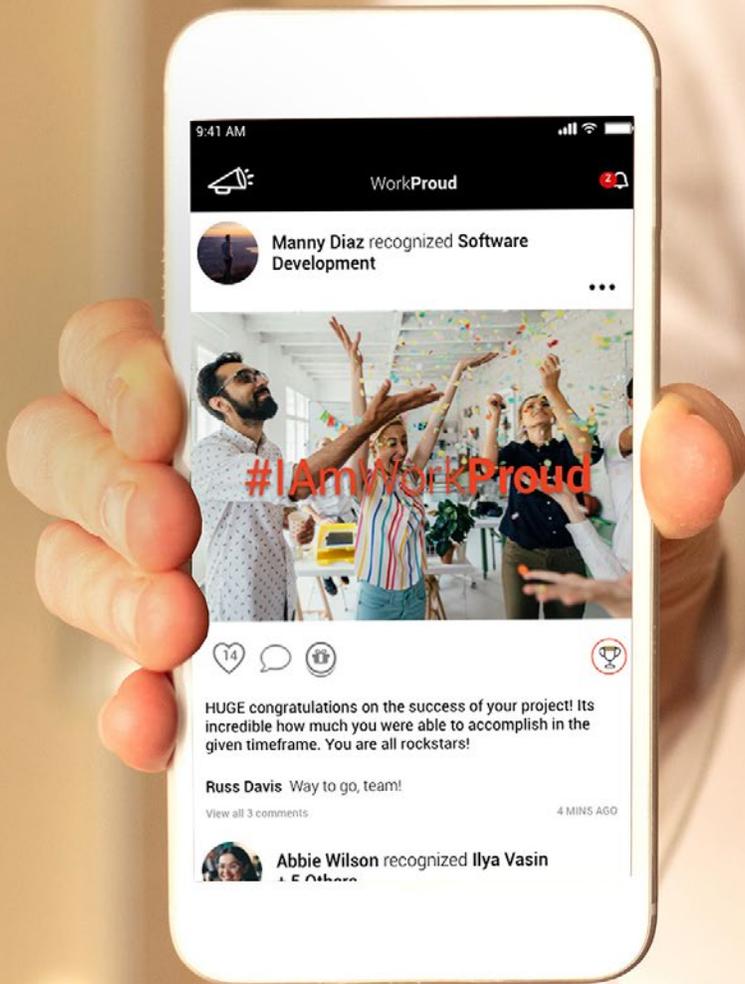
WorkProud streamlines your company's goals and moves towards a more flexible and inclusive workspace. We use technology to create a unified employee experience. If you are interested in learning how WorkProud can create a more positive employee experience in the workplace, visit our website at workproud.com for more information.

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