



PREPARING FOR RECOVERY

By Ian Robertson

As some sectors slowly come out of lockdown, what have we learned in the last four months and what will the rapidly evolving employment landscape look like?

At ema Consultancy, we have been fortunate enough to be busy during this period supporting our clients with their recruitment, HR and governance requirements.

Companies have rightly been focusing on keeping their staff and customers safe but having worked through the response phase employers up and down the country are now thinking about workforce strategies for the easing of lockdown.

Those companies that have learned lessons and assimilated best practice will be those that don't just recover but thrive. Here are four ways which we believe companies can prepare for recovery and give themselves a competitive advantage.

1. Coping with the Fear of Returning to Work

We are sensing a different pace from our clients, they are thinking about ways to get staff back to the workplace when it is safe to do so but this will not be business as normal, there needs to be a complete re-think.

Working from home, virtual meetings, and management were all quickly adopted by managers and staff who were forced into furlough or to work from home with very little notice or consultation.

This lack of consultation has meant that managers have had to be 'fleet of foot' in establishing what roles and tasks can be done differently and how they can support staff in their home arrangements. This has not been easy, particularly when it involves two parents working from home and children requiring home-schooling or those with a health condition or disability as well as finding the space to work productively from home.

There will be many who will fear returning to the new normal, not having social interaction with colleagues can lead to a dip in self-confidence and anxiety about going back into the workplace. Others may be concerned that they could catch Covid-19, childcare will remain an issue with grandparents, holiday clubs and other activities curtailed. Others will be enjoying not commuting, the flexibility in hours or even be coasting a bit due to lack of scrutiny.

It is not a one size fits all. Employers will need to think about individuals and ask managers to communicate with staff well in advance if they want them to return to work.

Researching the official guidelines for their sector and undertaking a Covid-19 risk assessment in consultation with staff and unions are the first two steps.

2. Dealing with Redundancy

The government furlough scheme has been a relief to many and given employers time to adapt their business, but we have seen many, many redundancies in sectors such as retail, travel, events and hospitality.

You may have staff on furlough who will not be coming back into your business or will be brought back part-time or who will require a different skill set as ways of working and customer interactions change.

Before making compulsory redundancies can you look at voluntary redundancy or early retirement? You might like to offer flexible working, job shares, sabbaticals or homeworking to other staff to retain as many people as possible.

Where you are considering redundancy, you should be thinking about whether staff can be retrained and moved to other roles.

You can also offer an outsourced outplacement service to support an employee's transition into new jobs with practical career advice, training, workshops, job search and emotional support

3. New Leadership and Management Styles

Managers have already had to adapt and learn to support their staff through online team meetings and one-to-ones, they have had to show more empathy and compassion than normal whilst probably also feeling they need support from their line managers.

Managers providing support to individuals and teams working from home, have to ensure adequate levels of management supervision and consistency, treating everyone fairly as individuals. It has never been more important to ensure mechanisms are in place, not to time check your staff but to ensure they are thriving or even surviving in a very different environment. Management support techniques must evolve to suit new places of work, new ways of working and be ready to adapt if the situation changes in view of local lockdowns, travel restrictions or further government advice.

In the new normal, we anticipate new leadership styles will come to the forefront, agility will be needed to lead effectively and to restore confidence in the workforce and with customers, suppliers and supply chains. These traits include honesty, consistent and timely communication with continued empathy.

Managers will also need to embrace collaborative working and be adept at leading virtual teams, smaller teams or staff that have relocated into their teams following restructuring.

Coaching and mentoring can be effective approaches for managers to develop their skills, knowledge and performance and can benefit the business as a whole as well as support the talent pipeline.

4. Motivating your Staff

Whether your staff are continuing to work from home or preparing to return to the workplace after many months of lockdown, many employees could be suffering from stress, boredom, frustration or health issues brought about by being inactive. They may be working longer hours or being distracted while trying to work. They may be burned out because they have not had a holiday, have had Covid-19 and be suffering long term effects or they may even have lost a family member or friend to Covid-19.

Employers have a duty of care to support the well-being of their staff and this has never been more important than in the continuing effects of a pandemic. This includes their physical well-being with an emphasis on health and safety, social distancing and cleanliness at work along with psychological well-being such as supporting work-life balance strategies, peer support and access to someone to talk to about mental health issues.

Communicate regularly with your staff, involve them in decision making when it comes to new policies and practices and make every effort to connect and engage with your staff as your business redefines its priorities.

You may have to change their terms and conditions and lower expectations when it comes to bonuses, lower pay or make other team members redundant leading to the survivor syndrome, where people feel guilty for keeping their jobs while others have been less fortunate.

The Future of Work

Everything will be different as we continue to deal with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, local lockdowns, new advice for employers and reactive government restrictions. Some sectors will be decimated, some will survive and those that reinvent themselves will thrive.

Companies that remain agile, flexible and resilient are more likely to ride the storm and adapt to new work priorities, routines and opportunities.

The Covid-19 crisis has driven change at a fast pace and savvy leaders will be looking at the benefits that have come out of the pandemic to pivot their businesses and get ahead of the competition. But it will all mean nothing if you do not have the right HR policies in place and cannot bring your workforce with you by preparing, supporting and rewarding them so everyone can thrive in the new normal.

Add a Call to Action?

ema Consultancy can assist your business through these challenging and changing times with relevant, timely HR, recruitment, redundancy and reorganisation advice to support your staff, management and Board. You can be confident that we've been making a positive difference to our clients for more than 13 years.

Contact us to see how we can make a difference to your organisation. In the first instance please contact Anne Elliott on 07875 762029 or Ian Robertson on 07947 126329.