Covid-19

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR THE HR PROFESSIONAL

ies institute for employment studies

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 2 >

About this Guide

Purpose

This guide is designed to help HR professionals navigate through the unprecedented challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. For each area of HR responsibility, we have focused the content around three phases we believe organisations may need to manage their responses – React, Recover and Renew[1].

From the outset of the lockdown in the UK, many organisations have provided tips for coping with the immediate situation. This guide aims to help HR teams look at both their immediate response to the crisis, and help the organisation to plan and act to get beyond this initial reactive phase.
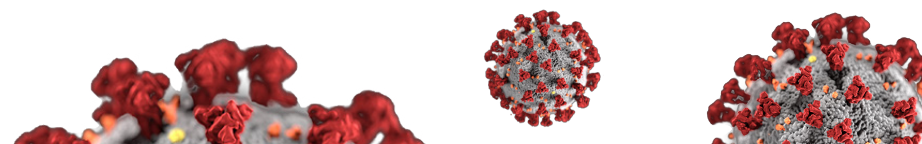
How to use this guide

The guide has been produced so that it can be easily shared with team members and colleagues, used as a presentation tool in meetings or workshops, and provides simple prompts that will assist planning and responses for HR directors and senior HR professionals. From our discussions with HR personnel we are aware of the extraordinary demands on individuals, and have kept each section focused and accessible.

For each section of the guide we have provided key considerations and questions that HR teams may need to address in order to sustain their organisation through these challenging times, as well as sources of information and support. The guide can be used as a whole or to get rapid action prompts for key areas of focus for HR during these challenging times. We have focused on those areas we believe will require particular attention and ones that may easily get missed.

Whilst IES are advocates and practitioners of evidence-based management and HR, we recognise that for HR professionals we are currently in unchartered territory. It is impossible to say that what has been evidenced to work before will work now. Whilst we have drawn upon our research and professional experience to produce this guide, we strongly recommend that while decisions may need to be made rapidly, different opinions and perspectives are sought. This is a time that leaders and managers are having to make difficult decisions in very unfamiliar circumstances and we recognise that is a major professional and personal challenge.

1. With thanks to Paul Streets, CEO Lloyds Bank Foundation & Honorary Visiting Professor at Cass Business School

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 3 >

Index

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 4 >
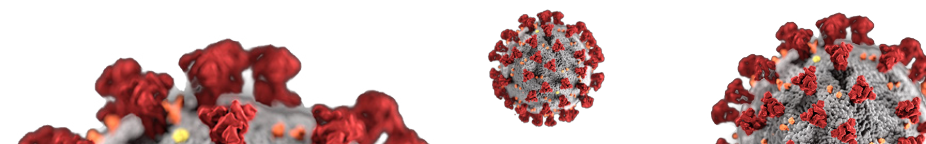
React, Recover & Renew

React

For all organisations there has been a gradual or immediate need to react and respond to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the response of governments to it. For most organisations this started with travel restrictions and the cancellation of events and meetings, which lead in turn to organisations moving quickly to home working or ensuring that staff who needed to, could continue to work in safe conditions.

For some sectors, Covid-19 has resulted in their closure or collapse. This was most immediately noticeable in sectors such as hospitality, aviation, tourism, and much of shop-based retail. Many organisations had to quickly move to shutting down, running with staff working from home or continuing, but with new working practices to keep staff safe.

There are, and will be, many organisations for which this is the only stage they face as they are forced to close down permanently as result of the wider impacts of Covid-19.

Recover

This phase is where an organisation focuses on re-establishing itself once restrictions are reduced or lifted, and operational constraints and controls have been removed. Part of the challenge of this phase will be that it will not be clear if those restrictions have been permanently lifted. The public health approach to "flattening the curve" could mean that those restrictions may be re-imposed or different ones put in place at several points over an extended period of time.

When staff who have been working from home or furloughed are able to return to work, employers will need to manage this transition consciously. It may require changes in how people are managed and supported, as well as engaging in new conversations on the flexibility that can be afforded to employees. People may have new needs and expectations, with different impacts financially and psychologically.
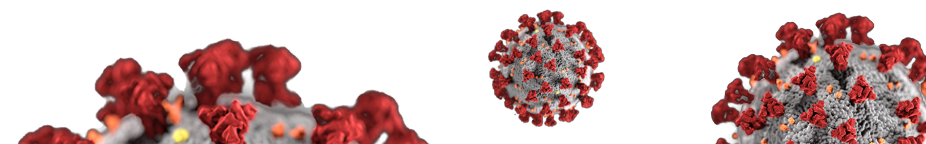
The Recover phase may last for a significant period of time as organisations are forced to adjust to the predicted major economic downturn. This may also mean that organisations fall back into the React phase.

Renew

The future of many organisations is likely to be very different from what it was before the pandemic. Customer, service user and employee expectations may dramatically change and the impact of Covid-19 is likely to have far-reaching implications that could take many years to address. It's currently unclear how this situation will play out from social, economic and health perspectives.

For example, given the recent decline in High Street retail prior to Covid-19, it seems likely that many retailers may continue the move to increase on-line businesses.

For others, their immediate response may have been about using exsting capabilities in very different ways. For example, Formula One engineers working on the design and production of respirators, or brewers and distillers moving to produce hand sanitiser. In these cases, the Renew phase may be more about a move to the re-establishment of their original focus. Others may need to completely re-invent themselves.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 5 >

Workforce Data & Analytics

IES' work with employers suggests it is difficult to effectively support and manage people if you don't have access to appropriate information about them, their jobs and their needs.
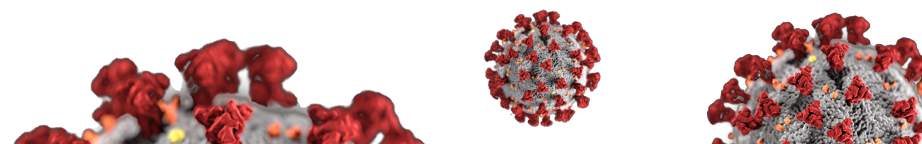
In more familiar times, good quality workforce data and analytics can help to:

- Understand what's happening with your workforce.
- Identify where action may be required.
- Track the impact of change.
- Meet reporting requirements.
- Benchmark for improvement.

In the current situation the immediate data needed about employees may be more basic, detailed and at an individual level, whilst in the long-term, macro data will be necessary to help shape the future of the organisation. Longer term views may need to be at a macro level to help shape an organisation that is capable of surviving a major economic downturn.

It is also important to see Workforce Data as being qualitative as well as quantitative. Knowing how your employees are coping and feeling, who is in a high risk category and what work they are actually doing is going to be important to know and track. There may be different challenges and data requirements for employees working from home, compared with employees still in their usual place of work.

There are also important links within the Governance section in the guide, particularly in relation to how workforce changes are recorded and how personal data is stored.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 6 >

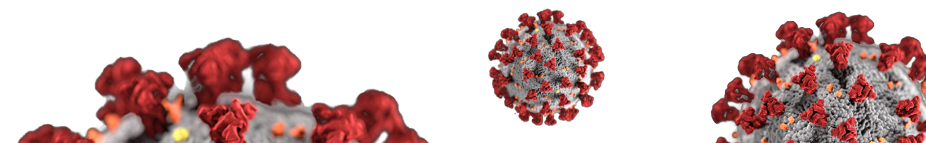# Workforce Data & Analytics - 2
React phase: Questions and actions

The focus in this phase should be on having access to, and recording data that is accurate, timely and usable. It is critical to know where people are, what they are doing, how they are, and the costs associated with the workforce. This will help inform critical decisions about how to manage the workforce, and to know what is affordable and sustainable in this first phase.

Questions to consider:

- Where are your employees?

- How are your employees? *(Whilst this is important to know, not everyone may feel safe or willing to share this with their employer. If known, it may be difficult to record as it may have been communicated in confidence. It is important to know who is off sick and for what reason.)*

- Who is, who wants to be, and who will be furloughed?

- Who is staying connected with each employee, including those who are furloughed?

- What work are employees doing?

- What are the costs of the workforce? If the financial survival of the organisation is in question, then it is vital that HR understands the costs associated with its people.

- For organisations still operating in their usual locations it is important to be aware of who is off sick and who is quarantined.

- Who can access workforce data and how is this being kept secure? With HR teams working remotely and at times on their own computers, there is an increased risk of personal and sensitive data being downloaded and stored insecurely. It is important to establish clear protocols for how data must be saved and deleted.

- Who is in a high risk health category? What impact does this have on their ability to work safely? What specific actions are required in relation to them?

Other data considerations could include:

- EAP usage.

- Temporary staff use. In some sectors there has been an increase in temporary staff use, for example, some supermarkets and home delivery services. Pre-employment screening information will need to be stored and records updated.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 7 >

Workforce Data & Analytics - 3

Recover Phase

The Recover phase may require different or additional workforce data as organisations move to re-establish operations. This will have to take into account that the lifting of restrictions may come in phases (and so could affect different employee populations differently) and the possibility that Covid-19 cases may increase again. There may be limitations on who is allowed to return to work or travel, meaning that employees may need to be categorised and managed in different ways.
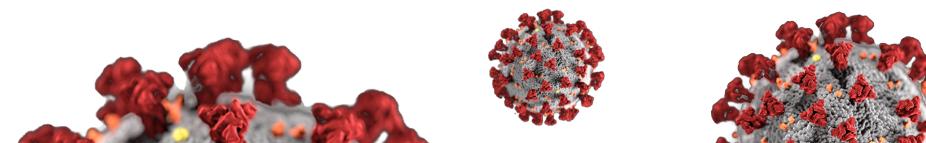
Tracking those coming off furlough and back onto payroll will be critical and must be managed in a timely and accurate way. When the immediate crisis of the pandemic is over it will be important to know the details of the remaining workforce. In some sectors, temporary staff may have contracts coming to an end meaning that payroll and employee record changes will need to be made and recorded. An underlying question that is important to come back to is "What do we want to know and what do we need to track in order to manage most effectively?"

As organisations return to more familiar ways of working and initial forms of government support come to an end, it may be necessary to complete returns on levels of furlough and other support. Accurate record-keeping and storage of data will play a key part in this. There may also be some unforeseen issues, for example, many employees seeking to take annual leave in a compressed period of time when restrictions are lifted.

Renew Phase

Post-pandemic it will still be important to have access to workforce data that is accurate, timely and relevant. Workforce and labour market data plays a vital part in shaping strategy and developing new opportunities for an organisation.

Knowing an organisation's key capabilities and workforce potential can help establish what an organisation could be capable of. Alongside this, organisations will need this data for workforce planning in order to ensure that they have, and are able to attain, the kind of workforce that allows them to survive and develop.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 8 >

Health & Wellbeing

Background

Many organisations have made significant progress in supporting the health and wellbeing of their employees over recent years, particularly since Dame Carol Black's ground-breaking work in 2008. There is already evidence showing that this Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on both the physical and mental health of employees, and it is vital to understand the implications in your organisation, and how you can best support employees.
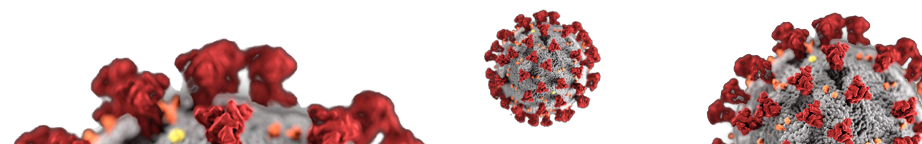
With the disruption of medical services, employees with underlying health conditions may have been unable to access treatment for a significant period of time. This could result in employees being unable to work or suffering longer-term health implications. Employers may find that they have a workforce with poorer health and lower productivity. This is a significant challenge for HR.

Our Employee Survey

During March and April we conducted an anonymous survey of employees to understand the impact of working from home on their health and wellbeing. An initial analysis of the first 500 **responses** indicated some concerning experiences. The results indicated that more than half of the survey respondents reported new aches and pains, especially in the neck (58%), shoulder (56%) and back (55%). Diet and exercise were affected with one fifth (20%) of respondents reporting an increase in alcohol consumption, while a third were eating a less healthy diet, and over half (60%) responded that they were exercising less. Poor sleep and increased risk of exhaustion were also cause for concern. The majority of respondents reported a loss of sleep due to worry (64%); and corresponding increased symptoms of fatigue (60%), possibly as a consequence of nearly half (48%) reported working patterns that included long and irregular hours.

The mental health of survey respondents depicted a workforce with a lot on its mind. Half of all respondents (50%) reported not being happy with their current work-life balance; a third (33%) frequently felt isolated; over a fifth (21%) were worried about job security, while just under half (41%) harboured health concerns for family members. Given current working conditions and the pressures on medical services, it is likely to be increasingly difficult for employees to access professional services or treatment they may need to deal with these issues (although employers should still promote services such as EAPs and workplace counselling if employee support is required).

Employers must also recognise the implications of individual work environments, and any potential associated risks, as these could have significant implications for longer-term HR challenges. Alongside this, it is important to ensure those working from home have a healthy and safe working environment.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 9 >

Health & Wellbeing - 2

React, Recover & Renew

Organisations commit to supporting the health and wellbeing of their employees for a number of reasons including:

- They believe it's the right thing to do.
- It's seen as a key to increasing productivity.
- To manage risk.
- To attract and retain good people.

The initial results of our working from home survey highlights the importance that HR should place on employee health and wellbeing in these challenging times.
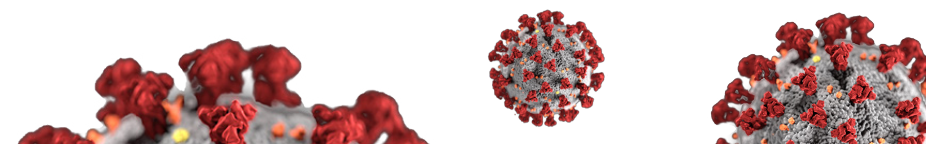
In the React phase, with staff either working remotely or with social distancing, it can be hard to know how people are feeling and corporate wellbeing initiatives may be quietly dropped or side-lined as other organisational issues take priority. However, employees may be facing additional pressures and concerns outside of (and additional to) work, that can have an impact on their health and wellbeing. Campaigns to improve health, highlighting sources of support and prompts to develop and incentivise healthier habits, are

methods through which organisations can help employees. With many employees having to work from home, and may be working without a proper work station/display screen equipment set-up, there are likely to be staff who are starting to experience musculo-skeletal problems. It is therefore important that any employee health and wellbeing policies and guidance are shared and communicated throughout this time.

The need to work from home may have quite different impacts on individual employees. For some, working from home may remove a commute and give more time for exercise. For others, there may be other stressors - from having a poor space to work in, interruptions from children, or being exposed to domestic abuse. There is already a recognition that some people will experience PTSD as a result of the pandemic, and HR will need to be ready to address emerging issues as organisations seek to re-establish "normal" and safe ways of working.

HR and line managers continue to have an important part to play in supporting employee health and wellbeing, but may have less awareness of how people are, what support or resources are needed, and what is (or isn't) working. How will you monitor the health and wellbeing of your employees? Throughout the phases it will be important to continue to review the need and the provision.

IES' **Health & Wellbeing Audit Framework** can help with this.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 10 >

Organisation Design & Development

Why this matters now

For the purpose of this guide we have defined Organisation Design as the aligning of structures, processes, physical space, locations and jobs in order to deliver strategy in the most effective and efficient way. Organisation Development is defined as the aligning of values, culture and behaviours in order to deliver strategy through the engagement, behaviour and wider contribution of the workforce.
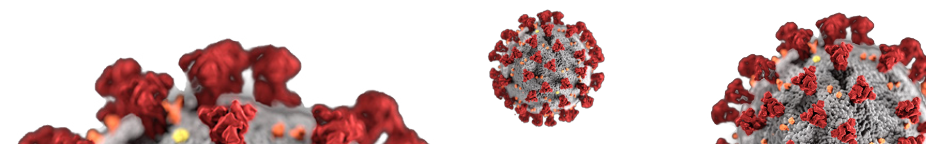
For many organisations, the Covid-19 pandemic has probably disrupted organisational design at all, or many levels, with a result of jobs and people going, new ways of working being introduced to create safer practices, or locations shut down with employees working from home. At the same time, without some of the normal constraints that exist in many organisations, there may be positive or negative behaviours that come to the fore that starts to define an organisational culture more clearly. The uncertainty that will exist about home and international markets, as well as the unresolved post-Brexit trade deals, may mean organisations have to think very differently about where (and how) they operate and where their suppliers are. These factors are likely to be particularly important considerations in the Recover and Renew phases.

In this section we focus on the importance of conscious efforts to monitor and shape the organisation for survival and for what may be a very different future. To reduce the chances for organisations remaining in a constant 'reacting phase', scenario planning could be an important mechanism to consider. Such scenarios may be as simple as considering the differences required for current restrictions lifted in the next month versus being lifted in six months. For some organisations, their design is a source of competitive advantage, enabling them to flex and change to take new opportunities and adapt to changes in their operating environment more effectively than their competitors.

Questions to consider:

■ What kind of organisation have you become in reacting to these current pressures?

■ Is this the organisation we want to be?

■ What else is required to achieve where we need to be?

Decisions made at this time can say something about the organisation you really are and the values you demonstrate in your decision-making and implementation. Where culture and values have been a strength of an organisation, it will be important to think about how you protect the best aspects of the business. This may be hard to do if the day-to-day focus is on cash flow and keeping your supply chain functioning.
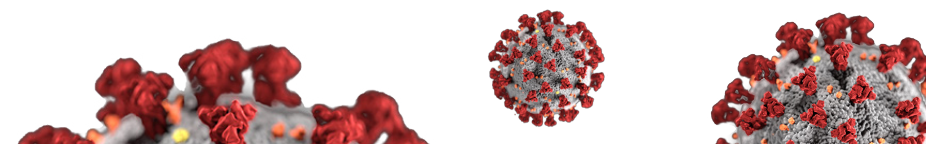
About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 11 >

Organisation Design & Development - 2

Organisation Design: Considerations during the three phases

Surviving the React phase may require an organisation to very quickly establish what the Minimum Viable Organisation (MVO) is – this is the structure, roles and resources needed to meet the basic requirements that will keep the organisation functioning to meet the needs of customers or service users. Some organisations will have pre-defined this through work on Business Continuity Planning. Having clarity on this allows you to quickly mothball or close those areas that are not key to the MVO, and therefore, the survival of the organisation. Effective organisation design can allow for greater agility and the ability to consciously react and respond at pace. Agility is likely to play an important part for organisations through the phases we have described.

With employees working in different ways, different locations and with others leaving, it is highly likely that roles have changed, sometimes in small and for others in massive ways. In some instances these changes may be akin to Job Crafting, where the job holder shapes the role to be more meaningful to them, make best use of their skills and to be more productive. With many people working with less visible supervision it seems likely that some will reshape their roles to work better for them. When restrictions are lifted, it may take a period of re-adjustment to understand how roles may have changed and if those changes will need to be documented contractually. Job Design may become a more important capability for HR in order to help build roles that are flexible and reflect the way that work is changing.

Questions to consider:

- What is our Minimum Viable Organisation (MVO) and how long can it last?
- How adaptable is our design and how do we ensure we can continue to adapt through the phases?
- How are roles changing and how do we ensure they are efficient, effective and may better support wellbeing?
- How do we ensure our systems and processes are fit for purpose in the new work context?
- What does the changing context tell us about the space we need in future?

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 12 >

Organisation Design & Development - 3

Organisation Development: Considerations during the three phases - culture, values and behaviours
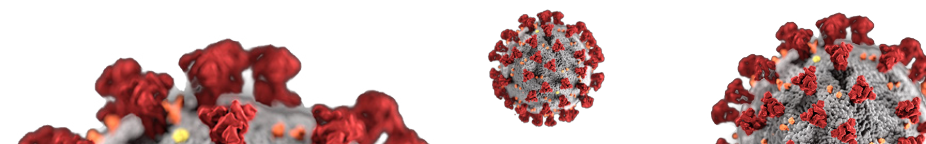
The culture, values and behaviour of an organisation are reinforced by a range of factors that can include: formal and informal communications, reward and recognition, organisational rituals, visual reminders, training programmes and the way in which employees at all levels treat each other. It's important that even with the disruption caused by Covid-19 that these factors remain visible and are seen as a priority, and how you communicate this to your employees is critical.

During the phases that organisations may go through, it is possible that the culture will change in a more emergent way and HR leaders have an important role to monitor the culture, keep bullying and harassment in check, and to maintain and challenge standards of organisational behaviour and values. Covid-19 may have an impact on engagement and productivity at a time when organisational effectiveness is at its most important, thus HR and organisational leaders and managers must be aware of employee attitudes and behaviours and follow-up appropriately.

It can be useful to pay attention to being an attractive employer even when you are not recruiting! Another key factor is how employee voice is managed during the phases and ensure that clear communication channels are provided. In a unionised organisation, it is important for HR to consider how they will work with union representatives in effective ways that sustain effective relations.

Questions to consider:

- How consistent are the style and content of communications?
- What behaviours are managers at all levels exhibiting?
- What behaviours do we need to consistently role model?
- What reputation are we developing internally and externally as a result of our organisational behaviour through the crisis?
- What are the potential consequences of this?
- How will employee representation be managed?

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 13 >

Organisation Design & Development - 4
Workforce Planning: Considerations during the three phases

Workforce planning enables an organisation to predict and plan for changes in employee capability and capacity that will be required in both the short and longer term. It requires the agreement of a set of assumptions about current and future requirements, together with the use of current workforce data, alongside forecasts about how and when that profile will change.

In working through the React phase, HR teams may need to undertake rapid short term planning that enables the reallocation of employees to new tasks, the implications of furlough, the identification of roles that are redundant and employees at risk of redundancy, as well as requirements for retraining or recruitment. It is important that regular reporting and reviewing is undertaken to ensure that assumptions are being measured and the required changes to the workforce are happening in budget, at the right time and with the required impact.

Further information on Workforce Planning is available in our **introductory guide**.

Questions to consider:

- Do we have the skills and capacity we need right now?
- What skills, resources and capacity are we not utilising? How could these be redirected?
- What capabilities will we need to develop or recruit? What skills are in short supply that we need? How will we manage this?
- What are the capabilities that we may need on a temporary basis?
- How will we practically plan and build our workforce requirements?

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 14 >
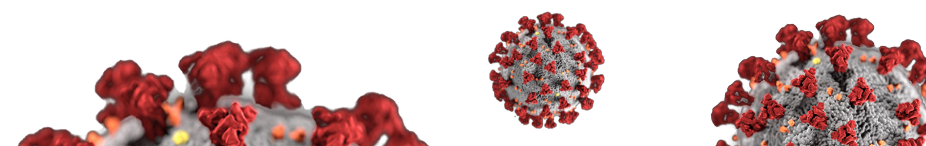
Organisation Design & Development - 5
Performance Management: Considerations during the three phases

Although Covid-19 has resulted, for many, in organisational disruption, it is now more important than ever for Performance Management to be undertaken in a timely and compassionate manner. Although the way in which performance management is undertaken will change for many, the reasons why performance management is undertaken are the same. For organisations with workers still in their usual workplaces 1-2-1s should be following social distancing which could make conversations more difficult to have. With employees working from home, 1-2-1s will be held via phone or video calls.
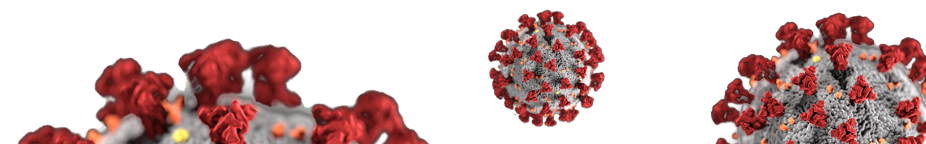
In these times, managers may be focusing primarily with health and wellbeing issues as employees adjust to the new situation, and may have to carefully balance any performance issues in-light of individual employee situations. Anecdotally, we have heard of managers feeling unable to manage performance due to the stresses that employees are facing and that 1-2-1s are focusing on health and wellbeing, rather than performance.

During the three phases, HR will have a critical role in supporting line managers to get an appropriate balance in Performance Management, whilst at the same time, ensuring that line managers are not feeling overwhelmed themselves. Where organisations implement a performance-related reward system, it will be important for HR to ensure that this remains affordable and that it continues to incentivise appropriate behaviours and outcomes

A summary of IES' previous research work on **Performance Managment** provides a useful reminder of the key aspects to reinforce in ensuring the process works effectively and consistently.

Questions to consider:

■ How do we help line managers have meaningful 1-2-1s?

■ How do we assess the effectiveness of our Performance Management processes through the three stages?

■ What support and guidance do we need to provide line managers for effective Performance Management?

■ How will we need to change Performance Management as the organisation moves through the three phases?

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 15 >

The Role of Leaders and Line Managers
A major individual and organisational challenge

During this period of upheaval and uncertainty, the role of organisational leaders and managers is potentially more complex and more difficult to perform. Research and professional experience has constantly reminded us of the potential ambiguities and challenges of leadership and management. Google Scholar brings up millions of references on these terms and organisations have often struggled to define and implement consistent, effective approaches. During this crisis it remains important for both formal and informal contact to remain as much as possible, and technology has provided ways through which consistant interactions can be made. Our homeworker survey highlighted that employees who had frequent contact with their line manager had better emotional wellbeing during lockdown, once again showing the importance of the line manager role.
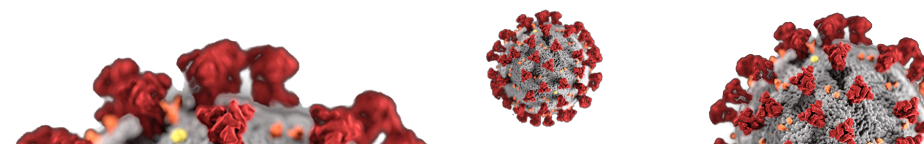
IES has researched, written and consulted extensively over many years on leadership and management. We have referenced below four key resources that are most pertinent and important for navigating the current situation in which leaders and managers have such a vital role to play.

Penny Tamkin's **article** on ethical leadership from 2016 is particularly relevant given the recent news stories of some managers clearly putting finances before the safety of their workforce, or seeking to benefit from the financial support provided by the government to furlough staff whilst still trying to get them to work. In times of extreme challenge, policies and processes may be forgotten or ignored, and corners may be cut in ways that ultimately compromise individuals and organisations.

Zofia Bajorek recently **wrote** about the challenges of line management as the "squeezed middle" and the potential risks to the wellbeing of line managers trying to achieve everything they are accountable for. With the current pressures and uncertainty, there are real risks of line managers becoming even more squeezed, having a detrimental impact on their own mental health.

A common theme over the past 10 years has been "organisational agility" with many leaders advocating the need for their organisation to be agile without being clear about what it meant in practice. Alison Carter and Sharon Varney focused on **change capability** in agile organisations in their 2018 paper, providing robust direction on the importance of building teams that are change-capable in order for an organisation to be agile in practice. Given the levels of change organisations have already faced and with much more to come, improving the change capability of their teams will help their organisation survive.

Dilys Robinson **wrote** about how engaging managers are able to deal with more challenging situations, with a particular focus on breaking bad news and managing performance issues. Having to do this remotely, or in restricted work environments, is something many manager will need to do now and over the coming months. This requires careful thought and a considered approach.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 16 >

The Role of Leaders and Line Managers - 2

React, Recover & Renew

In the early phases we see three key points of focus for managers and leaders at all levels:

- how we keep the operation going,
- how we sustain the team remotely or with safety and social distancing, and
- how we look ahead and prepare for what may be coming.

There is a difficult tension between the need for the management activities that focus on the planning, allocation of resources and tracking, versus the leadership activities that may focus more on providing direction, encouraging innovation and role-modelling. These are both important aspects of the role and are difficult to balance and fulfil in more stable and predictable times. Managers need support to be able to prioritise in these exceptional times and they need to give attention to their own health and wellbeing.

HR leaders need to pay attention to how they are fulfilling and behaving in their own role, as well as how the HR team supports and challenges leadership and management across the organisation. This means HR leaders have to maintain effective levels of self-awareness, act as role models and lead the maintaining of leadership standards and management. We recognise that this is a big ask when as an individual you may be faced with a range of personal challenges and anxieties. We have provided what we think are some key questions to explore in this area.

Questions to consider:

- As an HR leader, what are you role-modelling?
- What opportunities are there for your organisation's leadership team to set the tone of how they want the organisation to be at this time?
- How well is HR supporting line managers at all levels?
- Are clear expectations set of what is required of them?
- How are they being supported by both HR and their own senior managers?
- How will the role change when restrictions are lifted?

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 17 >

Governance
The importance of good HR governance throughout the phases

The levels of upheaval experienced by organisations at this time means there may be significant changes in staffing through sickness, furlough, redundancy, as well as many people working from home. This in turn may mean that remaining employees take on additional or new responsibilities, and without the levels of supervision that may have been in place in an office environment.

A consequence of this is the potential for accidental or deliberate non-compliance with legislation, policy or process. At the same time, documentation may not be completed for critical activities such as removing employees from payroll, documenting redundancy or ensuring pension contributions are still being made for those who have been furloughed. With some employees working from home experiencing connectivity issues there is the risk of secure and sensitive data being downloaded, worked on remotely and saved on local hard discs, creating potential GDPR issues.

It is important that HR leaders ensure that a pragmatic approach is taken to governance at this time, whilst not risking, in any way, policies that protect both employees and the organisation.

Questions to consider:

- Who has oversight of producing letters and documentation relating to furlough, redundancy, job changes and changes to working hours etc? Is everyone aware of this?

- Who is responsible for updating the HR records/database of all staff changes during this time?

- Who is managing payroll changes? Who covers if they are ill?

- If certain activities have been dropped to get through a crisis, how will you ensure important activities are re-started in due course?

- How will you maintain GDPR compliance?

- How will you ensure that government schemes such as the JRS and deferment of payroll taxes are fully complied with? Who is leading on these?

- How will you ensure that changes to working arrangements that become permanent are safely managed and documented, e.g. an employee who officially moves to being-home-based?

- How will you manage insurances and other employee benefits if renewals are due?

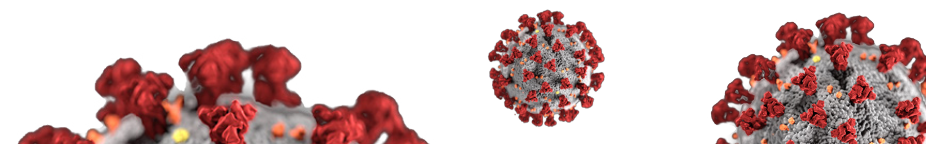- How will you manage whistle-blowing during this time?

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 18 >
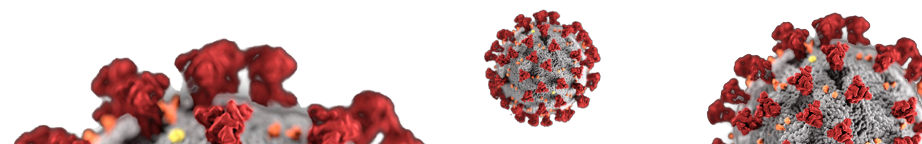
Suppliers and Consultants
Why are they important to consider?

Many employers are dependant on a range of suppliers for delivering aspects of the HR service and employee benefits, ranging from outsourced payroll and Employee Assistance Programmes to training and sickness management services. These suppliers and consultants have an important role to play in delivering the "employee experience" and providing vital support to employees. The relationship is two-way and suppliers are likely to be facing the same challenges as other organisations.

Deferring payment to suppliers could be attractive from the perspective of managing cash flow but could be detrimental for maintaining that relationship in the Recovery and Renew phases, where these services may be needed. Whilst these are exceptionally challenging times, the way in which organisations treat employees is sometimes an indication of the culture and values of the business.

.

Questions to consider:

- Who are the key suppliers and consultants used by the HR function?

- Who are the key contacts there and are they still working?

- Who is managing the relationship with each of your key suppliers and consultants?

- Do you know if suppliers are functioning properly and able to deliver the services you require? If their services are disrupted, how will you deal with it?

- What reassurances do you need from suppliers handling personal data that this is still compliant if their employees are working from home?

- How well does your finance team understand the importance of the suppliers and consultants used by HR?

- What work did you have scheduled with consultants that may not now happen?

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 19 >
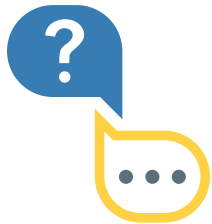
Decision-making

Throughout the phases of React, Recover and Renew, HR leaders will be faced with key decisions to be made. We have previously shared a practical **framework** for HR decision-making. The five questions it uses are summarised here.

- Does it make business sense?
- Is it legal?
- Is it fair?

- Is it consistent?
- Will people feel they've been treated with dignity?

Does it make business sense?
For many organisations, commercial and otherwise, there are likely to be questions of financial survival that start with "how long will our current cash position keep us going if our income dries up?" These may progress to "what opportunities for new income does the current situation provide?"

Being grounded in your financial reality can feel brutal, but at this time, for many organisations, there are constant questions about viability that will override everything else.

Is it legal?
Employment law is there for a reason and when followed in practice can protect both employees and employers. Looking at the legalities of a situation can often simplify the decision to be made.

There's also new guidance for organisations and employers in dealing with the impact of Covid-19. Much of this is written in straightforward language, so there's no excuses for not following it.
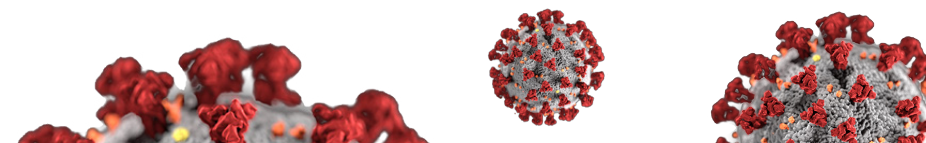
.

Is it fair? And Is it consistent?
Questions of fairness and consistency are often closely linked at work. When difficult decisions are made it is often helpful to understand how one decision may impact individuals differently. For example, the move to working from home has potentially different issues - lack of space, inability to afford heating the home all day, having young children at home, lack of suitable workspace or equipment, etc.

When your people are all working from home, is it possible for everyone to get heard and understood? This is also a good reason for not taking important decisions on your own - diversity amongst those making decisions may help to make a more balanced choice.

Will people feel they've been treated with dignity?
When making difficult decisions, sometimes the only positive that someone may have is how they feel they were treated.

It's important that each individual can at least feel that they were treated with dignity and respect, even if they are being made redundant.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 20 >

Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases

Many organisations have formal processes and protocols for crisis management and business continuity planning which dictate approaches to communication, decision-making, planning and reporting. These are particularly valuable where they are already understood by employees in dealing with the immediate impact of this crisis, through to Recovery and Renewal.

The HR function may need to make deliberate efforts to move out of the React phase in order to help the organisation find possible ways forward. The HR leadership team may need to meet regularly, to review what has happened, review new data, make decisions and plan next steps. In the heat of a crisis some leadership teams will do this rapidly on a daily basis in order to respond to new developments.

Given the level of upheaval that has already occurred and uncertainty about the future, it will be important for HR leadership teams to maintain these disciplines for an extended time to support the resilience of their organisation.

The Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) are a practical source of tools to respond to a crisis and beyond, and have been regularly used and tested. The decision-making model could easily form the basis for how HR works across the organisation to help more effective action - **https://www.jesip.org.uk/joint-decision-model**

Having read this guide, we encourage HR leaders to actively use the prompts and questions collaboratively to help in planning their organisation's longer-term approach. For each organisation there will be different challenges to overcome and the uncertainty will require people to think differently and continue to make difficult decisions. This is not something that HR leaders can do in isolation. We encourage you to share your learnings and challenges with others in order to make more effective decisions for your workforce and organisation. IES is working to support HR leaders and their teams through these challenging times. Through our research, dissemination and consultancy we are helping HR to find ways to address the challenges they face.

About this Guide | React, Recover & Renew | Workforce Data & Analytics | Health & Wellbeing | Organisation Design & Development | The Role of Leaders and Line Managers

Governance | Suppliers & Consultants | Decision-making | Enabling the HR Team to Lead Through the Phases | About the Institute for Employment Studies

ies institute for employment studies

< 21 >

About the **Institute for Employment Studies**

ies

institute for employment studies

- IES has over fifty years' experience of helping to improve the world of work.

- We do this through research and consultancy with employers, employer bodies, professional associations, government departments, educational institutes and foundations.

- We focus on developing evidence-based HR and management.

- Our work with employers focuses in three areas – understand, improve and evaluate:

  - **Understand** – we help employers make sense of what is going on inside their organisation and in their operating context. This enables better choices to be made on where action is required.

  - **Improve** – we work with employers to help improve the work of HR and of management/leadership.

  - **Evaluate** – we help employers track the impact that changes have. This can enable improved ROI and better learning of what works in their context.

- We are a charity and we are independent. We have offices in Brighton and London. We work across the UK and internationally.

- We have a team of experienced researchers and consultants who work closely with clients to ensure effective delivery.

ies

institute for
employment
studies
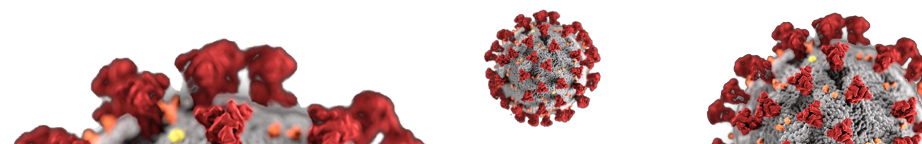
If you would like to learn more about the work of IES please contact:
Ed.Griffin@employment-studies.co.uk