CRISIS CULTURE INSIGHT

Health, Safety & Wellbeing strategy in a post-pandemic world

March 2021

Tribe combines insider knowledge
to provide a future perspective

Listening, learning, and sharing
for a stronger culture

tribe

intelligent culture change

Introduction

"If organisations can build on the lessons learned from this pandemic, they will be able to seize the biggest opportunity for a step change in Health, Safety and Wellbeing focus and ultimately, a holistic transformation of business operations."

This document outlines the insights from company experience through the pandemic as well as suggesting some organisational considerations for the future. This advice has been developed as a result of interviews on the Health, Safety and Wellbeing challenges that organisations faced during 12 months of a Covid-19 pandemic and their anticipated next steps. Tribe uses combined research based on client feedback and the experiences of our consultants.

The aim of this document is to provide our readers with observations of Health, Safety and Wellbeing experiences in international businesses as well as organisational building blocks for a post-pandemic world based on our collective insights. These experiences were collected from, mostly larger, organisations across a range of industries at national and international level.

Overview

2020 was the year that the business world experienced rapid and severe disruption. The rapid onset and persistence of the Covid-19 virus really took the Western world by surprise. The Eastern world, more used to fast spreading viruses such as Sars and Ebola, appeared to adjust sooner.

While some business leaders continue grappling with daily challenges from the pandemic, others are confident that the health of their employees is being protected. So with the financial status of their businesses in stasis, they believe it's time to plan 'what's next'. Indeed, many businesses are already planning, even when they still feel they may be in the eye of a storm.

Overall, we found that most of our respondees reported concerns about declines in wellbeing. The main reasons being increased job demands, exhaustion, home-working / home schooling challenges and mental health struggles. Additionally, when it comes to Safety and Risk Mindset, they expressed concerns about workforce complacency in some activities.

Like so much relating to Covid-19, the exit route is still not straightforward. Achieving the right Health, Safety and Wellbeing trajectory requires challenging choices. So, in the middle of so much uncertainty and disruption, how far should you shift from a 'steady as she goes' approach and adopt faster, more agile, approaches? How much, and how fast, are companies already pivoting to optimise future Health, Safety and Wellbeing outcomes? What is really going on behind the scenes?
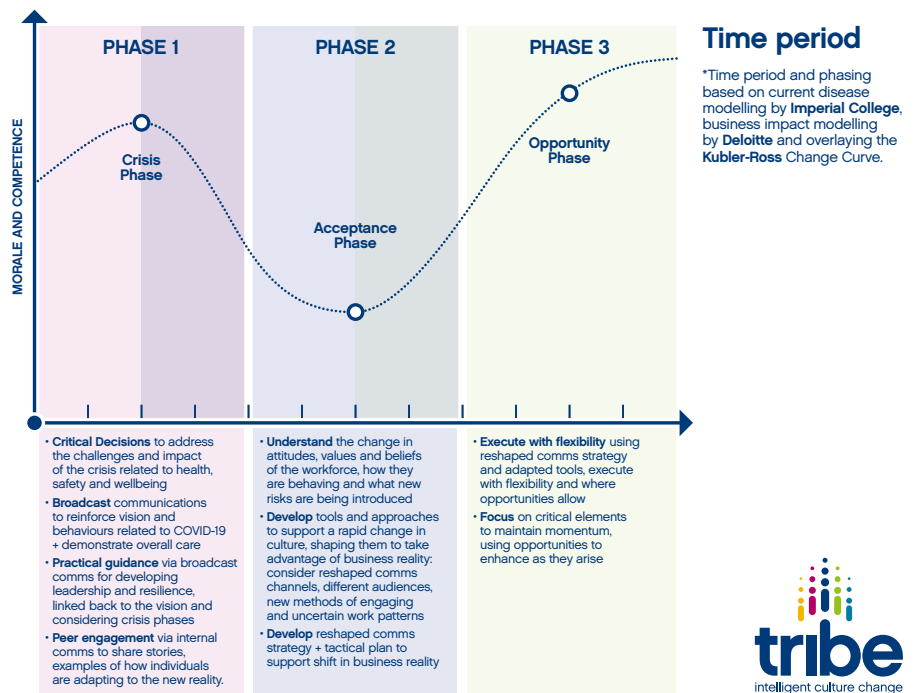
In June 2020 we launched our first Tribe Crisis Culture Insight report on the early impact of Covid-19. We found that organisations were generally reacting quickly and with purpose as the crisis shifted. At that time, most organisations were still at Phase 1 in terms of Crisis stages with little strategic implementation of Health, Safety and Wellbeing implications. Today, after a couple of iterations backwards and forwards between Phase 1 (Crisis) and Phase 2 (Acceptance), companies are definitely shifting into Phase 3 (Opportunity).

Crisis Culture Framework

Key challenges

- Workforce mental health and resilience
- Operating the business safely with less staff
- Rapid changes in behaviour
- Fear to go to work
- Under reporting
- Managing customer risks
- Communications overload
- Business or asset shut down, maintenance and start-up challenges
- Remote or absent leadership
- Social Distancing
- Denial of new reality + failure to adapt
- Moving backwards in maturity terms: Increase in unsafe behaviour and associated increase in risk, decrease in communication about safety, increase in anger and distrust.

Opportunities

PHASE 1 — Crisis Phase

PHASE 2 — Acceptance Phase

PHASE 3 — Opportunity Phase

MORALE AND COMPETENCE

PHASE 1
- **Critical Decisions** to address the challenges and impact of the crisis related to health, safety and wellbeing
- **Broadcast** communications to reinforce vision and behaviours related to COVID-19 + demonstrate overall care
- **Practical guidance** via broadcast comms for developing leadership and resilience, linked back to the vision and considering crisis phases
- **Peer engagement** via internal comms to share stories, examples of how individuals are adapting to the new reality.

PHASE 2
- **Understand** the change in attitudes, values and beliefs of the workforce, how they are behaving and what new risks are being introduced
- **Develop** tools and approaches to support a rapid change in culture, shaping them to take advantage of business reality: consider reshaped comms channels, different audiences, new methods of engaging and uncertain work patterns
- **Develop** reshaped comms strategy + tactical plan to support shift in business reality

PHASE 3
- **Execute with flexibility** using reshaped comms strategy and adapted tools, execute with flexibility and where opportunities allow
- **Focus** on critical elements to maintain momentum, using opportunities to enhance as they arise

Time period

*Time period and phasing based on current disease modelling by **Imperial College**, business impact modelling by **Deloitte** and overlaying the **Kubler-Ross** Change Curve.

Four major themes emerged from our research published in June 2020. They were:

1

Trust

How do people feel about the business response? Do they have trust in the organisation?

2

Mindset

What are people's mindsets and as a result what kinds of behaviours are people demonstrating?

3

Resilience

How mentally prepared are people to get through the crisis?

4

Engagement

How effectively are we communicating with people?

We recommended that organisations should be considering these four topics - Trust, Resilience, Mindset, Engagement - as they continue to address the cultural and behavioural challenges arising from the crisis and start to plan future approaches. These topics will all remain key levers in planning for the future.

According to our recent discussions with clients from companies that have operations in the UK and overseas, many were encountering workplace wellbeing issues as well as a level of complacency when it comes to risk in operational activities.

Significant anxieties were raised that mental health issues seem to be increasing. There were also concerns of burn out, an unsustainable workload, loneliness, and isolation as well as some people's disengagement from workplace activities in the absence of a supportive community.

On the flip side, there was a belief that corporate focus on wellbeing had improved, there had been a mindset shift for remote working and decisions were being made faster than before. From some early-stage employee surveys, there are indications that manager contact with their team members has improved. There were some worries that this may be becoming superficial over time due to increased workloads and individual capability when it comes to empathic engagement. Finally, much to everyone's delight, HSE teams are finding themselves being increasingly recognised as trusted advisors rather than auditors or repositories for incident investigations.

This report shares some of the key findings. We have included edited quotes from respondents to reflect specific sentiment. Section one provides context for the report. The second section shares an overview of the information and the third section expands on these themes. The final section elaborates on the key elements to include in future Safety, Health and Wellbeing strategic thinking.

SECTION 1
Context

In various guises, Tribe has been helping companies improve behaviour and culture for the last 30 years. We have a unique approach that combines the science of culture change with the art of engaging audiences with creative, 'outside the box' solutions.

Our unique experience allows us to focus on an organisation's people, culture and behaviours they influence and the resulting business outcomes. We focus on this because we know that if an organisation is able to understand influencing behaviours, it will start to shift the culture.

Our client activity combined with recent research has shown that throughout the pandemic, more than ever before, HSE professionals have been called upon to rapidly respond and advise on the new working realities. So much has changed in the last twelve months - remote working, social distancing, supply and demand shifts, regulation, and travel both nationally and internationally. The next challenge will be supporting the organisation and its workforce through to the post-pandemic era.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to the biggest shift in organisational mindset in over a century. In addition, on a personal level, individual attitudes, values and beliefs have all been continuously challenged throughout 2020 and into 2021. If organisations can build on the lessons learned from this pandemic, they will be able to seize the biggest opportunity for a step change in Health, Safety and Wellbeing focus and ultimately, a holistic transformation of business operations.

SECTION 2
Changes in the workplace since our June 2020 report

WHAT HAS IMPROVED?	WHAT HAS DECLINED?
Manager contact	Genuine engagement
Less commuting	Longer working hours
Work focus on wellbeing	Mental health
Communications	Communicating work related decisions
People are now used to home working	Workload
Spending time with family	Separation of work and home life
Technology	Isolation and loneliness
Agile decision making	Sharing decisions
Mindset shift for remote working	Video conference fatigue
Engagement with the HSE team	On-site or shop floor management
Closing out defects	Auditing

SECTION 3
Major trends

The long duration of the pandemic seems to be the biggest challenge. People are becoming more frustrated and beset with uncertainty.

We have identified six major areas currently impacting organisations and these will need to be factored into any future strategy:

- Mental health, burn out and exhaustion
- Remote working
- Approach to risk - operational activities and complacency
- Changing regulation
- Commercial pressures
- Engagement and communications.

Mental health, burn out and emotional exhaustion

Mental health is defined in thought, feelings, and behaviours. Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems. They are often a reaction to a difficult life event but can also be caused by work-related issues.

This report talks generally about work-related stress but where such stress is prolonged it can lead to both physical and psychological damage, including anxiety and depression.

From the client conversations carried out for this report, there is evidence to show increasing mental health issues within workforces. To counter this, lots more open conversations are taking place but are they enough? Managers are being asked to make time for people's mental health but most - at the best of times - are ill equipped to ask the right questions and deal with the answers.

As stress and anxiety are becoming more widespread, many are experiencing far more extreme reactions than they would pre-Covid. Some people who are normally calm and considered are reacting more emotionally and with a lack of clarity leading to disagreements.

There is also emotional exhaustion, especially among leaders. Everyone is feeling the strain of relentlessly carrying on regardless - particularly those who have not been furloughed. Managing and motivating a disparate, increasingly disengaged or 'flat' workforce, and operating in crisis mode for so long is taking its toll.

Senior leaders are overstretched in so many ways and some have been signed-off sick with depression and exhaustion.

In Europe, companies are also experiencing the seasonal impact. During the first Lockdown, in large parts of the globe, we were heading towards summer. The days were long, and we could be outside. During Lockdowns two and three, it has been cold and dark, accompanied by a feeling of the situation dragging on relentlessly.

People who would usually cycle to work haven't needed to, and with gyms closed, the winter weather made exercising outdoors unappealing. As is well documented, exercise and getting outdoors improve our mental health.

Mental health was at the top of most our respondents' radars. They see more people coping with anxiety, more cases of people suffering from anxiety and ill health. There was also a genuine concern that there may be unknown issues at play.

> *"People may be suffering and we can't see it"*

HSE Manager, Manufacturer

> *"The first lockdown was in the summer and people could enjoy outside. They felt the worst was over and were looking forward to freedom in 2021"*

HSE Manager, Utilities

> *"This time (in Europe, during Lockdowns 2 and 3), it's cold and dark. Our people are feeling emotionally exhausted as this drags on with no certainty"*

Head of HSE, Energy

> *"It's challenging to try and plan for a new normal in 2021. It's hard to snap out of crisis mode and move forward based on our pre-Covid thinking"*

Head of SHES, Retail

Stress, burn out and emotional exhaustion can be a reaction to a combination of events or experiences in someone's home life or work life or a combination of both. The work life and home life balance that many people value has been challenged with, for instance, the tensions between remote working and home schooling.

The uncertainty created by issues arising as a result of the pandemic has merged with issues such as reduced workforce numbers. This is another factor leading to pressured working environments. Reduced headcount has been attributed to several factors such as furloughs, organisational restructuring or simply people going in and out of isolation or quarantine.

"Everybody is feeling stretched"

Head of HSE, Marine

Leaders are feeling the strain of trying to keep everyone feeling positive. People are reacting emotionally rather than rationally. Remote working and less engagement in the workplace are leading to barriers are being created between co-workers.

"We are at fatigue stage. First time around, managers were problem solving and working positively. This time they are acting more emotionally"

Head of HSE, Telecoms

"Everyone seems to have different boundaries. The work never seems to stop. Some emails come in at 6.00am, others at 11.00pm"

Advisor, Professional services

Another factor contributing to stress is the higher level of personal engagement some leaders are experiencing when making decisions on Covid-19 issues. Many people have experienced the illness or loss first-hand. As a result, some leaders are struggling between emotion and fact when it comes to agreement on specific issues such as planning readiness, logistics, ethics, or practical solutions like wearing masks or mass vaccinations.

Remote working

Remote working has become a tale in two parts. On the one hand, most people have become used to working from home. On the other, many would return to the workplace in a heartbeat. Some people are thrilled about their greater productivity and flexibility, as well as the time and sanity reclaimed from long, stressful commutes. Others cannot wait to get back to the office, to talk face-to-face with people and work collaboratively in a single co-located space.

The pandemic pushed companies and consumers to rapidly adopt new behaviours that are likely to stick, changing the trajectory of approaches to flexible working. However, the limited separation between work and home was cited as an issue by many respondents. While people are more used to home working, they are struggling with juggling domestic issues such as home schooling or multiple family members trying to co-work in the same space.

A lot of computer-based office work, especially that requiring only moderate interaction and physical proximity, has now moved to the remote arena. While there has been a mindset shift to make this more acceptable in a 'business as usual' scenario, video conferencing fatigue is becoming a real issue. Respondents were also concerned that as time has gone by, it was becoming more difficult to engage their colleagues in workplace discussions.

"People are silo working and decision making isn't always shared"

HSE Manager, Construction

"People are not finding the time to exercise"

HSE Manager, Engineering

We had some observations about decision making based on skewed information or, indeed, the impacts of decisions not being fully shared. Additionally, less presence of managers on the shop floor or visiting teams on location, as well as reducing auditing, may also be leading to people cutting corners.

"Normally we are used to leaders making decisions on facts, so even if they don't agree, they will listen to the facts and go with the majority. Decisions around Covid-19 seem to be much more personal"

HSE Director, Telecoms

During the pandemic, the virus most severely disturbed areas with the highest overall physical proximity - on-site customer service, leisure and travel. Among the affected workforces were frontline workers who interact with customers in retail stores. This sort of work needs frequent interaction with strangers and requires on-site presence. In some areas, there was a strong migration to digital transactions, some of which may remain. Overall, Covid-19 has had little impact on activity requiring low proximity such as construction sites and other outdoor working. Jobs with higher levels of physical proximity are likely to see greater transformation after the pandemic.

While remote working is likely to continue in some form, some work that has been carried out remotely for the last 12 months, such as negotiations, critical business decisions, brainstorming sessions, appraisals, sensitive feedback, and induction sessions will be better carried out in person.

"Re-organisation means the company has shrunk. This means it will be easier to re-start the culture change programme"

HSE Manager, Retail

"Initially, people saw home working as a short-term solution. We now recognise it as a long-term solution"

HSE Manager, Manufacturing

"We saw productivity go up with remote working"

HSE Manager, Utilities

Many of our respondents are closing commercial premises in the preparation for a blended form of office / virtual working. Some companies are already planning to shift to flexible workspaces after positive experiences with remote work during the pandemic - a move that will reduce the overall space they need and bring fewer workers into offices each day.

Finally, be warned, as companies try new models of remote and on-site working, new challenges may arise. We are already hearing about widely different subcultures for these two groups of workers - with different norms, expectations, as well as focus on Health, Safety and Wellbeing.

"We are going through a massive shake up with a new CEO joining. People who would normally take this in their stride are less confident in their roles with Covid-19 issues predominating"

Head of HSE, Telecoms

"We are closing several of our offices and moving everyone to new, centralised locations. We want to encourage co-location and more collaboration in the future"

Head of HR, Technology

Approach to risk - operational activities and complacency

Risk mindset appears to have become polarised. There is a belief that workforce complacency may be a growing problem. People are not always following Covid-safe procedures or are resorting to performing activities on their own when two people are actually required. Bad habits have crept in.

"Some people may be tempted to skip rules to make it easier to do the job in a socially distanced way. So where it is recommended that two people work together, they are tempted to work alone"

HSE Manager, Manufacturing

Auditing levels have decreased and it is anticipated that people are lapsing. Managers responsible for safety have increased workload by making procedures Covid-safe.

"Done remotely, auditing is not as effective. Defects get closed quicker although we're unsure why this should be"

"With a second and third Lockdown, people thought they'd be more prepared, but they hadn't anticipated the lack of workforce engagement"

Tribe Lead Consultant

This may be attributed to less visible leadership and / or a reduction in safety auditing. Whatever the reason, some organisations are experiencing a spike in near misses.

And yet others are noticing an improvement in compliance since the start of the crisis. They report more awareness about working safely and what 'at risk' behaviour is.

Interviewees also talk about global differences across regions. Some regions appear to be a lot more fearful of Covid-19 than others. For example, organisations operating in Italy are noticing higher levels of fear amongst their workforces. This is likely to be based on the country's early experiences of the pandemic. Likewise, in countries with poorer health systems, such as South America, levels of fear are higher and so compliance is less.

> *"China and Singapore have very stringent rules. People in Brazil have commented they feel safer at work than home"*

HSE Manager, Manufacturing

> *"Apart from wearing masks, we don't see people doing anything differently outside. Although here in India, most people are still working from home"*

HSE Director, Technology

It is worth noting a positive outcome around the role of Health, Safety and Wellbeing teams because of the crisis:

> *"Some people are now more engaged with their Health and Safety team. We're hearing they're now being asked for their advice and opinion. People are keen to know how their team can help and it's increasing the profile of Health and Safety within organisations"*

Tribe Lead Consultant

The aspects of Risk Mindset discussed in the June 2020 Tribe Insight Report are still relevant.

Changing regulation

The variety and potentially conflicting regulations and speed of advice continues to prove a challenge to many businesses. Different international rules are complicating planning. This has proved a major logistical issue for companies running marine operations or working in the travel industry. Issues that have arisen can vary by nationality and quarantine rules - especially around dealing with different nationalities on and offshore.

> *"Conflicting guidance - different guidance from NHS / HSE / Gov / Industry sector, etc - is causing confusion"*

HSE Manager, Telecoms

> *"Different European rules are complicating planning around how to deal with Covid-19 outbreaks, if they arise"*

HSE Manager, Energy

In addition to the international challenges around risk mindset already mentioned, there are also national challenges when it comes to consistency in public health and local response. An example has been the tiering system used in the UK.

> *"The tier system across the UK made it difficult for us to manage. We had outlets in multiple regions, all in different stages of Lockdown"*

HSE Director, Retail

International governments are also applying varied approaches to managing the pandemic. Sweden may be focussing on achieving herd immunity whereas other countries, like New Zealand and Australia, are far more prescriptive in their approach.

> *"Additional time needs to be factored in for testing. Quarantines are also having an impact on our rotas and team working as we have people from multiple countries"*

HSE Manager, Energy

Leaders whose companies or workforce (in the case of the marine sector) span multiple geographies have found it difficult to standardise any approach. This has led to anxiety around protecting employees while remaining compliant.

Commercial pressures

Inevitably, with the commercial pressures created by the pandemic combined with a global economic downturn, there are fears that budgets will be cut at expense of safety. Getting the future strategy correct will be vital in building resilience across organisations.

The new investor mindset will be asking difficult questions of organisations when it comes to their organisational resilience, their approach to Health, Safety and Wellbeing and their engagement with partners and contractors.

> *"Our HSE budgets were tight pre-Covid but now with all the financial focus in the business, we anticipate we will be really stretched"*

HSE Manager, Technology

> *"The balance between the business finances and the Health and Safety budget is always challenging. We have already had a significant cut for next year"*

HSE Manager, Marine

The issue of how the crisis has affected business agility will also become a legacy of the pandemic.

> *"People don't yet know what the new normal will be. Take the retail sector as an example. They were planning for everyone buying online by 2030 but this vision has been accelerated because of the pandemic. Working from home is now seen as the new normal but the longer this continues, the number feeling disengaged and disaffected will only increase"*

Tribe Lead Consultant

Engagement and communications

Initially, there were several positive aspects that came out of the crisis. There was an initial explosion in communications across organisations and between individuals. The further adoption of digital communications continues to grow.

> *"We had to increase communications as safety maturity had dipped"*

HSE Manager, Retail

Continued social distancing has started to create barriers in communications. Many managers, already struggling with seemingly relentless workloads, are finding it difficult to cope with speaking to all their team members. There appears to be growing isolation between individuals working from home and their colleagues and, indeed, the organisational purpose, values, and priorities.

> *"There's lots of rhetoric coming from leaders but still concerns about asking people how they are feeling for fear of opening a can of worms"*

> *"There are cultural differences in managing communications, let alone some of the more personal issues"*

HSE Manager, Telecoms

In the early days of the pandemic, much of the communication was broadcasted rather than received. Many organisations are finding it difficult not to send out 'mixed' messages or overloading people with information. During the first wave, organisations focussed on managing the situation. It was very reactive. This time around, organisations have systems and processes in place to help them.

Workforces are becoming weary of the constant formal communications and are missing those casual conversations - those opportunities for leadership to gather undercover intelligence.

Traditional lines of communication have been broken down and not replaced with viable alternatives. People are just making do and engagement and interaction are missing.

> *"Normally, communications are emailed out to a workforce in the hope they get read but we're seeing even more fragmentation. People are working in hierarchical bubbles and collaboration is missing. When people collaborate, innovation takes place, but people are working in a much more process-driven way now"*

Tribe Lead Consultant

We've seen decision making isn't always shared more widely and it's leading to frustration and increasing disengagement among the workforces.

Decision making is often based on facts. These facts come from conversations in different office locations. With little travel allowed and the limitations of virtual meetings, respondents are noticing a tendency for decisions to be made based on perception and emotions. As a result, when people are asked, "what's the driving need for that?" they can't answer with practical or tactical examples, or first-hand accounts.

> *"People are silo working and not sharing information or decisions. When people don't have the facts, they fill the gaps. It's all very frustrating"*

HSE Manager, Construction

Many organisations reluctantly shifted to online workshops instead of face-to-face sessions for Health, Safety and Wellbeing interventions. However, now that they have become more used to these approaches, they may very well have a blended approach in the future.

> *"We had a dip in our safety culture, so we have adapted to virtual stand down events to bring our teams together."*

HSE Manager, Energy

SECTION 4
Future strategic factors to consider

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a concern from organisations that the risk to employees was increasing, but the risk was being offset by less commercial activity and a higher focus on wellbeing due to the virus. Some organisations even saw an initial drop in accident rates.

However, reported near misses seem to be increasing for many organisations. We have heard some concerns that once activity fully returns to pre-pandemic levels, the risk is going to be significant. For some, the concern was that individuals have 'switched off' from health and safety and the correct approach to procedures and processes, and that the working environment will be quite different for many. For others, there is concern that people won't want to return at all due to fears around the virus, concerns about restructuring and a lack of trust in - and engagement with - the organisation.

The four themes we identified at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic - Trust, Mindset, Resilience, Engagement - will all need to be considered as you prepare your future Health, Safety and Wellbeing plans. Issues identified from the trends arising out of the extended pandemic - mental health, remote working, complacency in operational activities, changing regulations and communications - will also have to be factored into organisational thinking.

Building on their agility at the start of the crisis, leaders will need to activate these elements as they move swiftly and decisively to re-energise their organisations. It really is the time to act rather than react. In a world of uncertainty, the goal must be to rebuild for the longer term. Companies that are strong and resilient will be better placed to survive and prosper. Nothing can be taken for granted; a balanced Health, Safety and Wellbeing culture needs to be cultivated.

1 Capture the lessons learned from new ways of working

Many companies are diving into the details of their return plans rather than focussing on the human capital and capabilities needed for a return. The time of populating spreadsheets with data to react to a crisis has passed. Identifying the numbers of people to fit into specific offices, adaptations to communal areas and so on, are great tasks but they are just part of the future jigsaw. To energise the workforce, it is important to build trust and understanding. Engagement and communication will be essential.

Co-location and collaboration will be key themes as organisations approach hybrid ways of working. There will be a vital need for business leaders to refocus on the desired Health, Safety and Wellbeing culture for their organisations so that they can build sustainable capabilities as the world emerges from the pandemic.

Technology and people interacting in new ways will be at the heart of future success for business. Accomplishments forged during the crisis need to be hardwired into the business model. For instance, identify the complacencies and habits (good and bad) which have emerged and analyse the key levers to shift these behaviours.

Leaders must ensure their organisations do not revert to old behaviours and processes. So, consider making changes that can sustain speed in ways that will inspire and engage employees.

2 Capture and sustain the speed of decision taking

As a challenge for business leaders, the pandemic has been unlike anything they have ever faced. It forced an abrupt dislocation of much of the workforce, shifted customer behaviours, fragmented supply chains, and forced every aspect of business performance into the spotlight. Most organisations moved quickly, and people behaved accordingly.

Companies have had to change. Many business-as-usual activities - working with colleagues, contracting partners, suppliers, customers - would have failed otherwise. They had to increase the speed of decision making while managing productivity safely, use technology and data in new ways, and accelerate the scope and scale of operations. Organisations in a wide range of sectors and geographies have accomplished difficult tasks and achieved positive outcomes in record time.

Now is the time for business leaders to find ways to recapture, and sustain, the sense of organisational energy, urgency, and speed - without the accompanying fear and stress. If some of these changes become permanent, if companies could operate in expedient and ingenious ways while keeping their employees safe, these shifts hold the potential to recalibrate the business and its operations which will ultimately improve the company's performance potential and Safety Culture maturity.

3 Be clear on purpose - engage individuals

As companies move to new, maybe more permanent ways of working, some people may feel some disengagement. Those longed-for workplace interactions, instead of video conference calls, may not be as meaningful as anticipated. Many will be basing their career decisions on their return experience.

Since March 2020 there has been a lot of crisis management in play. Urgent corporate priorities have superseded more intangible, personal considerations. Heath, Safety and Wellbeing have been a key focus. Harnessing the power of many in your workforce with a focus on purpose (individual and company) can be a key lever for engagement and collaboration. Clear purpose can also be a guiding light when it comes to shifting safety culture and enhancing workplace wellbeing.

During times of crisis, individual purpose can signpost a future that helps people face up to uncertainties and allows them to navigate them better. It helps to mitigate the damaging effects of long-term stress. Returning to the workplace, individual purpose aligned to company purpose can build employee experience, raise engagement, and increase those positive feel-good factors that lead to improved feelings of wellbeing.

4 Assess the impacts on individuals

While we may assess the lasting impact of the pandemic on the workforce, the mix of occupations, and the skills required, consider the individual's future journey.

Before Covid-19, the largest disruptions to work involved new technologies, growing trade and relocations. Covid-19 has, for the first time ever, elevated the importance of the physical dimension of work. Some work that has been done remotely for the last twelve months, is best done in person. Negotiations, critical business decisions, brainstorming sessions, appraisals and sensitive feedback, and induction sessions for instance.

Remote work also offers companies the opportunity to enrich their diversity by identifying workers who, for family and other reasons, were unable to relocate to cities where opportunities were concentrated before the pandemic. Start with a granular analysis of the tasks required for the business, rather than the jobs. Then there will be a clearer identification as to what work can be done remotely.

5 Use Communications to engage and motivate

To re-energise the organisation - to act rather than react, it is important to be clear about purpose and focus on engagement. The methods you use to share this energy will be your key to success. The next normal may also mean resetting how companies relate to and communicate with their people and how they should address future Health, Safety and Wellbeing issues.

SUMMARY

Yes, uncertainty remains. But now the goal must be to rebuild for the longer term. Companies that are strong and resilient will have firmer foundations from which to build future success. Those are qualities that can't be taken for granted; they need to be cultivated.

So, in conclusion, start with an idea - that returning is an opportunity with specific levers, not a plan to be implemented or a date to be achieved. Then go on to more specific considerations, such as the need to move fast and rethink where and how work gets done.

Finally, being clear about individual impacts and people management will be key in understanding the future workplace and in taking care of people. And having a sense of purpose knits everything together. Knowing what you as an individual stand for and how that fits with what your company stands for - and living those values - provides a solid foundation for future success.

We know that every organisation is unique, and the attitudes, values and beliefs of your people will shape how they respond during and beyond the pandemic.

To find out more about our Crisis Culture thinking or culture change work, contact: briony.ormond@tribecc.com or call her on 07866 586710.

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