

Morgan Lovell

BACK-TO-THE-OFFICE

A checklist to ensure a safe and successful return to work

CHECKLIST:

Back-to-the-Office

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Introduction

Your business and your leadership is being pressure-tested as never before. As lockdown relaxes beyond the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, radical changes are essential in your place of work.

Now is the time to set a course for your organisation's future in a world that is unrecognisable. This document is written to ensure you consider every aspect of your work environment when your people come back-to-the-office. After all, when your C-suite reflects on this period of time, you will want to score yourselves a healthy nine or 10/10.

Your criteria for doing so will fall under one simple heading: your people.

- How well did you treat them?
- How closely did you listen to them?
- Did you make them feel *inspired*, valued and above everything else, *safe*?

This must be at the forefront of your thinking, your decisions, actions and leadership in the coming months.

To safely allow your people to return to their place of work, we recommend four focus areas for your protocol: Creation, Communication, Implementation and Review. This checklist sets out the process in manageable stages. It will be your Back-to-the-Office Bible.

Morgan Lovell's teams of workplace consultants are ready in the wings to support you in achieving the best possible outcome in this unprecedented time. We have decades of experience leading businesses through pivotal periods of change. As a result of these strategic change-management partnerships, our clients have emerged more resilient and robust than they were before.

We know, together, we can do the same.

BENEFITS TO YOUR BUSINESS

By providing clarity around the benefits to your business of having a comprehensive back-to-the-office plan, you will focus all your minds on the importance of achieving a successful outcome.

Reduce risk of spreading COVID-19

This is the priority driving all your workplace assessments and planning.

Strengthen company culture

Demonstrating leadership tenacity now will engender a future based on trust and a sense of true value for individuals and teams.

Increase staff well-being

Safety is paramount. Your culture of listening and inclusion will drive your people's sense of well-being at work. Your ability to address their concerns and take subsequent action will result in an enhanced sense of staff contentment.

Maximise productivity

Identifying capacity, repurposing space, rotating teams and ensuring people are cared for will contribute to maximum output.

Improved recruitment and retention

New talent will react positively to a business that has put the health and well-being of its people high up on their agenda in this crucial time. Existing staff will be more likely to stay if their leadership has met their needs professionally and personally in this difficult time.

1. Assessment of risk and creation of protocol

The procedures you establish will be unique to the culture and identity of your business. They will nurture the roots of your organisation and provide achievable boundaries for a safe and happy workplace.

Your people must be encouraged to contribute from day one. Their input to establishing and developing your workplace procedures will ensure trust and cement adoption. Not only playing a part in re-booting your business, this process will strengthen your culture for years to come.

The overriding principle is that all business related activities must follow HM Government guidelines and this document should be read in conjunction with those as they are updated - [click here](#)

Where social distancing guidelines cannot be followed in full in relation to a particular activity, you should consider whether that activity needs to continue for the business to operate.

1.1 RISK ASSESSMENT

You need to carry out an assessment of the risks posed by COVID-19 in your workplace

Share the results of the assessment with your workforce

If you have over 50 employees, post the results on your website

Post signs in your building to say:

We confirm we have complied with the government's guidance on managing the risk of COVID-19

FIVE STEPS TO SAFER WORKING TOGETHER

- We have carried out a COVID-19 risk assessment and shared the results with the people who work here
- We have cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures in line with guidance
- We have taken all reasonable steps to help people work from home
- We have taken all reasonable steps to maintain a 2m distance in the workplace
- Where people cannot be 2m apart, we have done everything practical to manage transmission risk

1.2 PROTOCOL PLANNING TEAM

Create your protocol planning team to involve key people from:

- Human resources
- Property teams
- Executive board
- Office manager
- Operations director

1.3 COLLECT DATA

Gather data from staff regarding their return to the workplace

Allow this data to inform the workplace strategy:

- Workplace survey
- Virtual focus groups
- Online interviews with various personnel

Ask your people about:

- Their expectations
- Their hopes regarding flexible working
- Their anxieties
- What they expect from the office upon their return

Assess your floor plans and workspaces in their current form

Establish the capacity of all your office workspaces based on 2 metre space restrictions

1.4 ASSESS ALL WORKSPACES

Set standards for reception and welcome areas and incoming goods:

- Establish conventions regarding external visitors /contractors
- Establish procedures for the acceptance of deliveries
- Revise visitor arrangements to ensure social distancing
- Revise procedures around personal deliveries to workplaces

Set standards for entry and exit points

- Establish need for additional parking or bike rack facilities to account for reduced use of public transport
- Review storage for employees clothes and bags
- Set standards for one-way traffic flows
- Define where touch points can be eliminated
- Set standards for lift lobbies, lift usage and escalators

Set standards for common walkways:

- Establish circulation paths to control movement flows
- Identify high risk pinch points and establish approach based on:
 - access doors
 - security pass points
- Identify high-density walkways
- Reassess floor plans
- Identify where and if one-way movement flows can be introduced

- Consider fire regulations in all procedure planning
- Consider building regulations in all procedure planning

Set standards for desk areas:

- Establish capacity of desk spaces
- Assess workspace:
 - replan current desk space to allow 2m distance
 - assign individual desks
 - repurpose hot desks

Set standards for meeting/conference rooms:

- Small (less than 8 capacity)
- Large (more than 8 capacity)

Set standards for booth/pod areas:

- Establish etiquette rules to avoid selfish behaviours in private spaces
- Determine where repurposing can be achieved

Set standards for relaxation areas

- Establish etiquette rules

Assess size and density capacity of all common areas and establish resulting guidelines around:

- Washrooms
 - Single
 - Disabled
 - Group
- Breakout areas
- Restaurant/cafés/tea points
- Shared phone rooms
- Security hubs
- Kitchens
- Speciality areas
 - Libraries
 - Multi-faith/prayer rooms
 - IT support space/help desks
 - Storage areas/coat cupboards/shower rooms
 - Fitness areas
- Printer rooms
- Photocopier areas
- Rubbish and recycling areas
- Mail rooms

- Maintenance rooms
- Storage spaces
- Filing areas
- Locker spaces
- Stairwells
- Exits
- Vending areas
- Smoking areas

Set standards for shared equipment/services:

- Rubbish and recycling
- Internal mail
- External mail
- Whiteboards
- Conference room controls
- AV/TV controls
- Window blind controls
- A/C controls

1.5 DEFINE STAFFING LEVELS

Plan for the minimum number of people needed on site to operate safely and effectively

Establish a rota system based on workspace assessment and protocols

Assess IT requirements to fulfil rotating teams and continued home working

Plan to stagger teams by rotation:

- Start times during the day
- Days of the week
- Week on / week off

Ensure rotated teams simulate your typical work environment and once they are established, avoid changes so that where contact is unavoidable, this happens between the same people.

Stagger and lengthen lunch and break times to avoid overloading of shared spaces

1.6 ASSESS CLEANING REQUIREMENTS

Establish which areas present high/medium and low risks for transmission of the COVID-19 virus and subsequently review the cleaning strategy for each area.

- Review standards and procedures for reception and welcome areas and incoming goods
- Review standards and procedures for common walkways, lobbies and lifts
- Review standards and procedures for desk areas
- Review standards and procedures for conference rooms
- Review standards and procedures for booth areas
- Review standards and procedures for relaxation areas
- Review standards and procedures for common areas:
- Washrooms
 - Single
 - Disabled
 - Group
 - Breakout areas
 - Restaurant/cafés/tea points
 - Shared phone rooms
 - Security hubs
 - Kitchens
 - Speciality areas
 - Libraries
 - Multi-faith/prayer rooms
 - IT support space/help desks
 - Storage areas/coat cupboards/shower rooms
 - Fitness areas
 - Printer rooms
 - Photocopier areas
 - Rubbish and recycling areas
 - Mail rooms
 - Maintenance rooms
 - Storage spaces
 - Filing areas
 - Locker spaces
 - Stairwells
 - Exits
 - Vending areas
 - Smoking areas
 - Company vehicles

Review standards for shared equipment/services:

- Whiteboards
- Conference room controls
- AV/TV controls
- Window blind controls
- A/C controls

Address reviewed requirements with cleaning company

2. Communication

Life back-in-the-office will represent a complete metamorphosis in our business environment. You are required to undertake a change management operation of the highest importance to reflect this.

Your key to success will be to: plan thoroughly and collaboratively with your people; implement your plan skilfully; and, most importantly, openly advertise the new etiquette and rules expected from your people with clarity and integrity.

Your communication plan will need to address the minutiae of detail. “Back-to-Office Change Champions” will be critical to making your message heard. Regular reviews, refinements and repetition will build on a successful implementation.

2.1 WRITE COMMUNICATION PLAN

Establish “Back-to-the-Office Change Champions”:

- People who train, communicate and are points of contact providing procedural clarity
- Influencers
- Senior enough to make decisions
- Skilled motivators
- Know your business inside-out
- Great communicators
- Highly organised

Establish procedures if personnel have complaints regarding co-user behaviours

Brand the change messages to identify from “business as normal” messages

Educate your team on the benefits of returning to the office:

- Face-to-face contact
- Technical amenities

Explain the benefits of continuing to work from home:

- Work/life balance
- Environmental benefits

Adopt different channels of communication:

- email
- Intranet
- videos
- conference calls
- newsletters
- posters
- leaflets

Repeat the key messages

2.2 DEVELOP MESSAGING TOOLS

Staff:

- Protocol reminders
- Circulation path markers
- Hand washing instructions
- DIY cleaning guidelines
- FAQ postings
- Stay safe etiquette guides

Clients and visitors:

- Entry point tools to reassure guests and communicate how procedures are being implemented in the building

Deliveries:

- Documents for external personnel on your protocol for receiving inbound deliveries
- Guidelines for your teams setting out procedures for receiving external goods and mail
- Advertise guidelines setting out procedures for handling internal mail

2.3 ONGOING COMMUNICATION

Continuous feedback loop

Support forums

Health concern contacts

3. Implementation

The implementation of your back-to-the-office plan demonstrates your duty of care for your people. Creating workable, considered and highly organised plans will engender trust and above all will keep your people safe.

Embedding cultural values is more important now than ever before. Your leaders must walk the walk. They must demonstrate their commitment to your people's well-being, leading by example when it comes to respecting etiquette and building on established procedures.

Selfish, non-compliant behaviours need to be identified and corrected immediately in order to avoid stress, anxiety and putting your team and your business at risk.

3.1 RECEPTION AND WELCOME AREAS

- Control access via signage
- Reinforce security measures
- Install plexiglass screens at visitors' check-in points
- Remove seating to ensure two metre spaces
- Remove magazines and other non-essentials
- Supply hand sanitiser
- Provide clear guidance on social distancing and hygiene to people on arrival, through signage or visual aids before arrival
- Review entry and exit routes for visitors and contractors to minimise contact with other people

3.2 DESKS

- Reduce the number of desks based on your protocol
- Ensure users are two metres apart
- Assign desks to individuals
- Remove:
 - excess monitors and other equipment
 - surplus furniture
- Re-orientate desks so employees are not facing each other

Eliminate hot desks:

- Implement "clear desk policy" across business
- If not possible to assign all desks, stagger teams of people accordingly
- Allow flexible working (collaborate in the office and stay at home for focused work)
- Ensure IT equipment adequately allows for flexible workspaces
- Separate banks of desks

- Stagger people to fit capacity:
 - Ensure the staggered workforce simulates the typical cross-section of teams
 - If individuals are assigned the same desk during different shifts, consider bringing own keyboard and mouse
 - Ensure IT equipment adequately allows for flexible workspaces
- Ensure cleaning materials are available
- Signage about DIY cleaning

3.3 THE MEETING ROOM

- Remove and store chairs to match density standards and capacity
- Reduce capacity of any in-person meeting to 3 people
- Remove any shared items such as pens
- Maintain use of meeting rooms for 1-1 collaboration (avoid repurposing)
- Ensure cleaning materials and hand sanitiser are available
- Signage about DIY cleaning
- Use floor signage to help people maintain social distancing

3.4 THE PRIVATE BOOTH/POD

- Ensure strict rules around camping
- Ensure cleaning materials are available
- Signage about DIY cleaning

3.5 THE SHARED BOOTH/SEATING POD

- Repurpose as assigned individual desk space or phone booth
- Ensure cleaning materials available
- Signage about DIY cleaning

3.6 THE RELAXED SPACE

- Maintain space with clear rules
- Ensure cleaning materials are available
- Signage about DIY cleaning

3.7 COMMON WALKWAYS

- Work collaboratively with landlords and other tenants in multi-tenant buildings to ensure consistency across common areas such as reception and stairwells
- Implement one-way corridors where possible:
 - Introduce floor markers

- Widen walkways where possible
- Identify pinch-points and areas for queuing
- Implement "One in - One out" systems
- Ensure complete compliance with building regulations and fire regulations

3.8 COMMON AREAS

- Work collaboratively with landlords and other tenants in multi-tenant buildings to ensure consistency across common areas such as corridors and print facilities
- Control entry and exit depending on density allowance
- Stagger breaks and lunchtimes
- Restrict printing or copying to particular times for teams/individuals
- Ensure cleaning materials available
- Signage about DIY cleaning

3.9 SERVICES

- Biometric and security touch points
- Air quality monitoring and control
- Heat/vent/aircon units:
 - Full and rigorous inspection prior to returning to the office
 - Check whether you need to service or adjust ventilation systems so that they do not automatically reduce ventilation output due to lower than normal occupancy
- Door handles:
 - Frequent touch points should be considered as DIY cleaning areas
 - Avoid blocking open any doors that fall within fire regulatory requirements but where possible open windows and doors frequently to encourage ventilation
- Rubbish and recycling:
 - centralised with frequent disposal
- WC flush and taps
 - Frequent touch points should be considered as DIY cleaning areas

3.10 CLEANING

- Review when normal cleans are undertaken
- Clean based on density data:
 - refocus away from conference rooms towards public and common areas
- Establish when and where deep cleans are undertaken
- Use signs and posters to reinforce personal hygiene and DIY cleaning messages

- Increase housekeeping during office hours:
 - maintaining a visible presence will reassure employees
- DIY cleaning requirements
- Review with cleaning contractors
- If you are cleaning after a known or suspected case of COVID-19 then you should refer to the specific HM Government guidance - [click here](#)

4. Review

We all aspire to a return to “normal” and scientists suggest that the current restrictions and the procedures you set now will not need to be a permanent change. However, whilst it represents our current reality, the rules you establish and implement must be revisited regularly to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Every day, your people and your leadership teams will learn from time spent back in their workspace. It is imperative that these learnings are embedded to ensure your foundations are current and inclusive.

4.1 FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH

- Constantly review your back to work plan
- Gather staff opinion via Back-to-the-Office Change Champions:
 - survey to gauge staff feelings
 - observation studies to see how capacity is fulfilled
- Measure the success:
 - How well you mitigated the spread of COVID-19
 - The impact on your culture
 - Staff well-being statistics
 - Staff health records
 - Client perception of how your business coped
 - Productivity figures
 - Recruitment and retention figures