

BUSINESS RESILIENCE HOW TO GUIDE

COVID-19:

Returning to Work –
A People Focus



Locate in Kent



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COVID-19

Returning to Work – A People Focus

Returning to work after lockdown will mean different things to different people but is likely to involve the following:

- Return from furlough, either to working from home or to the workplace.
- Return to onsite working after a period of working from home.
- Return to work post illness (either confirmed COVID-19 positive diagnosis or self-isolation).
- Return to work post shielding of yourself or someone in your household.

No matter the circumstances the aim across all sectors and industries should be an engaged and informed workforce and a safe return to work for everyone.

Official government advice at the time of writing is still to encourage all employees to work from home, if this is possible. For those who now need to return, businesses are going to need to prepare and be ready to deal with the emotional as well as the practical implications.



Where are we right now?

Anxiety is understandably high around returning to work and a recent poll of 1,000 working adults conducted by YouGov for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that 44% of workers felt anxious about going back into the workplace. The same poll revealed that 31% of workers are also anxious about commuting to work.

This illustration below, plotting the phases of disaster, is a really good way of visualising the stages of change that you and your employees may have been through during the pandemic. You can probably recognise some of the points in time over the last few months, right up until the steep drop into disillusionment. Not everyone will reach these phases at the same time, and not everyone will experience it in the same way, but it's a helpful tool to be able to empathise with where your people may be in terms of how they feel.

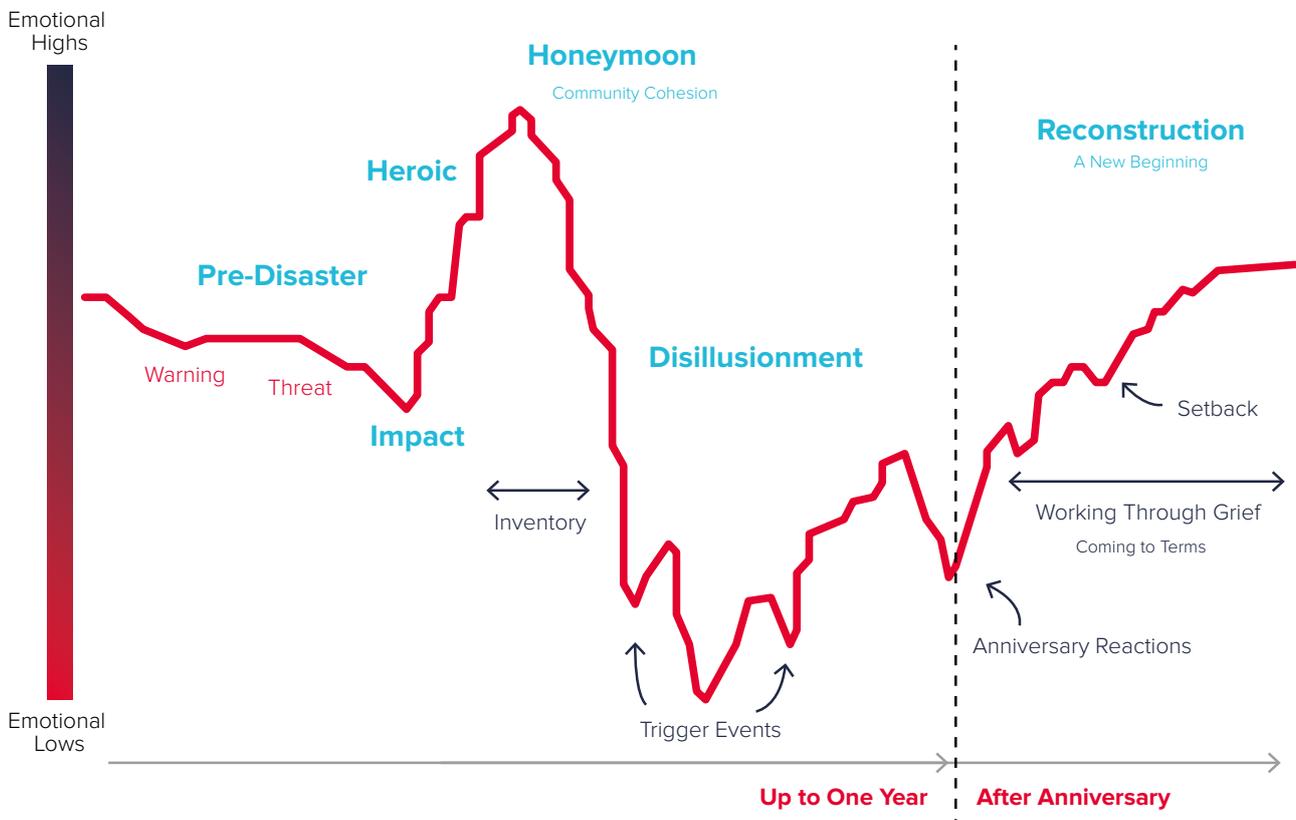


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Being aware of the changes people have gone through and the different phases they may have experienced should help you to understand their current wellbeing. That awareness will help you and those returning to work to adjust and feel as safe as possible. You will want your people to emerge from the disillusionment stage into the reconstruction period where we all try to build and navigate a new normal (whatever that may be).



Reference: www.samhsa.gov/dtac/recovering-disasters/phases-disaster

Return to work criteria

The CIPD is urging businesses to ensure they can meet three key tests before returning employees to work:



1. Is it essential?

Can employees work from home? If not, has the government job retention scheme been used to allow enough time to put safety measures, clear employee guidance and consultation in place?



2. Is it safe?

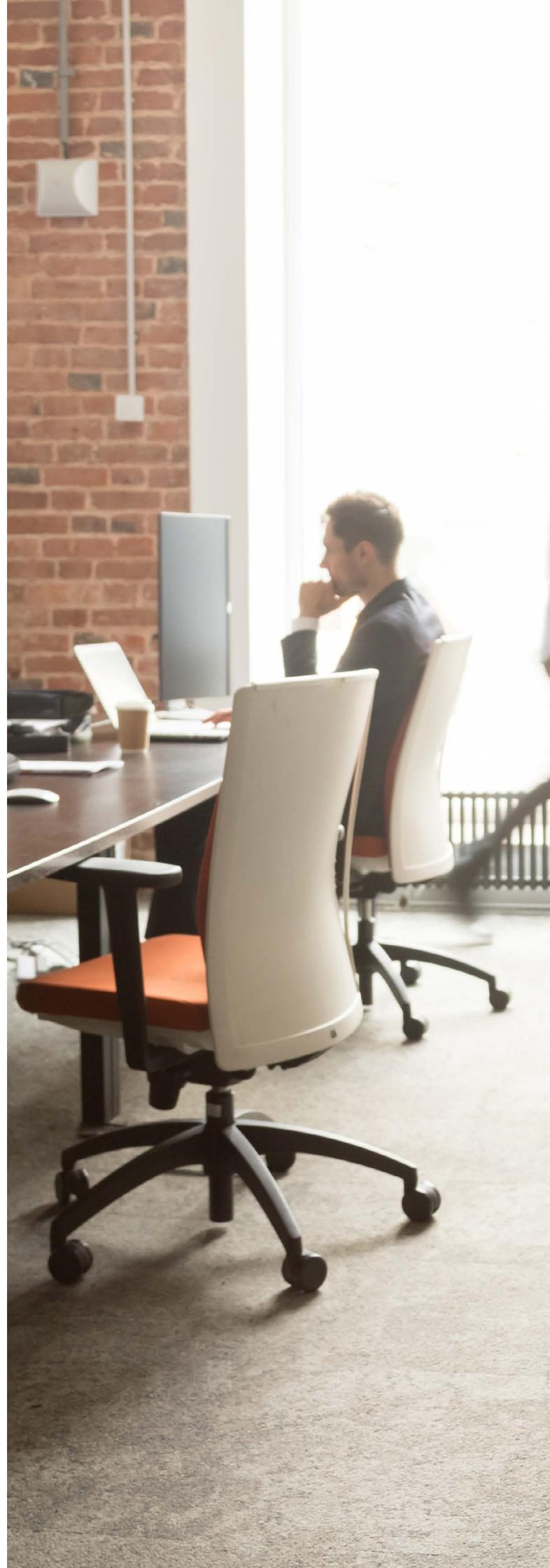
Have you considered all aspects of your duty of care to staff and returning them to the workplace? Have you fully considered if premises are sufficiently safe?



3. Is it mutually agreed?

Have you sufficiently consulted with staff over a return to work and any concerns they may have?

By carrying out these three key tests you can start the process of assessing if a return to the workplace is right for your business and your people.



Scenario planning

Once you have carried out the three key tests - and are sure a return to work is right for your workforce - the next step is to consider scenario planning. What things are likely to happen (actuals) and what things may happen (potentials). By considering both you can make sure you are well prepared.

Actuals:

The actuals that you are likely to face are:

- **Re-induction/refreshers** – Staff will potentially have been off for quite some time. As a result, like any prolonged absence from work, you will need to consider how you return the employee to the workplace. Will they need a phased return? Do they need refresher training particularly around safe working practices? What workplace risk assessments need to be done? Do policies and guidance need to be re-distributed? It may be necessary to organise a brief induction programme to re-familiarise staff.
- **New regulations and guidance** – Many new regulations and a lot of guidance may have been published since your employees were last onsite or working. You need to think about ways to share this all with staff without overwhelming them. It will be essential to think of ways to produce easy to digest information and guidance to staff to ensure they are fully aware of what is expected of them.
- **Contracts and terms and conditions** – On 6 April 2020 a number of employment law requirements came into place. These resulted in changes to the way that contracts of employment are drawn up and when they are issued. Therefore, it will be advisable to review yours to ensure that you are fulfilling your legal obligations. Those changes will also result in having to review your handbook and policies and procedures as well.
- **New ways of working** – Due to the level of uncertainty it will be more important than ever to engage and motivate staff. Your workforce will deliver the goals and targets of your business and therefore you will need to ensure that whatever mechanism you choose works. The nine to five working day as we know it may well end for many as you think about staggering arrival and departure times to increase social distancing. Office spaces are likely to be totally reconfigured and floor markings, one-way systems and signage will become the norm. Make sure you consult and inform staff about these changes as they happen to reduce uncertainty.
- **Mental health** – Lastly, but most importantly, the effect on people's mental health is, as yet unknown, but likely to be huge. Whether they have been ill, suffered a traumatic experience/loss, or been affected by any number of unknown scenarios you can be sure it will be different for each person. As such there will need to be a flexible approach to how mental health and wellbeing are dealt with. Staff needs should be considered on an individual basis to represent their individual experiences. Employers are going to be expected to have regular communication with workers about their mental and physical wellbeing. Be prepared to make workplace adjustments if necessary and to deal with issues on a case by case basis.

Factsheets, briefing meetings and easy to read signage will help people to understand new information and get into new habits.

Potentials:

Things that 'might' happen will obviously be different for each company. Tools, such as a business risk register and individual risk assessments, will help to zone in on potential challenges and plan. Issues to consider are:

- **A second peak** – further lockdown and how you might prepare for that.
- **Outbreak** – as staff return onsite an outbreak could occur and planning for how to deal with this will be essential.
- **Mental health** – as the emotional toll becomes apparent resources around counselling and employee support may need to be planned for.
- **Childcare** – how will your staff be affected by their children being off from school, some children are returning but not all and timelines are not yet clear.
- **Redundancy** – as business resumes (or not) it may be necessary to restructure and the formal redundancy process followed.

Bringing things back together

After considering your 'actuals' and 'potentials' and the factors relating to both, you will need to look closely at your resource planning to make sure that it matches your workload in terms of numbers and capabilities. Workload is likely to be phased as you re-engage your clients and supply chain.

Brief your managers fully before a return to work so that they are equipped and informed to be able to deal with any concerns and questions staff may have.

Top tips:

- ✓ Prepare return to work checklists for managers to ensure all points are covered and standards are consistent across all areas.
- ✓ Keep communication clear and consistent across the company.
- ✓ Set up surveys to understand staff fears and concerns and how reintegration is going.
- ✓ Prioritise re-familiarising staff with the workplace so that they feel safe before returning.
- ✓ Consider filming a video walkthrough of premises to share with staff before they attend so they can see what the workplace will look like and be mentally prepared.
- ✓ Encourage managers or HR to call staff individually before return to discuss any concerns.
- ✓ Carry out return to work meetings for each member of staff and record any concerns.

Contact us

If you would like further information or guidance around this subject, please email: enquiries@locateinkent.com



Further reading and references

www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus

www.samhsa.gov/dtac/recovering-disasters/phases-disaster

www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/one-five-anxious-returning-work-poll-finds

www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/news-articles/businesses-should-pass-three-tests-before-bringing-people-back-work