



ARTICLE

# Coping with change to COVID-19 guidance

by Matthew Solon

“I was doing so well. I’d got through six months of lockdown, of home schooling, of sharing childcare and chores with my partner and of holding down my job. Getting back to the office felt like a massive relief – we were on our way back to something like normal. Then, after three days, the goalposts moved again and we were back to full-time working at home. I took a real downer.” *(Client in a recent, online FTI Consulting workshop)*

## 22 September

UK Government announces a policy U-turn. People are now actively encouraged to work from home.

## 5%

Within one week, the number of people travelling to work declined by 5% – *Office of National Statistics*

## 35%

of executives fear workers may be demotivated by this extended time away from the office – *LinkedIn*

From active encouragement of a return to the office, the Government has gone back to strongly recommending working from home. Many companies have aligned their own guidance with Government policy. We are working with our clients as they support their people in navigating through this latest episode in the unfolding drama of the Coronavirus crisis.

Our core recommendation is this – take decisive, integrated action in two distinct but intimately related areas. The first is a programme of practical steps. The second is actively shaping and strengthening the psychological contract between employer and employee.

### A programme of practical steps

- **Say what’s important.** Repeat the central message that health and safety is your first priority.
- **Achieve total clarity on your policy.** Make a clear distinction between the advisory and the mandatory. Are some people able to return to the office? If so, what are the criteria and how will those criteria be applied?
- **Manifest your commitment to health and safety** in the precautions you put in place – the completion of a health assessment form before coming in, approval by line managers of each request, the whole panoply of one-way systems, sanitisation, cleaning regimes, mask-wearing and deep-cleaning.

- **Don't shy away from sensitive issues.** When are people expected to take annual leave? Can they carry forward any entitlement into 2020? Calculate the cost and impact of your approach and then communicate it clearly.
- **Align all your communications** – senior leaders, the HR team, line managers – everyone briefed and ready to share your approach and to answer questions from your people.
- **Be forward-looking.** Demonstrate that you are thinking and planning beyond COVID-19. Prove that you are not simply reacting to current events and that you have a plan to create an employee value proposition for the future.

### Shape and strengthen the psychological contract

- **Empathise with your people.** What will they think and feel about the employee experience that is now on offer? For example, those mandatory health assessment forms – reassure staff that their personal data will be secure and their privacy protected
- **Satisfy the deeply human hunger for recognition.** Recognise all the adaptability and flexibility they have shown so far, thank them for what they are doing now.

- **Commit to the Christmas season.** Involve people in planning ways to come together, to share and to celebrate the festive season – just as you always have done in the past.
- **Celebrate what hasn't changed.** Find people who are living your values, manifesting the best aspects of your culture, achieving great results for your clients or customers, supporting colleagues and helping your local community - and then publicise their stories across your organisation.
- **Increase leadership profile and presence.** One-to-ones, town-halls, team briefings, leadership forums, all-staff emails – anything and everything to show that your community of leaders and managers is totally committed to the organisation and to the wellbeing of its people.
- **Support your community of leaders and managers.** The work they are doing to support the mental health and wellbeing of staff is demanding and carries its own emotional burden. Agree the key traits of leadership in tough times – trustworthy, caring, stable, resourceful and positively focused – and help your leaders bring those qualities to the leadership they show.



### ABOUT THE PEOPLE & TRANSFORMATION PRACTICE

We work alongside clients to design, implement and embed impactful people-focused transformation. We support people, teams and organisations to adapt against a backdrop of disruption and displacement of operating models. Our expertise lies in workforce transformation, organisational design, restructuring, change management, leadership enablement and employee development as well as culture transformation and internal communication.

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#### About FTI

FTI Consulting is an independent global business advisory firm dedicated to helping organisations manage change, mitigate risk and resolve disputes: financial, legal, operational, political & regulatory, reputational and transactional. FTI Consulting professionals, located in all major business centres throughout the world, work closely with clients to anticipate, illuminate and overcome complex business challenges and opportunities. For more information, visit [www.fticonsulting.com](http://www.fticonsulting.com) and connect with us on Twitter (@FTIConsulting), Facebook and LinkedIn.

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