



FTI Vaccination Playbook: Navigating the Complexities with Data and Empathy

As COVID-19 vaccinations become more accessible, C-suite executives around the globe are racing to assess liability, define policy and answer an onslaught of questions from employees. For many, widespread vaccination acceptance unlocks opportunity to bring more employees back to the workplace and define the next normal, but the legal questions are complicated, and while many experts agree vaccination can be required, it's not clear that they should be required in all instances.

66%

Americans who would choose to be vaccinated if presented with the opportunity (Jan. 2021)²

60% people of color

70% white respondents

59% earning <\$50k/year

71% earning >\$50k/year

56% people under 45

70% people 45 or older

The good news is that willingness to be vaccinated is increasing. In October 2020, a CNN poll¹ found that just 51 percent of Americans would choose to be vaccinated if presented with the opportunity. By January 2021², that number had risen to 66 percent.

That said, there is still a significant gap to be bridged to achieve herd immunity within the workplace, and that gap is even more pronounced within certain groups. Just 60 percent of people of color said they would be vaccinated (compared to 70 percent of white respondents), only 59 percent of people making less than \$50,000 per year would be vaccinated (compared with 71 percent of those making greater than \$50,000 per year) and just 56 percent of people under 45 would be vaccinated (compared with 70 percent of people 45 and older).

Considering the very personal and emotional context of the coronavirus and its vaccines, it should be assumed that employee perceptions and beliefs will vary considerably and many employees will not feel safe returning to the workplace until herd immunity is reached. Employers who hope to encourage vaccination for the benefit of broader health and wellness goals will be required to launch a carefully considered campaign to increase confidence and comfort levels in those who are hesitant.

1. <http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2020/images/10/05/rel12a--coronavirus.pdf>

2. <http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2021/images/01/21/rel1c--coronavirus.pdf>

FTI Consulting's Vaccine Playbook helps employers accelerate adoption through a series of communications and engagement strategies appealing to both the rational and emotional elements of this ongoing debate:



Primary Perception Research

While it may be tempting to handle vaccination as a matter of compliance, the debate is much more nuanced and emotionally charged than other compliance-related topics. Lives have been lost, many groups continue to feel underrepresented in the data, vaccination may be at odds with some religious beliefs and people are being asked to make decisions without knowing the long-term implications. It is therefore important to begin any vaccination campaign with a thorough understanding of employee perceptions, concerns and intentions by sub-group, so the appropriate strategies can be mapped to each location and team.



Government Guidelines Inventory

Employees are flooded with information from local, state and national governments, health authorities and the media – and it is important that leaders and influencers involved in vaccination campaigns are prepared to provide reliable guidance and address the inevitable questions that result. Translating rapidly changing, complex political and regulatory standards will be essential to making the right decisions regarding employee safety, maintaining trust and ensuring that all vaccination-related collateral is appropriately tailored for local audiences.



Credible Influencers

The right external and internal influencers can be powerful motivators among those who continue to have reservations about the safety or efficacy of vaccines, but it is clear that strict hierarchies will not motivate the desired action in all instances. Leaders who race to spotlight their own vaccinations may be perceived as jumping the line, even as resisters wait to hear from people who are in more similar circumstances. This is why it is critical to understand both internal and external networks of influence at the start of the campaign and to build mutually beneficial relationships with health experts, community leaders and other highly regarded local personalities to maximize impact.



Targeted Planning

An effective communications, engagement and content strategy begins with a consistent narrative that is tailored to the concerns and motivators cited by each employee subgroup and brought to life through a number of channels. Strategies should include a mix of push and pull communications tactics and enable leaders to manage through potentially controversial situations. A decision not to be vaccinated may be perceived by some as putting the lives of others in jeopardy, while those who have made a personal decision to abstain from the vaccine may feel pressured or discriminated against.



“Glocal” Implementation

Consistency will be critical given the legal considerations in play, but successful implementation will be dictated by local nuances related to job responsibilities, employee demographics, vaccine availability, local guidance and cultural sensitivities. It is therefore essential that local leaders are equipped and empowered to adapt messages for their teams with regular content updates and training.



Monitoring & Measurement

While it is always tempting to measure communications outputs, the most important metrics for vaccination campaigns focus on impact (e.g., favorable changes in perceptions of the vaccine and its efficacy) and outcomes (e.g., the number of employees who choose to be vaccinated and the corresponding impact on reported COVID cases and/or exposure-related absences). Multiple feedback mechanisms will ensure employers are able to identify, understand and address areas of resistance to improve outcomes over time.

If encouraging vaccine uptake is your goal, a successful communications campaign will rest on listening, empathy, transparency, segmenting your audience and staying in command of an array of variables.

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