The NEW NORMAL,
A Perspective towards a New Normality and Working Conditions following COVID-19

A DISCUSSION ON WHAT MAKE US FEEL SAFE AT WORK

BÌNH THƯỜNG MỚI: Điều gì làm cho chúng ta cảm thấy an toàn trong công việc

AN NORMAL NUA: CÉARD A DHÉANANN SÉ SAOR IN AISCE AG OBAIR

نئی عام بات: ہمیں کام پر کیا لگتا ہے محفوظ

IL NUOVO NORMALE: Cosa ci fa sentire al sicuro sul lavoro

LE NOUVEAU NORMAL: Qu'est-ce qui nous fait nous sentir en sécurité au travail

Towards a New Normal at Work

After the first outbreak on COVID-19 in China, the spread to Europe and other continents, the WHO's pandemic declaration, the already long duration of confinement conditions in some countries and the unknown effects on everybody's life, we are yet to see the long effects of the pandemic evolution. Society is yet over studying and analysing what will be the economic and social consequences in the longer term globally. One thing is certain, the biggest impact so far is in people's behaviour. It is too early yet to talk about the psychology of people after COVID-19 but one of the clearest consequences is the trust that people have lost in relation to health conditions, not only in their closed circle of individuals, but also in others surrounding them. People are thinking now, about how many of those individuals around them are healthy? or who has not worried about going outside and thinking twice if it is safe (healthy), to use the public transport which is shared with other individuals or going into a place with another group of unknown people. Those questions may remain for a long time and certainly the worst of the pandemic effects is how society as a whole can trust each other to ensure good health.

We believe that defining a safe return to work, identifying a list of activities and actions for creating a new normal at work, will bring a positive attitude in everyone

As a research and scientific community we are all committed to address the challenges of COVID-19, from the most complex aspect, which is to find a solution to also find contention methods or also generate best practices for living or also best practices to pass through the COVID-19 effects. A series of informative documents have been generated and knowing a lot of information has been published already. In this document we only focus on collecting experiences from people who usually worked in open office environments and from those who their main activity involves interacting with others, either in small meeting rooms and/or medium size group meetings or simply in office corridors, in labs, in a classroom and/or in general indoors locations. The document will describe some ideas but also some facts in a form of recommendations on how people can safely return to do their work after COVID-19

pandemic lockdown is lifted. This can be considered as a wish list of overall (general) and specific (particular) requirements that potentially can help to recover trust. It is possible some of these measures have already been implemented but if not they certainty will be relatively easy to implement and the main benefit of considering them is gaining trust to make people feel safe at work. Those activities and measures that need to be implemented shall be taken as methods to enable people to develop, not only new methods, but also to provide indirect psychological support for a new normal start in terms of work practices after the pandemic.

Developing a business response plan in line with all guidelines to keep COVID-19 under control will enable us to develop a new normal for ourselves

Safety First

Safety is the basis for a good start in the new normal, from home to the street and as soon as we return to work premises after COVID-19, feeling safe in relation to health conditions is the most important issue. The following sections describe briefly the activities and actions that could be taken in our working areas, working space and building premises in order to improve/establish a safer working environment; always taking into consideration official recommendations after COVID-19.

Working from home, when possible and returning to work in shifts will minimise the number of people in the building at any one time

Work shifts programme

- Working in shifts increases staff safety by avoiding too many people congregating in the same place at the same time.
- Allocating days to do our necessary activities, either if it is administrative work or technical stuff, having a day in the week when this is done at the office will increase a feeling of safety e.g. Monday dedicated to resolve HR issues, Wednesday dedicated to resolve financial department issues etc.
- Allocating time slots for different teams to work during the day at the office premises, workload distribution is a good example of helping people to feel safe at work.

Rearranging the interior of the building to take account of the new guidelines will help to keep our staff safe while maximising working potential

New arrangements for the office building

Open plan offices in the last two decades are the most modern and common way to work, it is common to see co-workers facing each other's desks with nothing except a couple of monitors in between, the alternatives to help people feel safer at work are:
- Time for a new workspace design, allowing minimal distances recommended,
- Partition walls (wood or fabric) where necessary or when a new design is not possible,
- Transparent shields in appropriate places, for example in shared rooms
- Disinfectant to be provided at the entrance of the open office and to be used by everyone.
- Decontamination station in the main hall entrance, i.e. vaping or steam-based cleaning solutions.
- Wet mat with disinfectant solution for shoes cleaning will remove dust or particles.

Shared spaces need to be managed to reduce overcrowding and increase the feeling of safety at work

Shared spaces at work

- Common Areas (meeting rooms, lobby area, etc.) will need the occupancy level to be monitored and controlled to reduce risk and make people feel confident when visiting.
- Wash Rooms can be enhanced with automatic doors opening, sensors are relatively easy to install and inexpensive these days, this will reduce touching handles in common areas.
- Canteen(s) or food machines should have disinfectant dispensers just before entering and beside the machines to be used just before anyone touches the ordering pad and where possible should be equipped with wireless payment capability.
- Kitchenette, equally to other common areas occupancy should be indicated at the entrance door and be controlled at all the times, additional health and safety procedures should be displayed clearly to indicate the use of disinfectant regularly and practice social distancing.
- Maximum capacity and Room Capacity limitations, the use of counting people sensors and a display with colour code to avoid people entering the room when max capacity is reached.
- Promoting remote attendance at meetings is a common practice that everybody is doing these days. The effects on productivity need to be further researched but this may be a practice for the long term.

Some of the practices developed during the lockdown may need to continue to reduce our vulnerability to viruses

New practices at workplace and buildings

Remedies are always positive but it is well known that tackling the problem at its roots is best. Very few practices are looking at increasing immune system resistance, from better and healthier food consumption to practicing social distancing.
- Social Distancing continues to be the most reliable way to reduce the risk of getting infections, some societies would see this as an anti-social attitude but a trade off in between is always the best practice.
- The Working from Home Scheme is getting more and more popular today as a measure towards reducing risk and making people feel safer, bear in mind that working from home or new healthy working conditions and hygiene practices will need to be exercised rigorously.
- Meeting and Conferences schedule. Scheduling meetings in advance and having a booking system in place will make people more confident when they arrive at a meeting room. A display or led indicating the occupancy of the room will also be a way to increase feelings of safety when approaching the meeting room from a distance.

Self-awareness of our vulnerabilities has increased and thus our needs for personal protective measures and personal equipment

Personal protection measures and equipment

- Providing that common use sanitizer solutions or soap may become empty before the next refill process, the use of personal sanitisers is also a must in new conditions, people can carry a personal mini dispenser and make use of it on a regular basis. This is a number one

element to make people feel safe when approaching workplaces or when meeting people. In relation to COVID-19 not shaking hands is not considered bad manners but refusing to shake hands is. Thus practice waving or bowing when greeting people.
- Gloves are safe but be cautious if you are allergic to latex or rubber.
- Masks are not proven as effective but they are qualified as a best practice not only in pandemic situations but also when you interact with others at work, remember if you start having symptoms of cold or flu before or during the office time, simply go back home.

The use of smart technology (Internet of Things) can play a key role in helping to pass through the Pandemic of COVID-19 and protect us in the long run

Smart Sensors Technology

- Temperature Sensors can be installed in main halls and public access in a manner that temperature checks run on an individual basis, temperature is a good indicator if somethings goes wrong, not necessarily a bad or good evaluation but having an associated led light indicating yellow or green when the body temperature of an individual exceeds a specific temperature. Individuals can let people know if additional precautions should be taken, temperature sensors are well know these days and relatively easy to install.
- Thermal cameras can also be installed at access points to premises, particularly those that have staff controlling the access or check points, these devices are more elaborate than a simple temperature sensor device, thus they can be more accurate and also provide the specific areas where temperature is different from normal and even identify some problems before they become evident.
- Automatic doors play an important improvement to people's healthy feeling, because they will reduce the necessity to touch common areas, having the automatic door, either sliding doors, swinging or revolving types will definitely be an upgrade on building premises to seriously consider and that effectively can make people feel safer at work.
- Occupancy room indicators on each meeting room or common room either with a light indicator i.e. red, green or even the number or individuals in the room can make people at work feel safer or not only feel but act safer, Because this indicator will also avoid people coming in close contact if the light or number is visible at the door people will not interrupt ongoing conversations or meetings.
- Availability signals are a good upgrade in order to prevent people touching handles and doors unnecessarily, a simple colour code or an icon indicating not to disturb will reduce the number of people touching them, the availability signals can be synchronized with different elements in the room like capacity sensors, it is useful when a meeting is in process, software applications automatically change status when conference calls are finished, or simply when someone does not want to be disturbed.
- Mobile applications to have a traceability for sick people or informing others on the health conditions of other individuals are an important element to consider for new normal conditions. Mobile applications can play an important role not only as a social support for the COVID-19 pandemic, they are also a way to reduce getting into physical contact and to reduce the need to come into contact with other individuals.
- Web applications are necessary to monitor conditions and keep people well informed, in today's world where thousands of information sources are available and there is no reliable way to verify/validate the information that exists. Having a dedicated channel is crucial, official

sources can be a good starting point but a more dedicated and perhaps personalised online channel will make people feel better and safer (health related) at work.

Tracking, tracing and testing people who have come in contact with COVID-19 is recognized internationally as a key activity for containing the virus spread

Health and Safety procedures

- Improve current health and safety procedures to cover health emergencies including COVID-19 and other diseases that are transmissible by contact i.e. virus and infections.
- Create new procedures in how to act when someone self-identifies or is identified by others having some symptoms or the technology is making some indications to prevent future health hazards.
- Track and Trace procedures can be created and implemented to guarantee good public health and thus promote healthy practices and improve people's confidence at work.
- Involve ethical committees in all the activities and the creation of procedures to reduce any unexpected attitude or discriminative situation that is not desired and does not promote healthy conditions.

Working with the best public health advice as part of a Global to Local initiative will help us all to get back to work in a safe and efficient way

Getting back to work - Developing your COVID-19 Protocol

After studying several government protocols for lifting confinement and de-escalation in different countries we have identified a set of activities as general rules, recommendations and good practices to follow at work to make workers feel safer. The sections below are aimed at developing a response plan or to have a check-up list if you already have one implemented.

Developing a Response Plan

The first step is to create a dedicated team to study the current conditions at work and create the response plan looking at implementing prevention, control of the situation and measuring effectiveness of the plan, always having as main objective improving mental health and wellbeing. The overall general aspects of the response plan to take into consideration are:

❖ update the plan as necessary, we are looking at safe health practices not perfection
❖ communicate the response plan and updates to workers on a regular basis
❖ establish a clear procedure for dealing with suspected health hazard cases e.g. COVID-19
  • Train managers and create teams responsible to deal with such cases
  • Keep log of contact groups to help in contact tracing
  • Provide instructions for workers in case a suspected case is identified
  • Define and make available isolation areas for suspected cases
  • Make sure a well identified location and the provision of:
    – ventilation.
    – tissues, hand sanitiser, disinfectant and/or wipes
    – PPE, gloves, masks
    – clinical waste bags
  • Facilitate "stay at home" policies for people with symptoms

- Promote hand hygiene
    – provision, training on how to do it and correct use of cleansing materials
    – practice regularly;
        - after coughing and sneezing
        - before and after eating
        - before and after preparing food
        - if in contact with someone even if no symptoms are evident
        - before and after being on public transport (if using it)
        - before and after being in a crowd
        - when arriving and leaving the workplace/other sites
        - before having a cigarette or vaping
        - when hands are dirty
        - before and after toilet use
    – avoid touching eyes, mouth, or nose
    – have access to facilities to support hand hygiene
      (for example hand sanitiser/hand wipes/hand washing facilities)
    – do not share objects that touch mouths, for example, bottles or cups.
    – use your own pens for signing in.
- Respiratory Hygiene
    – awareness, facility, practice
    – breath with your mouth closed
- Physical Distancing across all working activities
    – no hand shaking policy
    – avoid multiple occupancy of offices, utilise free spaces
    – consistent working and breaks of small teams
    – organize breaks, not everyone at the same time in the same place
    – reorganize working and break areas to allow recommended distancing
    – stagger canteen use or close it if physical distancing is not possible
      (if closed then deliver alternatives)
    – promote online meetings as much as possible
    – one way systems for access/egress routes in the workplace where
      practicable
    – each team should (where reasonably and practicable) be provided with their
      Own communal facilities (washrooms, kitchens and communal rooms) in order
      to avoid the additional burden of shift-wise use and the necessity to clean
      between occupancy by different teams. If this is not possible, employers
      should implement phased use and an enhanced cleaning regime
    – prevent gatherings of workers in the workplace
    – where 2 metre worker separation cannot be ensured by
      organisational means, alternative protective measures should be put
      in place, for example:
        - Install physical barriers, such as clear plastic sneeze guards
          between workers, etc.
        - Maintain at least a distance of 1 metre between side to side seats or
          as much distance as is reasonably practicable
        - Minimise any direct worker contact
        - Make face masks available to the workers

- At Risk/Vulnerable Workers
  - work from home
  - if not possible then must be preferentially supported
- Regular cleaning and disinfecting work areas and equipment

❖ **Implement prevention and control measures**
- Declaration form before return to work
- Induction training for all workers about the response plan
- Implement temperature testing
- All measures planned above

❖ **Mental health and well being**
- Support workers suffering anxiety and stress due to events that have happened or are happening in the current situation
- Awareness of any such programs

It is important for all of us to be aware at all times of the up to date information about Covid-19, particularly our local and national policies and plans

Final Comments

Employers contemplating reopening are advised to develop a Covid-19 business response plan, to address the potential level of risk (including for individual workers) and formulate procedures for responding to suspected cases. This short article will help you to start to develop your response plan or simply to confirm points you have already in the current one. Workers getting back to work need to feel they are working in a healthy safe working environment; this will bring as a response peace in mind and increase levels of productivity and dedication to work duties. Wellbeing and health matters at home and particularly at work.

The biggest impact of a pandemic is in people's behaviour, we are yet to see the long effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, people need to recover trust on health conditions surrounding them and enforcing a set of actions as the ones listed in this short article and the implementation of a response plan is a step further in that direction.

Additional Sources of Information

"Looks into the history and evolution of the office based culture and the impact that Covid-19 generated" This article asks what is the point of offices in modern society? From the creation of the first office in 1822, office workers clearly showed a deep dislike of the place and patent lack of productivity which have been referenced in several studies throughout time but they were and still are a necessary evil to run societies (corporate or government). In modern offices, the standard is the norm, everyone looks the same and thinks the same and it also reflects society at large with women or minority representation as one climb up the pyramid. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the already existing trend of remote working which satisfies so many people but the human socialising side starts to take over and the people start to miss conversation with peers and the fact that some see a crispier and clearer cut version of themselves in their office version.

https://www.1843magazine.com/features/death-of-the-office

"What will change from a medical point of view" The different changes cited in this document can be divided into three categories: changes that have to happen (future burnout of medical professional, mistrust of globalisation, improvement of the healthcare system), changes that can happen (creation of an immunity passport, surveillance as an ongoing public health measure, new habits born from social distancing) and what should change (intensive use of AI in healthcare, use of IoT device for health monitoring and telemedicine to shift the point of care and to find a sustainable solution for human activities)
https://medicalfuturist.com/life-after-covid-19-what-will-change/

"This look into how the urban environment could evolve" This shows that with an intense shift toward digital tools by the people in general due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a new way to develop an urban centre could be imagined reaching Net Zero carbon as the actual public transportation system is not suited for social distancing and people at large will turn to private vehicles for transportation to keep up with social distancing.
https://diginomica.com/city-life-must-change-completely-after-covid-19-not-just-get-smarter

"Price Waterhouse Cooper advice on how to return to work" This lists the recommendation from Price Waterhouse Cooper to all businesses about returning to work after Covid-19. It is divided into four main elements: preparation for recovery and readying for a return to work, a list of key decision criteria, creation of a return-to-work transition plan, and the four actions you can take now as you plan the return to work.
https://www.pwc.ie/issues/covid-19/return-to-work-considerations-for-businesses.html

"The do and don't do from Monday May 18th" This official document of the government of Ireland concerning what can and cannot be done from May 18. It is divided into eight categories: stay at home, the only reasons you can leave your home, small groups outdoors, cultural and social measures, workers, retail, personal and commercial activities, health services and, transport and travel.
https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/cf9b0d-new-public-health-measures-effective-now-to-prevent-further-spread-o/

"Galway City Council Reopening" This article explains how Galway city council is organising the exit of confinement following the five phases announced by the government. It announces the creation of a city mobility team to look into post confinement transportation, asks the public to really mind the vulnerable people and introduces guidelines for the construction industry. It also explains under which phase and to which extent Galway city council services will reopen.
https://mcusercontent.com/c722bbb106ff348118090b624/files/eaaa5bce-a4b5-4875-902b-8fee7a76f0d6/GCC_Roadmap_for_Reopening_May_2020.pdf

Official Sources:

Irish De-escalation process
https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Return-to-Work-Safely-Protocol.pdf

German De-escalation process
https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/news/how-germanys-black-sheep-became-a-model-for-its-covid-19-response/

http://www.rfi.fr/en/europe/20200420-germany-coronavirus-lock-down-lifted-partially-economy-schools-angela-merkel-europe

Spanish De-escalation process

https://english.elpais.com/politics/2020-04-28/spains-prime-minister-announces-coronavirus-deescalation-measures.html

https://english.elpais.com/society/2020-04-29/spains-deescalation-measures-what-we-know-so-far.html

https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/consejodeministros/resumenes/Documents/2020/PlanTransicionNuevaNormalidad.pdf

French De-escalation process in English:

https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/news/france-lifts-lid-on-gradual-virus-deconfinement-plan/

https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/Deconfinement-from-Covid-19-coronavirus-in-France-What-is-reopening-when-so-far

https://www.connexionfrance.com/French-news/Map-of-France-shows-departments-as-green-or-red-as-France-plans-deconfinement

In French:
Official site of the French government, there is 6 tabs at the bottom which cover 6 cases, open then that where you get the detailed information:
https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus/strategie-de-deconfinement

Catholic newspaper, this only worthy part of this link is the map of level of COVID-19 spreading at the beginning of the piece:
https://www.la-croix.com/Sciences-et-ethique/Sante/direct-coronarirus-confinement-jour-45-france-plan-deconfinement-ecole-entreprise-cas-mort-monde-2020-04-30-1201091925

Also a government link but the information is more compact
https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/actualites/A14029

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We acknowledge the scientific community and active researchers for their participation and inputs provided to create and validate this document alike the feedback received. The main purpose of this document is to be informative about new normal conditions at work during and after COVID-19 and provide best practices as support for individuals that are getting back to work. Every individual with the correct guidance and understanding can use and adapt the shortlisted activities and actions for **Getting back to work - Developing your COVID-19 Protocol** introduced and explained. We provide this information for free distribution under a creative commons licence with no liability or responsibility of any type towards its authors and with the clear understanding that its content and ideas can be extended, modified, altered.

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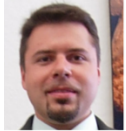
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