



Protecting Your People. Protecting Your Business

Five Keys to Managing the Human Factor and
Driving a Successful Return to the Workplace

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Executive Summary

As companies in every sector around the globe continue weathering the COVID storm, resilience has become the defining factor. While many companies quickly returned essential workers where possible, the bulk of return-to-work strategies in 2020 focused on adapting to remote work and virtual service delivery — finding inventive ways to enable people to remain apart while maintaining business continuity. Looking forward through 2021 and beyond, resilience strategies will increasingly shift toward hybrid approaches that find ways to bring people back together — employees, as well as customers and guests — in order to reclaim productivity and collaboration advantages, avoid potential negative impacts on employee wellness from long-term remote work, and begin rebuilding social capital among staff and with customers.

Most organizations have begun taking some steps to return workers to the physical workplace, ranging from remedial plans to get IT staff back on-site, to more advanced plans such as those in production and manufacturing operations. But all organizations will need to develop more thorough and comprehensive strategies in order to secure their current operations and scale up to bring more workers back.

Moreover, public health experts suggest that continued COVID surges, as well as uncertainty around vaccine time lines and vaccine efficacy against an emerging diversity of coronavirus variants, foreshadow a new potential reality: COVID may remain an ongoing and evolving public health and business challenge for years to come. This signals a major paradigm shift in the business world: The post-pandemic workplace could find itself permanently prioritizing public health and infection control as a core element of business continuity and security best practices. In this new landscape, companies may have to increasingly factor the direct connection between the health of their people and the health of their business.

As organizations consider how to support resilience and protect business continuity in the face of these unprecedented challenges and uncertainties, now is the time to begin building a comprehensive plan for tackling these challenges. If they haven't already done so, businesses can start by developing the policies and processes that will be required to keep people, assets and company secure. A prudent next step for many organizations will be evaluating proactive investments in the right technologies and services that will help them more effectively implement those processes and turn their plans into an achievable reality.

COVID Crisis Presents Multi-Faceted Challenge for Organizations

The pandemic has created complex challenges for almost every organization. On the one hand, there is a clear need to protect the health and safety of staff — and, in many cases, customers or guests. This side of the challenge brings with it a host of compliance concerns, as companies need to follow public health requirements and guidance, Federal, state and local mandates, as well as employment law. As they navigate this challenge, they're also running into murky questions around recording, storing and accessing the personal health information (PHI) and other personally identifiable information (PII) of staff. Companies which rarely dealt with PHI or PII are now faced with a whole new set of information security concerns.

On the other side of this complexity, organizations are trying to create revenue and keep their businesses intact. These challenges continue to force businesses to make tough decisions around balancing revenue against profit. This has led to widespread furloughs and layoffs, as well as a significant reduction in hiring rates, as evidenced by a quick glance at U.S. employment statistics over the past year.¹

Short-Term Resilience Has Defined Success Amid the Pandemic

As companies work to keep operations moving and business open during the pandemic, they have found new ways to be resilient. They've successfully enabled employees to work, communicate and collaborate remotely. They've found new ways of connecting with and serving customers from a distance. The pandemic has undoubtedly led to significant negative impacts — from revenue loss, to layoffs, to bankruptcies and closures. But the remarkable ingenuity and resilience of many businesses, and their employees, has protected them — at least thus far — from more severe impacts from enforced shutdowns and economic slowdowns.

The Acute COVID Crisis May Be Evolving into a Long-Term Paradigm Shift

The term pandemic has acute connotations. Indeed, the COVID pandemic has been described with terms like “storm,” which evoke a period of extreme tumult. But public health experts today suggest that COVID-19 is much less like a storm than a significant change in climate. Newly emerging variants and continued surges across the country and around the world may indicate that COVID-19 is showing no signs of abating on its own in the near future. And while the speed

of vaccine development should be celebrated as a societal accomplishment, uncertainty around the timeline for effective vaccine distribution and administration, along with the efficacy in addressing new variants, and the duration of immunity, suggest that a vaccine may not be the magic bullet that eliminates the risk entirely. Instead, public health and epidemiology experts suggest that COVID-19 may become a seasonal challenge — similar to the flu, but with potentially much more salient public health risks.

Along with the ongoing risks from COVID-19, there are experts and analysts who believe the pandemic has driven a major paradigm shift in the modern workplace — defined by increased awareness and sensitivity to public health concerns. In connection with this shift, health and safety will remain top-of-mind for many employees — every time they enter the workplace, as well as when they consider where they want to work. Companies will similarly prioritize the health and safety of their employees as never before, as they see the clear, powerful connection to business continuity and other critical business outcomes. This new paradigm would cause businesses to make significant and long-term investments in employee health and infection control — not just for the benefit of the employees, but as an essential strategy to support and drive the success of the business.

1. <https://www.bls.gov/covid19/effects-of-covid-19-pandemic-and-response-on-the-employment-situation-news-release.htm#ques8>

Navigating Uncertainty — Making Smart Decisions

Since the start of the pandemic, a combination of evolving medical and scientific understanding, analysis and direction, along with public uncertainty and skepticism, has clouded decision-making around best practices and protocols to mitigate infection risk — in the workplace and everywhere else in daily life. Much has been learned — from a scientific perspective, as well as a policy perspective. Yet there remains no clear consensus about the when and how to fully return to the workplace. Frustrating though it may be to not act based on definitive guidance, each organization must do the best they can to make smart decisions with the best information they have in relation to their specific business and objectives.

That starts with a business having to review the applicable laws, orders, or regulations that apply in the business's states and municipalities in which it works. Most states and municipalities, as well as public health authorities, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), have given guidance on: 1) daily screening & health monitoring for employees; 2) mask-wearing; and 3) proper physical distancing in the workplace.

3 Common Components of Workplace Infection Prevention

SCREENING

Daily screening (including temperature and symptoms) and health monitoring for all employees, as well as other individuals entering the facility.

MASK-WEARING

Consistent and proper mask-wearing when indoors and/or when unable to maintain proper physical distancing.

PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Ensuring all individuals maintain proper physical distancing — whether at a desk, in a meeting room or shared space, or in other public areas of the workplace.

A Major Risk: The Human Factor

As we've seen over the past months, one of the biggest challenges to effective infection prevention is the matter of compliance — i.e., the human factor. Indeed, as expert understanding of COVID-19 continues to grow, the biggest risks in the post-pandemic workplace may become these human-factor challenges:

- **Understanding the what:** Ensuring employees understand the specifics of the business's policies and processes intended to mitigate infection risk and protect employee health.
- **Understanding the why:** Ensuring employees understand the importance or value of compliance with the business's policies and processes — in terms of protecting their personal health, protecting public health, and protecting the health of the business.
- **Reasonably enforcing compliance:** Having protocols in place to enforce compliance with infection control measures — without damaging employee trust and satisfaction.
- **Monitoring compliance:** Effectively measuring compliance to get a real-time view of risk.
- **Effective change-management:** Targeting education and compliance training to support and increase compliance.



Five Keys to Managing the Human Factor and Driving a Healthy, Successful Return to the Workplace

Managing human-factor issues to drive compliance is a complex challenge. But it's hardly new in the business world. In fact, it's arguably at the core of any successful business. Looking to forward-thinking business leaders, analysts, and solution providers, businesses today can draw on proven experiences to build a five-step strategy as part of a successful return to the workplace plan:

- STEP 1** Build policies around your unique objectives, risks & challenges.
- STEP 2** Focus on effective change management, including training & communication.
- STEP 3** Use technology to track & improve compliance.
- STEP 4** Move away from manual workflows to drive your goals of safety & efficiency.
- STEP 5** Leverage Business Intelligence (BI) wherever possible.

STEP 1 Build policies around your unique objectives, risks & challenges¹

Every business initiative should begin with clear objectives. Most organizations are looking to 1) protect the health and safety of their employees, 2) maintain or enhance business continuity and service delivery, and 3) minimize the cost (in terms of new technology spend, lost productivity and additional administrative resources), but it's important to define exactly what those three critical outcomes look like for your organization. With your objectives as the guide, you can then begin building policies and processes that address the unique challenges and risks of your business operations and your workspace(s) when it comes to infection prevention. Creating an environment for returning to work starts with considering the specifics of your workspace(s), which may include:

- **Entry points:** Determine where and when employee (and guests) enter the facility. This is critical to building effective screening protocols to help prevent employees from introducing health risks into the workplace.
- **Size and layout:** Consider the relative dimensions of spaces, but also the layout. If it's an office space, open-concept layouts will present different risks than cubicles or fully enclosed, individual offices. Less structured spaces, such as those found in production, manufacturing or distribution facilities, will have unique risks, as well.
- **Shared spaces:** Consider the specific risks around restrooms, meeting rooms, break rooms, cafeterias, entry ways and other shared public spaces and high-traffic areas.
- **Traffic patterns:** Consider who is where — and when. Do employees work in multiple shifts and/or with different schedules on different days — or do they all work a similar (i.e., 9-to-5) schedule? Think about how different employees typically move around their workspaces — from a desk to a restroom, a printer, or a water cooler. This will help you gain an understanding of which employees are likely to be near each other, and for what length of time.
- **Job requirements:** Consider how the specific job requirements of workers may present challenges to compliance with mask wearing or physical distancing.

STEP 2 Focus on effective change management, including training & communications

Employees returning to the workplace are not going “back to normal.” They are learning new policies and protocols — and may frequently need to “unlearn” previous habits and patterns. This change management isn't easy — even when workers understand what's needed and believe in the cause. One human-factor challenge is that people tend to take the path of least resistance. In the business world, we call this efficiency — and companies tend to seek out and reward workers' ingenuity in finding smarter, faster, more efficient ways to get the job done. So, when asking employees to follow a new set of policies and protocols around infection prevention, companies need to acknowledge that they are ultimately adding friction to employees' work lives. Following protocols is not the natural path of least resistance. That's why effective training and communication needs to go far beyond simply informing staff of new policies and protocols. Training and communication should include:

- **A clear appeal to “What's in it for me?”:** Anytime a company asks its employees to do something different — and something more — they need to provide a clear, compelling answer to the simple question, “Why?” Make sure employees understand the underlying basis for your developed infection prevention protocols and policies. By protecting their health, they're also protecting the health of their families, communities and the general public. But you can also make it clear that protecting the health of employees is a powerful way to protect the health and success of the business — which, ultimately, benefits each and every employee of that business.

2. Any products or services Ricoh offers in connection with this document are not intended to provide any legal, regulatory, or compliance advice regarding your company's COVID policies or processes. You are solely responsible for obtaining competent legal, regulatory, or compliance advice to determine your obligations and whether your policies or processes comply with those obligations.

- **Tips to reduce the compliance burden:** Making compliance easier is the best way to increase compliance. Try to provide tips and guidance on how employees can simplify and streamline their new requirements — to save time and hassle. Employers should look to their state health and occupational safety agencies (among other places) for any applicable guidance. Empowering workers to feel smart and efficient will help drive compliance.
- **Review & reinforcement:** With any change process, repetition and reinforcement is key to forming healthy new habits. Training on infection prevention protocols cannot be a one-time activity. Companies must make ongoing review of policies and protocols a priority — dedicating time and resources to ensure continued compliance. Businesses should get smarter about training over time, recognizing their biggest compliance challenges and targeting their training and education to address these issues.

STEP 3 Use technology to track & improve compliance.

The pandemic accelerated digital transformation (DTX) in every organization, and businesses should look to leverage this DTX momentum to implement technologies that help them power a more successful return-to-work strategy. In particular, companies may want to use digital technologies and related services to help them measure, monitor and improve compliance with their chosen policies and protocols that form their return-to-work plan. This includes the following:

- **Create metrics for an objective audit trail:** Define how you will measure compliance with your specific policies and protocols (mask-wearing, physical distancing, screening, etc.) — how will you know your employees are compliant?
- **Leverage technologies:** Look for ways to leverage technology and automation to measure and track employee compliance — both to reduce the labor cost and drive more reliable, objective metrics.
- **Analyze and use compliance data:** Look for technologies that integrate analytics capabilities that enable you to continuously monitor compliance metrics and regularly analyze that compliance data to identify issues and opportunities, and prioritize actions to improve compliance (i.e., providing additional training or adjusting protocols).

STEP 4 Move away from manual workflows to drive your goals of safety & efficiency.

Eliminating potential points of failure is critical to the consistency and reliability of any process. When it comes to implementing robust infection prevention protocols in the workplace, manual (read: human-powered) workflows can present potential points of failure. Humans can make errors (in executing policies, as well as in recording information). But perhaps the greater risk of manual workflows is that they put employees directly in the line of infection risks. For example, an employee conducting manual temperature checks as employees arrive at work will have a much larger exposure risk than any other employee. And should that individual become infected, they are then exposing all those employees that come through that screening point. Companies should look for ways to move away from manual workflows and leverage automation wherever possible as they build their infection prevention policies and protocols, including:

- **Moving away from manual temperature checks:** Automated kiosks can enable touch-free temperature checks and automates the data trail of employee temperature monitoring.
- **Moving away from paper-based screening surveys:** Digital symptom surveys and health screenings — conducted via automated kiosks, mobile or web apps — can streamline the process of screening incoming employees and monitoring employee health.
- **Moving away from manual compliance monitoring:** New monitoring and screening tools can automate elements of compliance monitoring, from monitoring mask-wearing to proper physical distancing within the workplace.

STEP 5 Leverage Business Intelligence (BI) wherever possible

Addressing infection risks in the workplace requires understanding the complex movements and behaviors of employees in the workplace. If this sounds daunting, that's because it is. But sophisticated business intelligence (BI) tools are built for exactly this type of challenge: seeing the patterns and trends in a sea of complex data. Moving toward automated technologies gives companies insights that make implementation, evaluation and refinement of policies and protocols smarter, more efficient and less burdensome for all involved.

- **Automating access screening & security:** Fully automated, kiosk-based technologies can not only conduct temperature checks, symptom screening or wellness surveys — they can monitor mask-wearing compliance and use facial-recognition to gate-keep physical access to the premises (even with individuals wearing masks). These automated kiosks can be supported with integrated voice communication tools to assist kiosk users and help reinforce policies when needed.
- **Setting up the workplace for physical distancing:** Leverage workspace management tools to set up your workplaces and optimize workflows and efficiency based on your chosen policies and procedures.
- **Managing dynamic workspaces:** Workspace management tools can also help companies understand and manage how employees move through workspaces, providing automated solutions for limiting seating capacity in meeting rooms, cafeterias and other shared spaces, and enabling rapid, effective contact tracing in the event of confirmed exposure.
- **Data-driven optimization & management:** By pulling together the data automatically captured by screening and monitoring tools, companies can further develop and refine their return-to-work strategies. For example, a company can define a specific trigger (i.e., mask-wearing compliance issues on consecutive days) that will automatically send digital training/education resources to an employee. Or, it can use data around increasing compliance challenges to create targeted employee communications and signage. This creates an end-to-end system of ongoing, data-driven process and policy improvement.

Working to Make the “Safer Way” the “Easier Way”

Uncertainty and unknowns have defined the last year. While the specifics of the post-pandemic future remain murky, experts suggest this “new normal” may indeed be a permanent paradigm shift: Regardless of the path COVID-19 takes, the modern workplace has been indelibly marked by a heightened awareness, sensitivity and prioritization of employee health and infection prevention. Most companies have already begun thinking about the broader return of employees to the workplace. But forward-thinking businesses are already taking action — forging ahead with creating the specific policies and processes that will enable employee health and safety in the post-pandemic workplace, and investing in the technologies that will help them implement those plans. Companies are increasingly recognizing that waiting longer to develop such plans will leave them chasing these leaders from behind — adding yet another challenging headwind in an already-difficult business environment.

Yet, even for those motivated to begin preparing now, success demands striking a delicate balance among three demands. Companies need to do what's right to protect their people — and public health in general. They also need to work to make it easy for employees to follow policies and processes — combining smart policy-making, robust training and change-management, and automated technologies to make compliance simple, and simple to track. But at the end of the day, they also have to run successful businesses. They need to take advantage of sophisticated BI tools that can help them streamline compliance with their new protocols and policies, maximize efficiency and mitigate the impacts of new protocols and policies on productivity and operational performance.

In many ways, these three demands can seem at odds with one another. But done well, companies can create return-to-work strategies that bring key business interests into alignment. And giving the business powerful operational advantages and a competitive edge in the post-pandemic world.

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