

Ten tips for returning to the office

For many people the return from the summer vacations has coincided with the return to the office and all this is happening at a time of great uncertainty, due to the ongoing spread of Covid-19. The majority of companies are making an effort to manage this transition to the 'new normality' by way of the adoption of hybrid models that combine in-office and remote working, while trying to reassure their employees who may be feeling a mixture of fear and frustration. Internal communication can be a highly effective tool when dealing with these challenges.

As part of Grayling's #RetoflexibleEficiente, we would like to share some simple tips to accompany organizations as their employees start to return to the office environment:

- 1 Respond to fear of going back to the office:** ongoing contact with staff is essential to identify their legitimate concerns ensure they can return to the office in a secure manner. Develop specific initiatives to try to help employees face up to this fear.
- 2 Improve the employee experience:** it is vital that companies adopt the necessary measures to make the return to work as painless as possible: develop health and safety protocols, assess the willingness of staff to return to the workplace taking into account the personal situation of each employee, coordinate which employees will be at the office and those who will work remotely, evaluate the level of commitment and motivation of employees.
- 3 Prioritise employee wellbeing:** it is important to continue listening closely to employees and to reinforce the message that health comes first. Measures to ensure emotional well-being are now even more important.
- 4 Reinforce the role of managers, who are crucial to ensuring emotional wellbeing:** Managers are currently the main link between employees and the company. Leaders need to set up networks of teams, generate empathy with employees and promote good communications, since poor management on their part can jeopardise the transition to the new normal. Provide your managers with the necessary tools and resources to engage effectively with their teams and raise productivity and performance.
- 5 Promote flexibility:** the process of returning to the office will be long due to the challenges of transitioning to the new reality and flexibility will continue to be vital. Increase the number of days staff can work from home and promote new working practices.
- 6 Communicate, communicate and communicate:** the management should transmit a vision for the future showing transparency when taking decisions and creating clear communications channels, primarily via the managers. It is important to offer advice and to establish consensus on how to communicate in order to facilitate this task for all concerned.
- 7 Reinforce your sustainability and social responsibility strategies:** the crisis has been a catalyst for strategies based around sustainability and social commitment. This is a tremendous opportunity to align the vision and purpose of employees with the new strategies as a key means of increasing their commitment to your mission.
- 8 Look for new hybrid formulas merging the physical and virtual worlds:** employees are experiencing fatigue after using virtual formats for so long. The time has come to reinvent your organisation through the use of a wider variety of tools and formats that promote more effective communication. Events and activities that combine the physical and virtual worlds are going to be a clear trend moving forward .
- 9 Review your strategy and purpose:** the pandemic has highlighted the need for a change in priorities, short-term action plans and organisational models. Attributes such as flexibility, innovation, digitalisation and accessibility are gaining importance in value propositions and will be key to retaining talent in the future. Safety will of course also continue to be paramount.
- 10 Identify key learnings:** analyze what did work and what didn't during the pandemic (teleworking, teamwork, leadership), and establish new protocols for the future.