

Clause for Thought

Getting used to ‘the new normal’ is a phrase we now hear on a daily basis. What it means and what the practical implications are for businesses, is something that many find hard to articulate in a succinct way.

As countries learn to control the Covid-19 pandemic, businesses are learning to adjust to new ways of working. They are also looking at ways to bring employees back to the workplace. But how can HR teams support and navigate leaders to do this based on their existing policies?

Employers need to review their policies so that they reflect the new normal. Return to work plans will differ from place to place and from company to company. Now is the time to reflect ‘the new normal’ in your flexible working policy. For example, staff may be living with a health condition that makes them especially vulnerable. Others may be struggling to balance work and childcare or some may have caring responsibilities for vulnerable family members. In these circumstances it may not be helpful to follow normal policies and processes for requesting flexible working. By updating the policy, you give clarity and support for business and staff alike.

Policy updates are not the only action that companies should take. Ensuring fairness and consistency in the treatment of all employees whether working flexibly or not, will be critical. This can be done simply through ongoing communication and engagement.

What does this look like?

- Virtual town halls. These usually happen in a large office or in an auditorium. These can happen just as easily via video platforms.
- Providing managers with guidance, training, and support for managing staff remotely. The way managers used to manage teams, may not be effective when their staff are not able to travel to an office or have home distractions.
- Encouraging regular one to ones or ‘check-in’ meetings. Not every call a manager has with their team must be to discuss work tasks. Sometimes just calling to say hello and ask how someone is can make a big difference and breaks up the isolation of home working.
- Fair workload distribution and regular reviews of workload and objectives.
- Regular team meetings with videos on (if staff can use the video on their computer). Many people still do not feel comfortable being on camera, but it is more noticeable when others are on camera while others are not. It can help build relationships and seeing people’s background gives fun topics of conversations! We are all in the same storm but not necessarily the same boat.

If you want your policies reviewed to make fit for purpose during the pandemic and beyond, please contact me at kwatkins@ihrsolutions.co.uk or call me direct on 07566 766954 or call our helpline on 01604 709509.

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About the Author

KATHERINE WATKINS

Katherine has over 20 years' international experience working in HR, across various sectors, including financial services, insurance and regulated environments. Over the years, she has collaborated with some exceptionally talented HR professionals, with whom she has joined forces on special projects. Her network of HR professionals provides advice and training to companies and other HR teams.

In her role with UKGI Group, Katherine heads up the Human Resources Consultancy and provides objective support to firms on employment law and HR issues. She uses her extensive skills and knowledge to work with firms to help them develop strong and resilient HR strategies and establish healthy organisational cultures.

Katherine holds a degree in Business Administration and Management from the University of Northampton and a Postgraduate Diploma in Human Resource Strategies from London Metropolitan University. She is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (FCIPD).

