



Reboarding your employees after lockdown: A guide for returning to work and the workplace

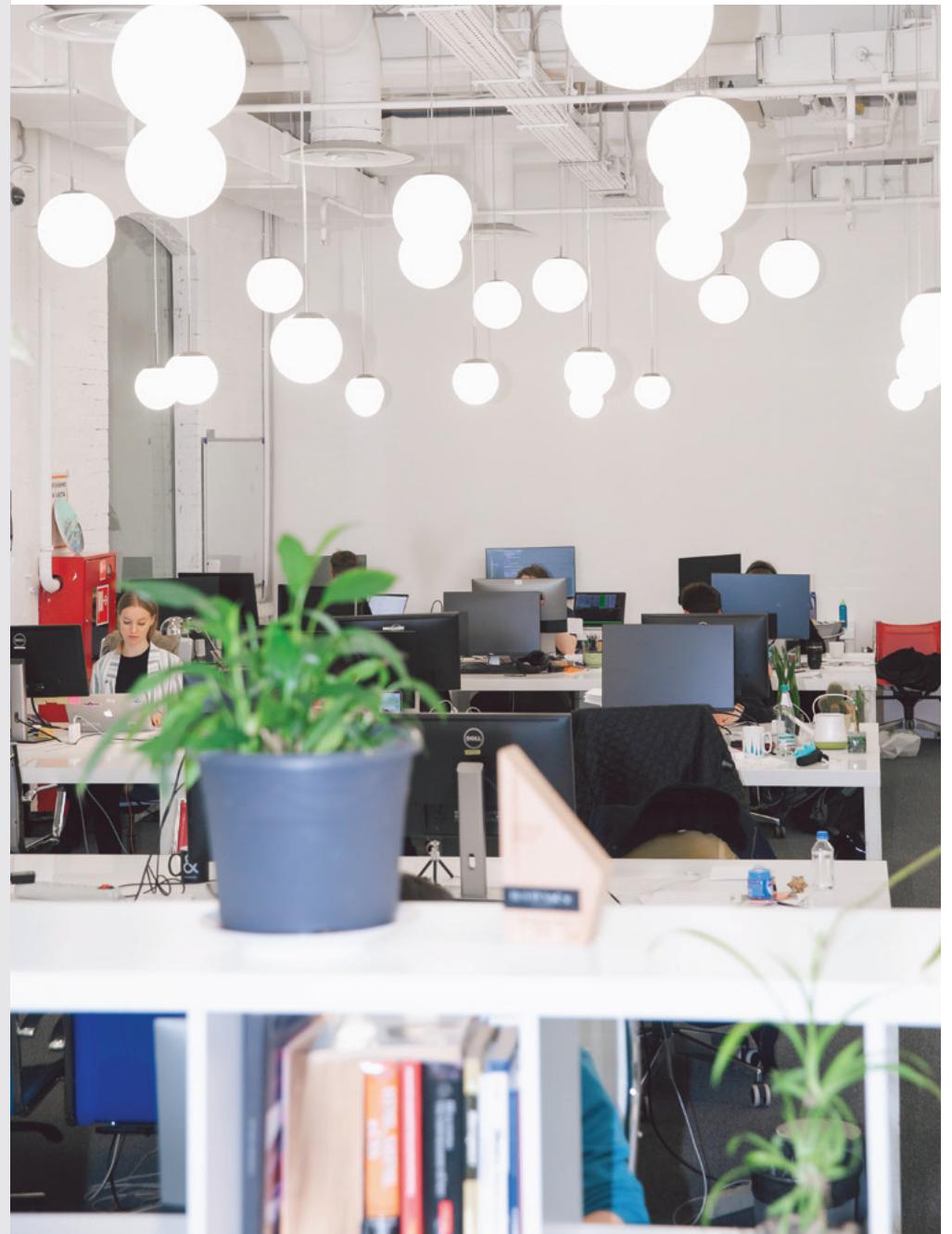
Produced by **People Insight**

Reboarding your employees after lockdown: A guide for returning to work and the workplace

It's fair to say that there's no going back to the workplace we knew before lockdown. However, as restrictions continue to ease in the UK more people are able to return to work - whether physically returning to the office or resuming their ordinary hours from home.

It's time for your organisation to manage peoples' transition from the 'temporary' working conditions we've adopted since March, to your vision for a new workplace.

Perhaps you've heard talk of 'reboarding' already. It's the idea that just as you welcome new employees with onboarding resources and training, so too should you greet employees returning to work after lockdown.

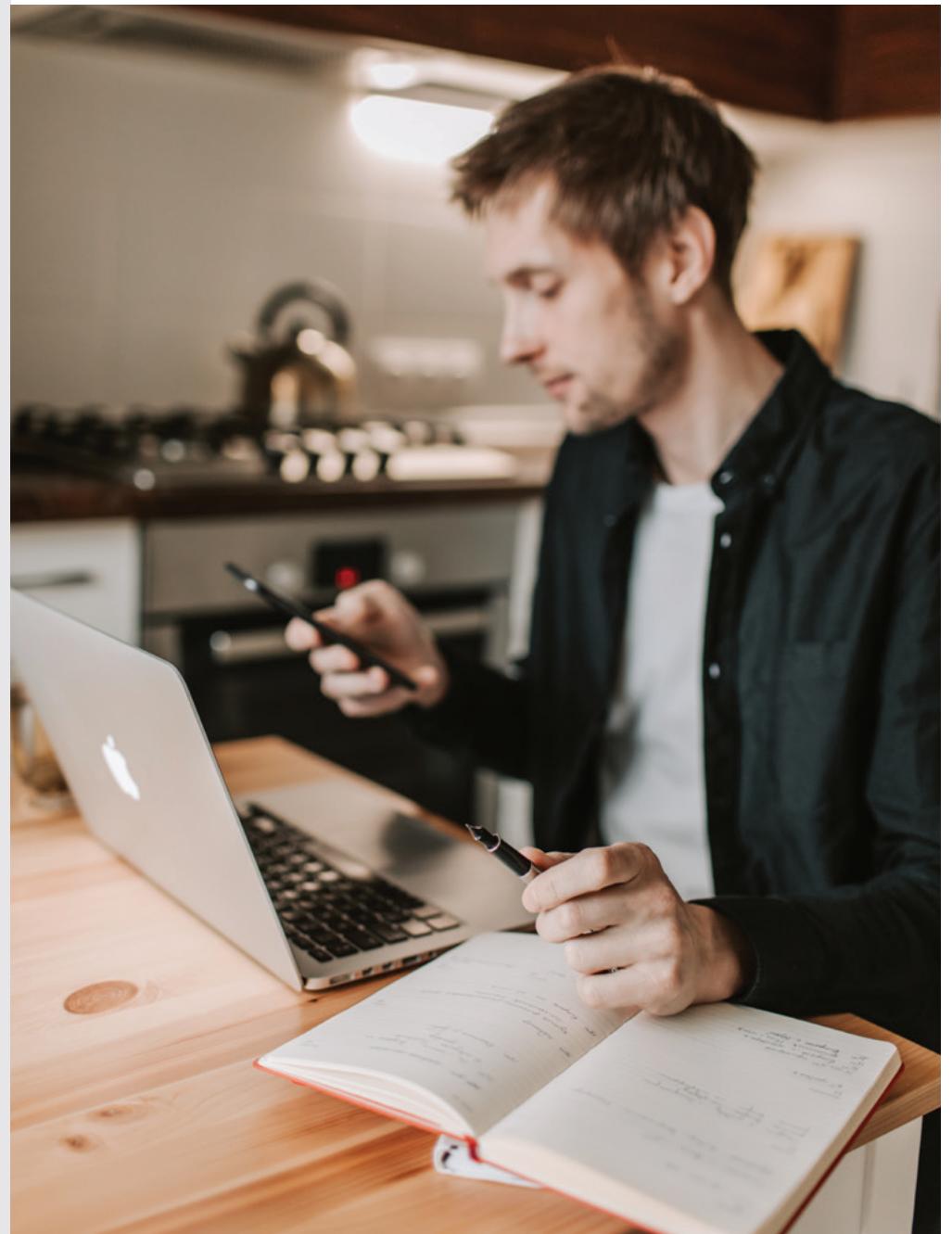


Consider your furloughed employees who may have been out of the loop. They will be adjusting to new working practices, policies and tech in a workplace that looks very different. They might be feeling a bit rusty, or anxious.

We're not going back to business as usual, but that's no bad thing. This is your chance to design a new kind of employee experience based on the lessons learned during the past few months and how you want a post-Covid world to look.

Our guide to reboarding contains:

- ▶ A framework for post-lockdown reboarding
- ▶ Tips for sustaining your culture during change
- ▶ The leadership behaviours needed for an effective return to work

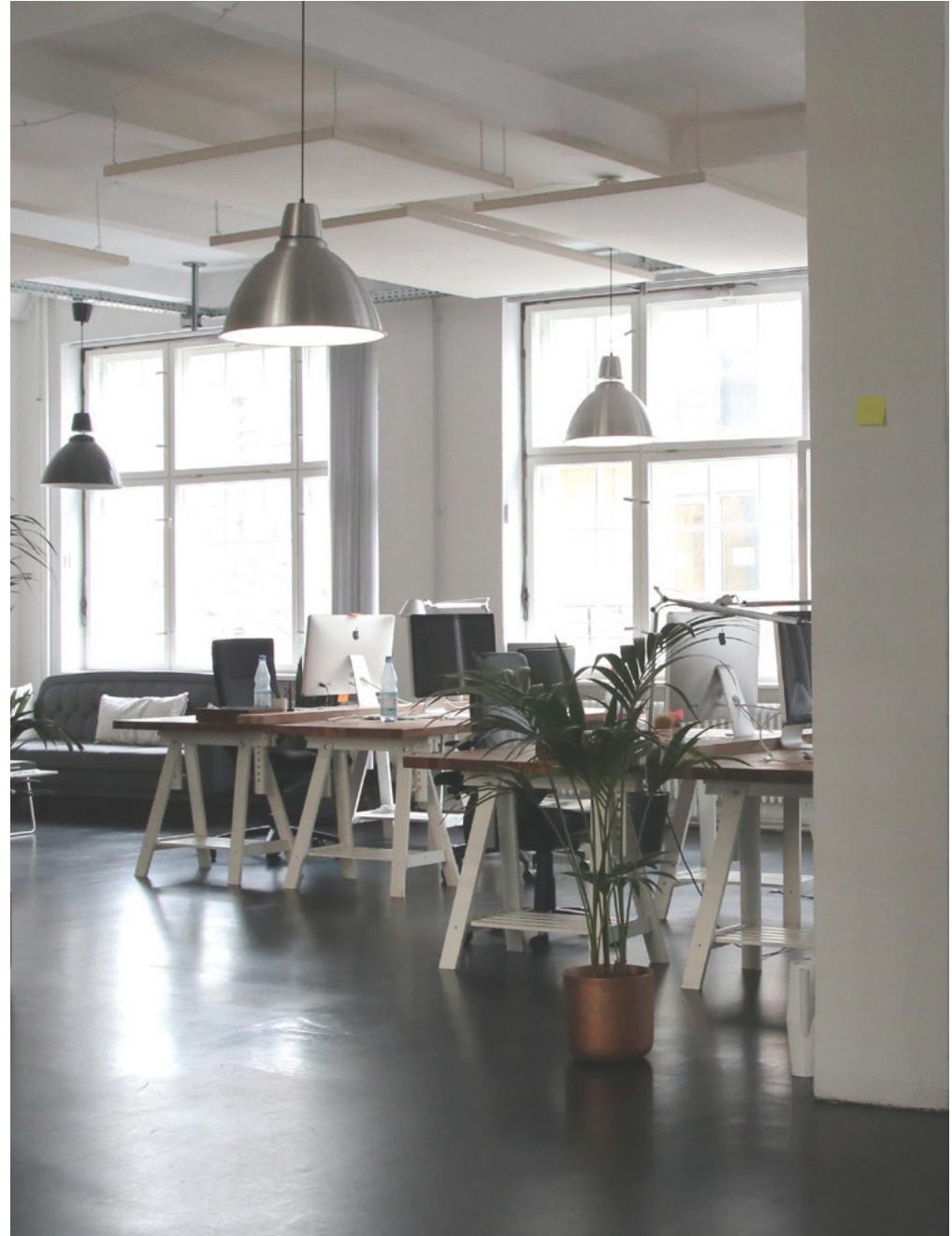


Establish your 'new normal' before reboarding starts

During lockdown, drastic changes happened with little notice or planning. Organisations that had been hesitant about remote working found themselves adapting to this overnight and retrospectively realising the extra considerations, resources and support people needed to work effectively from home.

Returning to the workplace will involve similar changes, but with the benefit of time to plan and consult your employees about what your new workplace looks like.

**Use the prompts on p5 and p6
to guide your planning**



Physical changes

- We're starting to get used to social distancing in shops and the space between desks, one-way systems around floors, controlled access to communal areas and sanitisation stations are here to stay for some time, so move any quick fixes to something more established.

Behavioural changes

Consider the less tangible changes people will experience too.

- For example if your culture is built on collaboration, how might people's behaviours change when they are encouraged to work at a distance?
- If leaders, managers and colleagues have shed formality and been more relaxed in lockdown, how does this play out going forwards?

Lockdown lessons

Think about what your organisation has learned in lockdown and how these can support your future workplace:

- What were your biggest successes?
- What challenges prevented people working effectively?
- What feedback have you had from employees and managers about ways of working during lockdown from your pulse surveys, 1:1s and discussion groups?
- What new behaviours have emerged during lockdown?
- What initiatives were put in place to manage people's wellbeing and mental health during lockdown?



To see feedback from over 8,000 employees on how they want to transition post-COVID [click here](#)

Review your policies

Now is a great time to **revisit your formal policies and ask if they reflect the changes and lessons** from the last few months.

- ▶ Temporary changes to agile working, leave, sickness benefits, security etc must now translate into **more permanent measures**.
- ▶ As an organisation you may have responded to the Black Lives Matter movement but **does your diversity & equality policy reflect these changes?**
- ▶ Lockdown has also prompted an increase in volunteering and community action, **how could your CSR policy embed these changes in your organisation?**

Start engaging employees now

Organisations who listened to their employees and led with compassion during lockdown actually increased employee engagement. Keep this up by running pulse surveys that ask your people how they are feeling and what they want from their return to work.

- ▶ People Insight's research suggests that **the majority of employees expect a blended approach to working from home**.
- ▶ **Employees also hope to tailor their working week to the type of tasks** they have on; for example heading into the office for collaborative tasks or coaching others, and working from home to tackle more focussed tasks.



50%
of people hope
1-2 days
working
from home
will be the norm.

Get your leaders and managers ready first

Insights from the pulse surveys we ran during lockdown show managers have not felt as supported as more junior staff. In fact, we saw a spread of 70 percentage points between the most junior and senior roles for the question 'I feel sufficiently supported by my manager'. Managers put a lot of energy into supporting their teams, but who was there for them?

When thinking about the return to work, it's essential to first support your managers so that they are ready to go back and take care of their teams.



Their new duty of care

Managers had to adapt overnight to managing remotely and taking on new responsibility for supporting their team's wellbeing and mental health. As people return to work, managers will continue to feel this [duty of care](#) for their team's physical and psychological safety.

Equip managers with the training and resources they need to feel confident about reboarding their team and supporting their physical and mental health. Provide managers with a mechanism for feeding back and asking for support and, vitally, ensure that their feedback is taken on-board and acted on.

Refresher of policies and expectations

As you review your policies, brief managers on the changes made and what this will look like for their teams.

- ▶ What new health and safety measures are in place?
- ▶ How will managers be expected to enforce new policies?
- ▶ What behaviours do you expect them to role-model?

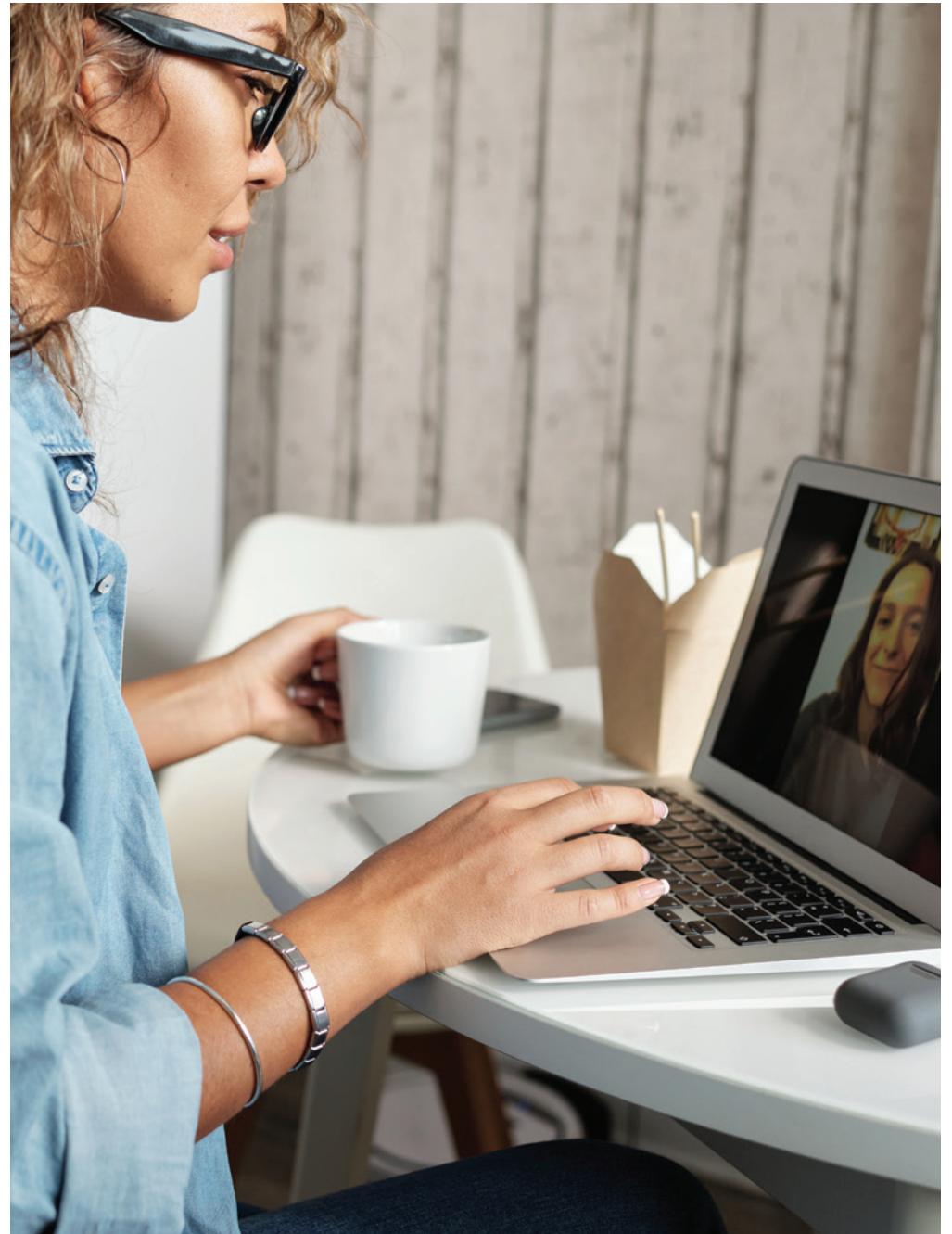
This will all be new to them, so be clear and consistent about what you expect them to do and give them space to ask for help.

Consider the individual

Perhaps the biggest leadership lesson from lockdown is a new perspective on treating employees as individuals. Everyone has had a different experience of lockdown; some may have been ill, bereaved, or caring for others. Some may have experienced financial hardship, relationship breakdown or isolation. Whilst some have been furloughed, others may have worked all out during lockdown, covering for others, and be at risk of burnout. As we return to work, **this individual perspective will remain vital and the most effective managers will recognise employees' unique experiences and needs**. In turn, your organisation must empower managers to fulfil their teams' requests for more flexible working.

Your reboarding process

Everyone's experience of returning to work will differ. Some will be heading back to the physical workplace, others returning from reduced hours or furlough while others will be continuing to work from home with a new structure in place. Be sensitive to the needs of each audience as you approach reboarding.



1. Reintroduce employees to the workplace

Heading back into the office has been much awaited by many, but it brings safety concerns with it too. Set your workspace up for safe, effective working and communicate clearly to your people what these changes will look like and what they mean for how you'll work together.

- ▶ **Follow Government guidance for making your workplace 'Covid secure'** and carry out a full risk assessment to understand how to protect your people. Think about your response to a potential shut-down too - at the moment **only 30% of HR execs have an exit-strategy for an employee testing positive for Covid-19**.
- ▶ **Prepare employees for changes** to your physical workspace and the behaviour changes these result in. Temperature checks, advanced cleaning, staggered entry & exit and revised seating plans will all take some getting used to.
- ▶ **Share education & guidelines with employees** via an online health & safety module, office posters, floor markings and weekly email updates. Update your posters and signage regularly so they stay relevant. .

2. Support wellbeing and mental health

Consider how the return to work could impact people's mental health and wellbeing, and support them with initiatives, feedback channels and compassionate leadership.

- ▶ **Factor people's mental health** into your returning to work risk assessments. Lockdown survey insights show that **82% of respondents** are aware of wellbeing support available from their organisation, however mental health still worsened by an average of 8.1% during lockdown. Effective wellbeing support must go beyond providing resources and information to truly changing behaviours within your organisation.

Your reboarding process

- **Compassionate leadership is key for recovery.** Leaders must actively change their behaviours to support wellbeing.

According to [McKinsey](#), 'Awareness, vulnerability, empathy and compassion are critical for business leaders to care for people in crisis and set the stage for business recovery'.

Leaders are positioned as role models for behaviour, so can set the tone for your organisation by acting with compassion and demonstrating care for people's needs.

- **Consult and listen to employees.** Employees are likely to experience heightened stress upon their return to work. Use pulse surveys or wellbeing indices within your annual survey to identify employee stress and burnout risk and take action to improve the health and experience of your employees.

Case study:

Proactively exploring wellbeing at VINCI Construction UK

VINCI Construction UK (VINCI) designs, builds and manages the facilities that improve everyday life. People Insight have worked closely with VINCI for several years, and their employee engagement has gone from strength to strength with participation at 85% and an overall engagement score of 83% (6% above benchmark.)

VINCI's employee survey is far from static. The team learn from each iteration; adapting questions, demographics and communications relevant to priority issues. Recently the Burnout Risk Index has been added to the survey, to explore wellbeing more thoroughly across the business. This measure identifies where people may feel over stretched and where burnout could be a potential risk, so that action can be taken.

"This was a proactive move", said Therese Stevenson, HR Director "by undertaking this analysis we are able to head off problems before they occur. Fortunately, the data indicates we don't have a significant problem, but we continue to track this in every team."

To follow up the survey, Therese and her team respond to specific survey feedback in their HR business plan. What's also impressive is that they also underline how they want people to behave and engage – holding everyone accountable for their actions. Business initiatives link back to survey feedback in the Fairness Inclusion and Respect (FIR) best practice booklet, such as the establishment of Mental Health First Aiders and Wellbeing Champions.

[Read the full case-study](#)

3. Provide working from home guidelines

Lockdown prompted a lot of organisations to take up full-scale remote working for the first time. Now that a blend of office and home working looks like a longer-term model for most organisations, there are some considerations that might have been missed during the pre-lockdown transition.

- ▶ **Revise your wfh policy** - Think about the lessons learned during lockdown and gather feedback from your employees to understand what working from home should look like going forward.
- ▶ **Provide the right resources** - [Insights from over 8000 UK employees](#) reveal that the greatest remote working bugbear is not having the resources that they are used to in the office. If working from home is to be a longer-term arrangement you should consult your employees and identify what they need to work effectively. Some organisations offer employees a budget of up to £200 to improve their home working set-up, a gesture which demonstrates care and trust and empowers employees to solve their individual challenges.

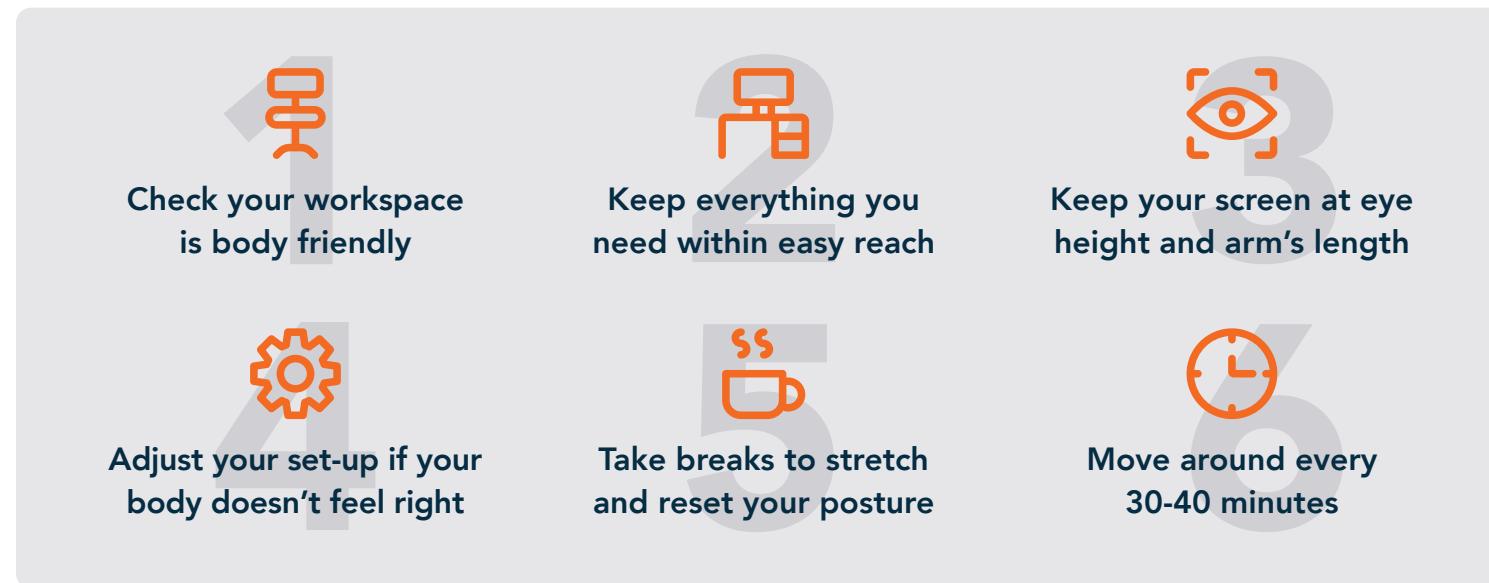


[Click here to see how Brewin Dolphin and Nottingham Building Society equipped people for home working](#)

- ▶ **Watch out for wellbeing while working from home** - As you redesign your working experience, continue to support your people's wellbeing with interventions, compassionate leadership behaviours and respect for individual needs. Continue too to listen to staff and use a wellbeing assessment or survey index to measure how effective your wellbeing interventions are.

- ▶ **Help people create a good home workstation** - Just as you would risk assess your office set-up, provide employees with guidelines for maintaining a good home working station. While some will have designated offices, others will be sharing spaces or setting up a station in their kitchen or bedroom.

Use these home office health tips as a starter:



More great advice for a great home office set-up:

[Working from Home When You Don't Have a Desk: 8 Tips for Better Posture](#)

[11 Ways To Maintain Good Posture While Working On The Computer](#)

[Working from home: How to set up your home office](#)

4. Reset your expectations

Feedback from employees shows that organisations who recognised the additional strain of lockdown and adjusted their expectations of input and output are viewed far more favourably than those who demanded business-as-usual during Covid-19.

'Reduce expectations. It's not business as usual. To say that ignores the difficulties people are facing.'

'You've shown compassion by recognising everyone is under different pressures and reassuring that good work is still being done regardless.'

Returning to work will require similar understanding and compassion from your organisation, particularly for employees readjusting after furlough or reduced hours.

► Retraining & refreshers

- Some employees will have been away from work and out of the loop for months so will need patience and support while they readjust. Look at the training components of your onboarding process and offer these to returning employees as a refresher of key skills and systems. It's likely that lockdown has brought changes too so consider how to brief all employees on the new tools in place, new ways of working or updated processes.

► Upskilling & development

- Now's a great time to remind people of the learning & development opportunities available, and how to access them. Share digital modules, gather materials centrally and encourage managers to hold 1:1s with their direct reports to pick up on personal development goals. Consider too how your learning & development programme can adapt for people continuing to work from home and be clear that the same opportunities are available however people choose to work.

► More changes are likely to come

- The post-Covid world is likely to bring more change for organisations and employees. As we experienced at the start of lockdown, agility and clarity is essential to help employees adapt to new conditions, guidelines and ways of working. Communicate to your employees about the values and behaviours expected of them to support your organisation as you adapt to the new normal.

► What does success look like?

- Expectations may have shifted during lockdown to flex with people's caring commitments, childcare arrangements or personal needs and things won't go back to normal overnight. Explain to your people how business changes will impact individual performance targets and assessments and encourage managers to have transparent conversations about expectations for outputs and success.

5. Stay connected & social

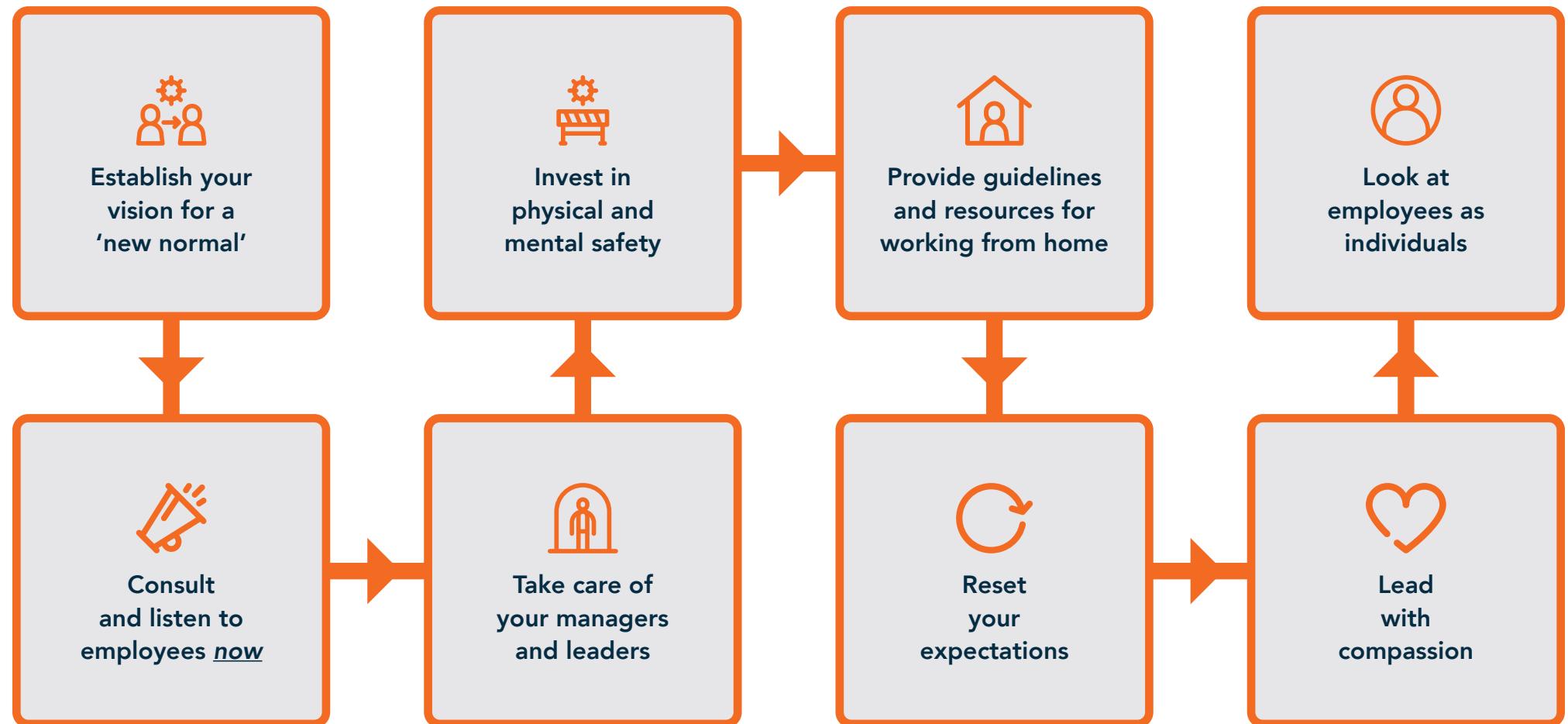
Virtual drinks, lunchtime quizzes and online socials became a common feature of lockdown working and people got creative with ways to keep connected to one another. Returning to the office brings us a step closer to real-life socials, but bear in mind the people who are continuing to shield, work from home or who may need longer to readjust.

- ▶ **Keep up your support once reboarding is 'over'** - Continue to check in with employees via formal surveys, quick pulses or 1:1 conversations to understand how they are finding the transition back to work and what else they need. During lockdown we heard about a number of leaders who showed empathy and attentiveness, like the [CEO personally phoning staff](#) to discuss their concerns. Continuing this human and candid style of leadership will help engage and support your employees as they readjust to working.
- ▶ **Work hard to create a sense of belonging** - Now more than ever, your culture has an essential part to play in uniting your people. Be clear and transparent about the impact of Covid-19 for your organisation's vision and goals and engage your leaders to act consistently with your values. To help embed their new culture [Arrow Communications](#) launched a series of quarterly infographics which share company news, highlight actions and results from their last employee survey and reflect a focus across the business on being more transparent and collaborative.
- ▶ **Effective leadership through change** - Employees have experienced a great deal of change at pace, and there's plenty more to come. Your leaders' behaviours and actions will be key to getting people on board and engaged with your new work experience. Employees need to see their leadership team displaying the values and talking about them frequently so encourage leaders to be present and listen to the views and opinions of your people.



[Click here to read more about successful leadership during change](#)

Your reboarding priorities at a glance



Solve your employee engagement challenges

Create your ideal culture for success with our surveys, listening strategies and industry expertise.

Talk to us about how we can support your reboarding process with pulse surveys, wellbeing assessments or bespoke survey design.

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