



RECALIBRATING THE TEAM

Gradual transition back into the workplace while having to abide by post-quarantine safety measures may prove a trying experience for employees. Anders Liljenstolpe, CEO of JLL's Russia and CIS business, gives tips on how to best navigate the return to the office and help staff recalibrate.



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With the lockdown lifted, people are starting to go back to work, and to accommodate them offices need to become safer. People yearning for the way things were may be in for a disappointment – this is a post-quarantine environment with new, sometimes inconvenient rules that can harm morale and productivity even worse than the uncertainty of self-isolation. So the question is – how to return to the office while maintaining efficiency and retaining valuable team members?

1. Take safety precautions

Above all, the post-quarantine office environment should be safe. There are steps employers can take to comply with Rospotrebnadzor's recommendations without breaking the bank.

First of all, stagger the work schedules: let 20–25% of the workforce back and slowly increase that share. The full return to the office may take anywhere from three months till the end of the year, but that is fine.



The pandemic creates new rules for staff in offices.

Second, introduce new guidelines: masks and gloves for all, hand sanitising, and social distancing of at least 1.5 metres. If an employee is ill – they stay home.

Third, make changes to the office routines and overall environment to facilitate compliance with these rules. Consider these changes:

- mark desks for a chequered seating pattern;
- close down conference rooms and co-working zones or cap the number of people that can be present;
- lay out optimal paths around the office with arrows on the floor;
- check the staff's temperature every four hours and keep tabs on the total number of people in the office;
- arrange regular cleaning and disinfection;
- make sure postal and other deliveries are contactless;
- promote the new office rules by putting up special posters.

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These quick fixes will solve the safety problem for the nearest months, when efficiency and continuity are key. For the long run, however, the management will need to make a strategic decision: either expand the office to ensure proper spacing between employees, or implement new work arrangements such as home office and hot desking, thus cutting down on rented space or

repurposing it in a more useful way.

2. Use what you learned from remote work

When planning a phased return to the office, the management should take into account not just common sense and personal circumstances and wishes of its staff, but also business needs. Look at the work tasks and decide if the office is absolutely necessary or if they can be done from home.

Over the past few months, there has been a major shift in the perception of remote work at Russian companies, with even the most sceptically-minded managers warming up to it and some employees realising they prefer it over the office. Now is the time to re-evaluate the approach to business organisation and maybe offer employees partial or full remote work.



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When transitioning employees to home office, it is important to provide them with full technical support – not just for efficiency purposes, but also as a token of care.

REASON FOR RETURNING TO THE OFFICE IS PRESERVING THE TEAM SPIRIT

3. Do not turn into a slave driver

Managers should keep a cool head and be mindful of the fact that the virus is still out there. However, corporate rules do not have to feel like a chore to follow: come up with creative ways to entice compliance, like fun posters and maybe some inside jokes based on your shared working experience.

One way to ease people into the “new normal” at the office is assigning special ambassadors from the ranks of, say, HR managers or any other volunteering employees. They will meet people at the entrance, tell them about the new rules, demonstrate how to follow them, and be available in case anyone needs help. They can also give the other employees special “welcome back” kits from the

company. In addition to PPE, these can contain little gifts like a hand moisturiser, guideline cheat-sheet, and a stay-safe checklist. Also, delegate the duties of overseeing compliance to department heads – this will show trust.

4. Communicate openly and often

During a period of uncertainty, people are most worried about their job security. This means that employees more than ever need to know how things are at the company, and it is up to the CEO to elucidate them. Gather employees for regular office-wide meetings to present the financials and answer any questions.

Another reason for returning to the office is preserving the team spirit. People are already tired of virtual get-togethers, so instead of online teambuilding think of some other formats of workplace communication. For example, let members of different departments make presentations about themselves for their colleagues with information about their clients, approaches and cases. This will promote cooperation and cross-pollination between departments.

Remind everyone that any employee can talk to you on any matter that worries them, and initiate such interactions yourself. Swedes have a thing called fika, a time during the workday to enjoy a coffee, a snack, and a talk with colleagues. You too can invite co-workers to an informal break, be it in the virtual space, a big conference room, or a summer terrace at a café. This will enable you to stay in tune with the personal sentiments at your company.

Source: Vedomosti (<https://www.vedomosti.ru/management/blogs/2020/06/17/832872-kompaniyam-vozobnovit>)