



Get ready for the employees' return

Companies must provide a smooth transition when their employees – after months of working from home – begin to return to their place of work.

By Kristine Seest

The number of people aged 25-34 who have used their health insurance to talk to a psychologist has increased by 38 percent during the shutdown. At the same time, the general physical health has declined, an increasing number of people have experienced bodily pains, and although energy levels have gone up during the shutdown, many have felt a sense of worry.

These are some of the results from surveys conducted by Danica Pension and PFA Pension among their own clients. The surveys show that the pension savers – and thus the employees in various companies – are physically and mentally affected by the shutdown. This should be taken very seriously now that employees are beginning to return to the workplace.

»We are getting more inquiries from companies who want to know how they can best prepare for the reopening of their offices. It is our general recommendation to focus on the fact that neither employees nor the workplace are the same as before the shutdown. It is important that companies learn from the positive as well as the negative aspects of the shutdown and its effect on the employees' well-being and their working environment,« says senior specialist Helle Gram Quist from Corporate Health & Wellbeing at Willis Towers Watson.

Different needs

According to Helle Gram Quist, the shutdown has had neither a clear positive nor a clear negative effect on employee well-being.

»There are some who have been happy to work from home because they have had greater flexibility and no transportation to and from work and therefore have had an easier time creating a good work-life balance. And then there are employees who have suffered because they have missed going to work every day and seeing their colleagues. There are also those in between who have enjoyed working from home but would like the flexibility and opportunity to go to the office when it makes sense. Companies have gathered a lot of valuable experience and now have an obvious opportunity to build on that by asking employees what they prefer – and to then offer the conditions that can increase their employees' well-being,« says Helle Gram Quist.

Companies can offer more flexible working conditions to meet individual needs – i.e. by allowing employees to choose between working from home and showing up at the office. It will meet the needs of those who want flexibility and the needs of those who want to return to the old framework and the daily attendance at the office.

Reunited with the height adjustable desk

Returning to the office marks the end of the dining table as the centre of the workspace and a reunion with the height adjustable desk and the office chair, which will be seen as a major improvement by many employees. On the other hand, there are other areas of the work environment that need to be adapted so that employees can feel safe and secure in light of the risk of infection with covid-19. It requires clear guidelines on how to hold meetings, use canteens and relate to guests – in terms of registration of attendees, handshakes, personal hygiene, safe distancing and the use of mouthpieces.

Below are a number of recommendations from Corporate Health and Wellbeing in Willis Towers Watson. The recommendations are general and can be used as inspiration to initiatives that can create a smooth transition for the employees when they return to the office.

■ Gathering experience

It is a good idea to learn from the employees' experiences during the shutdown. It can provide insights into the pros and cons of working from home and form the basis for new guidelines. Gathering feedback can take place on an ongoing basis and allow for relevant adjustments to build a future work culture.

■ Hybrid workplace

Design a hybrid workplace where it is possible to combine working from home with going to the office. The hybrid workplace is flexible and requires clear rules that are created for hybrid teams and hybrid meetings – i.e. that the company's meeting rooms are designed so that meetings can be held with employees (and others) sitting in the meeting room and others attending from home.

■ Create zones

Consider redesigning the workspace. Perhaps the workspace needs to be adapted to the employees' needs and wishes. Is there a need for quiet zones for tasks that require immersion, or is there a need for creative spaces for innovative processes?

■ New guidelines

It may be necessary to revisit existing guidelines and policies to assess whether they need to be updated – i.e. the company's guidelines on working from home, on the number of employees in the office at the same time, on requirements for getting access to the office, for physical distance requirements, etc.

■ Measurement of well-being

The shutdown created a renewed focus on the employees' well-being and this focus should be maintained by continuously measuring employee well-being and making use of the results for adjustments that can prevent injury and illness and increase employee well-being.

■ Individual coaching

HR can assist managers by providing guidelines on how to support individual employee needs and by offering qualified coaching to maintain and improve employee well-being.

Contact Corporate Health & Wellbeing in Willis Towers Watson if you want advice on how to strengthen the health, well-being, and working environment at the strategic level.

Sources

- [A lot of young people experience mental health problems during the shutdown](#)
Danica Pension, 14 April 2021
- [We must care for our physical and mental health during these times](#)
PFA Pension, 30 November 2020