

The TMC ADVISOR

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Hidden Issues - Working from Home

By Peter Aggus

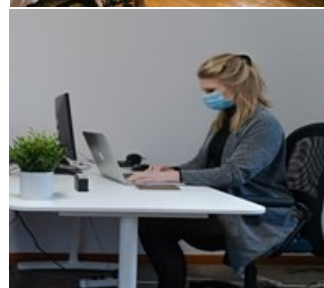
It was a quick fix to deal with the pandemic—pack up your gear and work from home. That allowed many service companies to adapt to the new world we were plunged into—but it has consequences. [Previously](#) we have looked at technical issues but there are legal, tax and liability issues that companies are ignoring or have yet to consider. Ignorance is not an acceptable legal excuse. You could face serious issues as an employer or employee.



One Foot Back in the Office

By Ellen Koskinen-Dodgson

As you reopen the office, you'll likely abandon 100% work-from-home and stop short of 100% return-to-the-office. Just as either model causes operational problems, so does this hybrid model. If you're looking to bring back (or develop) an environment that incubates creative collaboration, mentoring, the fun, people-side of the workplace, and a sense of belonging, you need a plan that anticipates problems and mitigates them. Here's our checklist.

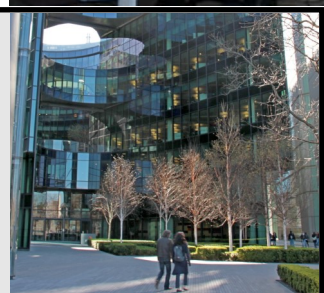


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Beyond Handwashing: Workflow Issues

By Guy Robertson

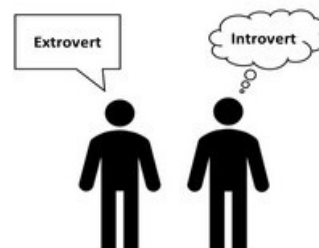
In the coming months, the new coronavirus vaccines could allow you and your co-workers to return to your office. While this return will include many challenges, including possible requirements for social distancing, etc., new pandemic-related workflow changes could be much more important. Workflow changes can cause employee uncertainty about roles and processes, which can lead to job dissatisfaction and customer complaints. Here is our advice.



Reconnecting "Back in the Office"

By Thomi Glover

I was listening to a presentation, on line, of course, in which people were discussing how they felt about getting back to the office. Some people were very happy about seeing everyone in person again while some were not so sure. Back to the office will mean different things for different personality types so managers will need to use the right strategies to get everyone reintegrated and working well as a team. Here are the top issues.



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What is a Workplace

When you get a job you are assigned a place to work, often a desk with a phone and computer. This is all 'owned' by your employer, not you. Your employer must pay insurance to cover liability for accidents, and the liability is enshrined in workplace legislation. This means that, if you suffer an injury while at work you are covered for medical and earnings loss by such as Worksafe BC.

When you are at home after work, this coverage is not in force and injury is generally your fault. You will not get compensation if you injure your back in a badly designed chair at home.

What about when you are home-working? Is that home or work? The legal implications are untested in much of Canada but other countries choose to define space used at home **for the purpose of work where mandated by the employer** as if it were 'owned' by the employer. The key issue is whether your home working is mandated or voluntary.

Voluntary Home Use

If an employee decides, for their own convenience, to work part time from home then they retain 'normal' office space and working at home is informal and at their risk.



Mandated Home Use

If, however, your employer 'requires you' to work from home (as happened during COVID19) then different rules apply. The mandating is a variation in the contract of employment and there is a CRA tax form (T2200) that employers normally provide to employees certifying that. Employers can provide an allowance to cover expenses and there may be tax benefits available (for which employees need to complete a T777 as part of their tax return).

Some employers might reduce base pay to reflect that employees no longer need to spend time and money travelling to the downtown office. This reduction may be justified as helping to offset the extra cost of supporting home-based workers.

The space used at home now counts as your official workplace and

employers are likely liable for injury to their employees while working there.

In some countries, employers are expected to survey home working environments and certify that they meet required standards. They may also provide professional desks and chairs to reduce injury risks from use of low quality items.

On December 15th, the CRA introduced, for the 2020 tax year, a flat-rate deduction for home working of \$2 per day up to a maximum \$400. They also introduced simplified versions of the forms for when the flat rate does not cover a particular case.

Paperwork

Where home working is mandated, employees need to consider which option suits them best when doing their 2020 tax return. HR departments need to make sure all government forms are completed and that work at home policies have been developed and clearly communicated to staff.

If you'd like to comment on this article or explore these ideas further, contact me at peter@tmcconsulting.ca.

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Peter, as an engineer & technology management consultant, has developed innovative & cost-effective solutions for clients in many industries.

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What Kind of Normal?

No matter whether your staff will be working from home or from the office, there are many issues that need to be addressed in order to "get back to normal". [Other articles](#) this month examine a number of these issues.

Many organizations are taking a step back from the idea of "normal" in light of their pandemic experience. "Business as usual" might not be the best approach for 2021. There might be a better way to operate.

They're reimagining the office from an employee point of view as they realize that the best employees are valuable assets. These employees should be retained as they will help to transform the organization.

Employee Point of View

So if the best employees are to be hired and retained, they first need to be understood. Studies have shown that, more than money, people who love their jobs are looking for:

- An organization with good values
- Management that treats them fairly
- Workmates that they enjoy working with
- The right level of responsibility (this differs by person)



- Work that is suited to their personal style (this also differs by person)
- Recognition for good work
- The right balance of group energy and quiet contemplation time

Organizational visioning should include this and related information.

Checklist

1. Develop and follow a plan to create a safe and healthy workplace. Safety is a foundational and legal requirement.

This may include, while social distancing is still required, staggered schedules, some mandated work from home and mitigation plans for natural places of congestion like elevator lobbies and lunch rooms.

2. Establish policies to support a safe and healthy workplace and find a way to deal with violators. If violators "get away" with rule breaking, rule-following employees feel unfairly treated and unsafe.
3. Implement technology that makes it easy to connect with staff that are in the local office, at home, walking down the street or working half way around the world. The more natural it feels, the better the results.

Remote workers usually miss out on the informal coffee room or hallway chat that sometimes include critical information about office politics or changes to project requirements. To support better communication, the best technology and processes are needed.

Making it Happen

Bring in professional help for visioning and to assess employee/team needs. Evaluate your existing or planned technology in this light.

If you'd like to comment on this article or explore these ideas further, contact me at ellen@tmcconsulting.ca.

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Ellen Koskinen-Dodgson is President and Managing Partner of TMC IT and Telecom Consulting Inc. She is an IT and Telecommunications Management Consultant, electrical engineer, author, speaker, media resource and Expert Witness.

Beyond Handwashing: Workflow Issues By Guy Robertson

In the coming months, the new coronavirus vaccines could allow you and your co-workers to return to your office. While this return will include many challenges, including possible requirements for social distancing, etc., new pandemic-related workflow changes could be much more important. Workflow changes can cause employee uncertainty about roles and processes, which can lead to job dissatisfaction and customer complaints. Here is our advice.



Workflows

For many reasons, our workflows have changed over the past year. Workflows are the combinations of scheduling, tasks, and procedures that result in getting our jobs done.

As we try to get back to the office, it's unlikely that the old workflows will be re-established quickly, if ever. Office culture will have changed and some co-workers will not reappear.

The Challenge

A big challenge for many organizations will be re-connecting with key customers and stakeholders, many of whom face post-pandemic problems of their own. Stress can mount: some old contacts have moved on, some key suppliers might have gone out of business and deliveries and important documents may have gone astray.

Employee's uncertainty about their roles and which processes they should follow can lead to job dissatisfaction, reduced productivity, customer complaints, and loss of your organization's reputation.

Solving these challenges will require the right workflows.



The Plan

You must prepare for new ways of conducting business, establishing processes that will support efficient workflows for all employees, no matter where they work. To plan for the evolution of new processes, the following steps will be helpful:

- Review the job descriptions (JDs) of all employees. Some JDs will have been out-of-date before the pandemic. Employees might have agreed to carry out ad hoc roles and tasks as they started working from home, and the pandemic has rendered their JDs obsolete.
- Compile drafts of pro tem JDs. Pro tem tasks, those "temporary, for

the time being", tasks that were needed to keep things going during the pandemic, should be compared to the old JDs.

- Gather input from customers, employees and other stakeholders regarding their needs and expectations and the need for any supplies, equipment or software to deliver the work.
- Decide which tasks and responsibilities should be included in a new, post-pandemic JD.
- Ensure that employees have the necessary training and certification for any new tasks and processes.
- Ensure that the necessary documentation—e.g. manuals, guidelines, contracts, warranties, diagrams—have been created for users' reference purposes.

Get ready for new workflows and more promising times.

If you'd like to comment on this article or explore these ideas further, contact me at guy@tmcconsulting.ca.

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Guy Robertson is a senior planner at TMC and an instructor at the Justice Institute of BC and Langara College. He has written five books and numerous articles on corporate security and disaster planning, and offered workshops and lectures at conferences across North America and in the UK.

Reconnecting “Back in the Office” By Thomi Glover



I was listening to a presentation, on line, of course, in which people were discussing how they felt about getting back to the office. Some people were very happy about seeing everyone in person again while some were not so sure. Back to the office will mean different things for different personality types so managers will need to use the right strategies to get everyone reintegrated and working well as a team. Here are the top issues.

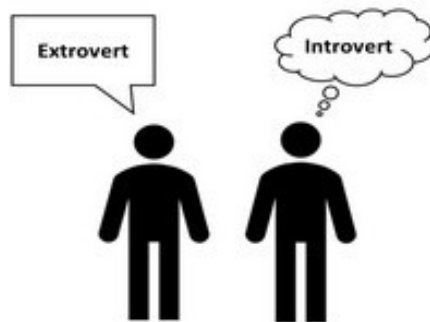
Let’s consider the more personal side of returning to the office. What’s it really going to be like to “go back to work” in the old sense of sharing office space, chats over coffee or lunch? And for the people who may be challenged in this return to the old way, what will they do?

Introvert vs. Extrovert

In my field of work, I spend a lot of time helping people determine what they need to be, to do and to have in order to be effective and successful as well as “comfortable” and happy in their lives.

What we know for sure is that we are not all the same and so our needs are not the same either. Some people really want and need lots of interaction with other people. Others not so much or maybe not at all. This is largely driven by the extent to which we are introverted or extroverted.

For extroverted people, the opportunity to be with, talk with, and work side by side with others is a source of energy and satisfaction...and hence personal productivity. So many extroverted people really miss the live interaction which they don’t experience through



ZOOM or other platforms. They need to “press the flesh” or “share air” – it’s like a spark that lights up their brains and creates enthusiasm for life in general.

For introverted people like me, the opportunity to work from home, to think and write quietly and facilitate electronically has been a real gift and they will be sad to lose the opportunity if and when things get back to normal.

Lead With Empathy

As good business relationships are built on trust, and we’re accustomed for centuries to creating trust through conversations, relationships, and physical contact, I hope that our

prolonged “life at a distance” won’t be too difficult to reverse.

It’s important to assess the harm that might have been done over the past ten months. Has our distancing eroded our inclinations, our ability even, to reach out to other people in the flesh, to make ourselves vulnerable as we inevitably do in relationships? We may have lost a little of our ability to feel, to care about others, and to create effective teams. Cohesive teams are critical to success as they provide valuable interactions that spark new ideas.

So take stock and pay attention to the energy needs of your employees. Also address the anxieties that will emerge with the inevitable disappointment when “normal” doesn’t happen as quickly as we hoped.

If you are interested in exploring the significance of this “life below the surface”, please get in touch at thomi@tmcconsulting.ca. It’s one of my passions!

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