



## PSYCHOLOGY GROUP

Excellence in Business. Excellence in People.

For some, returning to the office means yet more disruption after a prolonged period of upheaval. Some feel like they only just settled into a new norm and now they need to change again! Here are OPRA's tips for supporting change.



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# Transitioning to a New Normal

Whether your team are working fully remote, are operating in rotations, or only select staff have changed their work location, many organisations are starting to focus on a return to their pre-COVID-19 state of work or some type of 'new norm'.

## Recommendations

1. **Don't go 'cold turkey'.** This refers to the temptation to advise that from a certain date all staff are expected to be back in their workplaces. After a prolonged period of change and stress, employees are likely to be fatigued. Some will be cautious about second-wave infections and the potential impact. It will be more palatable and less likely to have negative impact on individuals, workplace productivity and satisfaction if a graduated return can be negotiated, if feasible.
2. **Roll-in as you rolled-out.** That is, if you staggered key personnel, teams, or groups to work remotely first, or assigned a rotation, then work backwards from the most recent. It will be fresher and easier for them to return sooner, and the population/s who have been remote for longer may be more vulnerable; it may suit to stay remote for longer than other cohorts.
3. **Plan your approach and be mindful.** What roles are needed (realistically) back in the office, first? A structured, well thought out and thoroughly communicated strategy is likely to offer employees support, reassurance, and clarity of what to expect and when. This in turn eases unrest and stress.
4. **Show empathy.** Because of the uncertainty, stress, and challenge of recent months, be kind to others! This also goes for being kind to yourself. Everyone will be challenged by another disruption and the potential chaos of transitioning 'back'. Please be aware of this, look out for yourself and others.
5. **Reframe negative thoughts.** What is the silver lining here? "It can be great to get back to routine and order." "Get out of the house and see people face to face."
6. **Prepare for safety requirements.** Ensure that the workplace has accommodated recommendations for safety precautions and has appropriate equipment, hygiene products, and distancing measures implemented, prior to returning.
7. **Be prepared to change.** As we know, change is the only constant. Prepare employees with as much information as possible, operating in a flexible manner than can accommodate further future change initiatives. See the questions we pose (on the right) to test your organisational preparedness for flexible work.
8. **Reflect and learn from this process.** How did your organisation handle the response to COVID-19? Was it successful and smooth? How was the employee experience? What would you do differently if this happened again? Leaders should critically review and update your Business Continuity Plan. And finally, think about how you, your team and organisation may acknowledge and even celebrate performance, achievements etc., from over the past few months.

Some employees are likely to **ask for more permanent flexible arrangements**, especially if they have demonstrated productivity and found working remotely suitable to their lifestyle and preferences.

Consider:

- What is your organisation realistically prepared to offer?
- What roles are feasible to be remote or flexibly managed?
- Anticipate that this is likely to become a new normal; how can your organisation best accommodate these requests?
- What are the financial considerations and policy implications (e.g., insurance policies, equipment, working ergonomically, and workplace safety considerations)?
- How will you measure success and productivity in a more flexible or virtual world?

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Watch a Quick  
Video, Here!