

The Transition into the “New Normal”

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As we are “flattening the curve” and the economy is slowly opening, employees will start to transition back to the office after nearly four (4) months of working from home. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many organizations to close and, those that did not have a disaster recovery/business continuity plan in place had to scramble to come up with a “work from home” solution in order to keep their business running while keeping their employees safe and healthy. Such “on the fly” solutions can cause serious complications as employees return to the office, and company leadership realizes that they must adjust their risk strategies to suit the “new normal”.

An example of such "on-the-fly" risk assessment and change is ambulance/EMT protocols that had to be rewritten on a daily basis. There is a governing body/approval



process for what an EMT/Paramedic can do in the field but that all went out the window due to the influx of COVID-19 patients.

There is always risk involved in approving new protocols without fully vetting them first, but these unprecedented times surfaced a whole new set of fluid risks and protocols. This proves that even businesses that survived and even thrived during the “work from home” period must be very thoughtful in addressing the processes involved in returning to work.

While the risks that were present in the beginning of the pandemic lockdown are weakening and the chances of contracting COVID-19 have lessened greatly, we must continue to comply with social distancing protocols and ensure employees are not at risk of infection. Below are a few risk mitigation strategies that every business owner and leadership team should take into consideration before they have their team return to the office.

- Not every employee is/will be needed when “work from home” ends — and some employees will not want to come back to the office. The company must evaluate the people needed against the risks of having them back in the office. Who are the essential employees, and who are the employees who would benefit from staying at home? Does your organization have an open floor environment? If so, some employees may have underlying illnesses and won't want to work in such environment - If they have been doing their job productively for 30-60 days, why do they have to?
- Whiteboard all the new processes (and costs) used during the “work from home” period and then identify (1) what worked, (2) what didn't work and, (3) what can work with a small tweak.
- Identify the tasks employees were performing during “work from home” (compared to before) and costs, if any.
- What are the risks associated with new processes or applications used during “work from home” including network security, bank fees, equipment for employees, technology platforms, etc.?
- Put together a Risk Register that can serve as a tracking document to help identify the impact of a certain risk while factoring in the likelihood of that risk occurring. Keep it as simple as possible while still allowing the risk to be easily detectable. Outline a category, owner, frequency, severity and what management controls are in place to mitigate that risk.



While some may say we were fortunate to be able to work remotely and seamlessly, we would say this was not pure luck, but rather a carefully planned, vetted and successfully orchestrated business continuity plan. As a risk management firm, we have been speaking about the importance of having [such a plan](#) for a very long time. We successfully implemented a remote work strategy, and you can view pictures and read updates about our “work from home” journey on our [careers page](#).

If you need more information on any of the topics covered in this blog, or need help with putting together a business continuity plan or addressing any risk related issues please contact [Albert Sica, Managing Principal](#), at 732.395.4251 or asica@thealsgroup.com.

Topics: [Enterprise Risk Management](#), [Total Cost of Risk \(TCoR\)](#), [pandemics](#), [COVID-19](#), [business continuity plan](#)