

Discussion Summary

- The discussion focused on instilling confidence for employees and customers in the workplace as people return to work.
- There have been a number of high profile factory closures, which have been front-page news over the last few weeks. We have also seen a local lock down in Leicester, which triggers concerns about other local lockdowns.
- Make UK has produced reports recently. The first being – [Responding Resetting and Reinventing UK Manufacturing Post Covid19](#). Highlights include:
 - Responding to resetting, post COVID-19.
 - COVID-19 predicted to stunt manufacturing growth until 2022. It furthermore states that digital global and green initiatives are central to aiding recovery.
 - Forecasts reveal that it will take at least 2 years for manufacturers to get anywhere near to the pre-COVID-19 growth track. It will potentially cost £36 billion.
 - The report predicts that the sector will help the UK meet its zero carbon target through a mix of investing in green and maximising the use of digital technology. This can only happen with a repurposed industrial strategy, involving a partnership with the UK government and other stakeholders to recognise the key value of the sector.
 - The report reiterates the importance of manufacturers diversifying their customer base to help achieve growth.
- The second report, The second report – [Make UK Manufacturing Monitor](#), which was published on 3 July is relatively new data:
 - The speed of decline in the sector is alarming
 - Nearly 98% of manufacturers are continuing to trade
 - 16% of firms are operating at capacity
 - 28% are operating anywhere between zero and half of their capacity
 - A quarter of firms have furloughed their staff – 26%-50% of their workforce
 - More than 40% of manufacturers plan to make redundancies over the next 6 months
 - Overall predictions are pessimistic although the data does indicate an improvement
- Culture of confidence is incredibly important. You must have a competent individual who has read the guidelines who can pass the information on to your employees on a regular basis. Once controls are in place then you need to ensure that people follow them.
- The culture of confidence should be a virtuous circle. Making sure you have someone who is well-informed of the situation but ensure you bring your employees through with you.

Impact of Government's Latest Guidance on Working Safely

- There is quite a lot of rhetoric about restarting the economy and businesses getting back on track.
- Key safety messages:
 - Government's guidance is that employees should still be working from home wherever possible.
 - Some office-based businesses are re-opening soon where all staff are being brought back in to their place of work. There does not appear to be much consideration, if people could stay working from home.
 - Employers may be overlooking the requirements to consult with employees about the restart. In particular employers are not consulting on risk assessments which should be carried out. This is an obligation.
 - Workers are being presented with introduced measures, instead of consulted of what they are and why they have taken particular precautions. This may not give employees confidence that the right measures have been put in place.
 - Government guidance has now changed the proximity rule from 2 metres to 1 metre plus risk mitigation. It reflects the reality that some businesses were finding it difficult to comply with the 2 metre rule due to the nature of the work.
 - If you decide to go under the 2 meter threshold, you must make your employees feel confident that the necessary mitigation measures have been put in place.

Communication is Key

- Manufacturers are more familiar with risk assessments and implementing safeguards accordingly. Those assessments will need to be reviewed each time the government guidance changes.
- As COVID-19 is a new disease the nature of risk changes. The likelihood of the risk materializing changes also once there are confirmed cases of the disease.
- There is a fear factor around transmission between colleagues. A consultation about the safeguards in place is more important than ever as this helps to build and strengthen the confidence that is needed as people move back to work.
- The spread of the virus could occur outside of the workplace. Businesses may not be familiar with enforcing safety measures in smoking areas or canteens.
- Guidelines are available on the Government website. Employees may review them and not understand what are guidelines and what is law. Therefore, management must convey this appropriately and to be clear why it is important to follow both at the workplace to keep the risk to the lowest possible level.
- Employees also personally have an obligation to protect the health and safety of themselves along with their colleagues. If they are contacted by Track and Trace, they must self-isolate if required. At the same time, they must inform their employer.
- If an employee goes on holiday that is not supported by the air-bridge they may need to self-isolate. As an employer you are entitled to ask where they will be going.
- There are issues around, if an employee does not comply with the obligations that are placed on them. They need to understand what those obligations are, they need sufficient training and to understand that there are ramifications, if they do not comply.
- Weekly updates and team meetings to discuss this is helpful.
- Many employers have done risk assessments but they have not been communicated to their workforce. What should be done is adapt as the government guidance has changed and communicate this accordingly.
- If you get in to the unfortunate instance where someone tests positive, one thing to bear in mind is that ICO guidance says that you should not tell employees or colleagues who has contracted the disease, as it is personal health data. It will probably be clear to them at a later stage. You must say that someone has tested positive.

Relaxation of Government's Home Working Rules

- A number of firms are saving significant amounts of money by having people work from home and are looking at reviewing contracts with certain individuals.
- The Government should be led by infection levels. If there is a drop-off of infection levels, then there may be further relaxations however, if there is a spike over the summer then the guidance may be strengthened.
- Many staff have been working from home for over 4 months using Microsoft teams to stay connected.
- It is important to have physical contact with colleagues and many businesses are considering a phased return with social distancing.
- Some businesses are presenting it as a positive. People have been working from home efficiently, effectively, and there has been a lot more collaboration and communication than usual. Businesses are also conscious about well-being and mental health of their colleagues and are starting to encourage meeting up, to maintain physical connection.
- Individual consultations could be held with those people who are happy to work from home.
- Childcare issues remain a factor with many schools still closed. It is good to justify people's return to work but important to bear in mind childcare issues – again communication is important.

Addressing the Fear Factor

- Fear factor cannot be underestimated. Media as well as the government has enforced this fear. We will find difficulties in assisting people with their confidence. Businesses will need to monitor and plan for further local lockdowns as we have seen in Leicester, which will affect people's confidence with returning to work.
- Businesses must avoid complacency: We are still at risk. The disease has not disappeared.
- Travel to work and the fear of public transport remains an issue to be dealt with.

Additional Resources

- www.makeuk.org/training/all-training-courses/covid-19-e-learning-and-resource-pack
- www.makeuk.org/training/all-training-courses/covid-19-e-learning-a-manufacturing-workers-guide
- www.makeuk.org/training/all-training-courses/a-guide-to-managing-homeworking