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Return to office.

A constructive approach
to a complex problem



Return to office.

The return to office is happening – if it hasn't already. Many businesses have either mandated a return to office (RTO) or encouraged employees back several days a week. There have been a variety of reactions to this shift over the last few years, the main one being that this sensitive message needs a constructive approach in order to land.

Having seen that employees don't technically need to be in the office to fulfil their role, there needs to be a compelling reason or purpose behind commuting in again. But that provided part of the core problem. While they may be fulfilling their role, there's much more to being part of an organisation – and feeling connected to colleagues and the wider purpose helps to generate a positive employee experience.

Our role within all this is to help you handle the complexity with dexterity. We'll walk you through our tried and tested method, so everyone ends up on the same page and any internal comms create meaningful impact so people actually want to return to the office

Reframe. UNDERSTAND

- 1 Surfacing your return to office purpose
- 2 Testing your return to office reality

Retool. ALIGN

- 3 Defining your rules of engagement
- 4 Creating authentic and consistent messages
- 5 Readying leaders and line managers

Return. DELIVER

- 6 Communicating with impact

Reframe.

1 SURFACING YOUR RETURN TO OFFICE PURPOSE

It all starts by figuring out what makes coming into your office distinctive. Why is it meaningful for both your people and the business? By getting that down on paper, you can start to address the barriers that anyone reluctant to come in could be feeling.

Given a return to office is a top-down decision, your senior leadership need to be the ones to sit down and discuss that the reason behind your RTO. This could be to facilitate better learning and coaching, promote efficiency or innovation, address property costs and more.

It's also worth looking at your remote working policy, comparing it with your other core documents like a code of conduct and employee value proposition, to see how this all syncs up. From there, you can compile a definitive 'why' for working together in a shared shape and the greater meaning behind it.

2 TESTING YOUR RTO REALITY

Defining the reason for your return to office is half the story – the other half being what it practically looks like. The marrying of these two makes sure your narrative will have credibility and authenticity to power its message. Without it, there can be a disconnect between what your leadership are thinking and what your people will actually feel.

The nuances of how your return to office will work establish its affect on your employees, so it's best to stress-test your narrative to make sure it'll land with them. This allows for capturing of any extra benefits you might not have considered, as well as revealing the most common blockers thrown out for your RTO strategy.

This is where having an external partner can really add value – both as employee experience experts, and as a third party who can allow employees to speak freely. Given anonymity, they may be more likely to share their honest thoughts, which are essential to crafting a message that resonates.

Retool.

3 DEFINING YOUR RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Once you have those two elements alongside your testing, you can start to form a plan. Knowing which elements of your return to office have the biggest blockers means you can potentially alter aspects to compromise and where you'll need to greater focus on to persuade people.

From here, you can look at tactic for how to land your messages, including who's best placed to share the narrative, how you'll approach change management, what timeline you're working to, and any contingencies for flexing of rules or enforcement.

It's also worth considering any activations that can run in tandem with your return to office, offering proof points around its purpose and encouraging employee engagement. The power of demonstrating value, rather than simply stating it, cannot be understated.

4 CREATING AUTHENTIC AND CONSISTENT MESSAGES

You know your purpose, the reality, and a strategy to cover people management and internal comms – now comes the actual messaging itself.

How will your frame the narrative so it connects the dots between your RTO purpose, your employee value proposition, and overcoming any barriers? It might seem like a big ask, but if you've done the groundwork then a path through should come fairly naturally. Although sometimes an external perspective lends also helps, especially if you're struggling to see the wood for the trees.

With a shared messaging framework in hand, you can communicate in one, consistent voice. And that's powerful stuff. You'll be able to say the right thing, to the right people, at the right time. That's when it's time to prime things for rollout.

Retool. CONTINUED

5 READYING LEADERS AND LINE MANAGERS

Your line managers are at the vanguard of your engagement strategy. Leadership effectiveness can make or break most strategies, as they're usually first port of call when things change, so you'll want to make sure they're well prepared.

Properly briefing leaders and line managers on what to expect means you can address any grey areas and get ahead of any questions they have. That way, when everything comes into play, they can feel confident of what's needed from them. It's also crucial to establish how the return to office will be measured and reported, as well as what happens if it doesn't go to plan.

By having these conversations, you can make sure you've covered off everything line managers and employees might need to support them through the return to office – all that's left is to compose your communications strategy and hit the go button.



Return.

⑥ COMMUNICATING WITH IMPACT

You've surfaced your purpose, tested the logic, nailed your narrative and written up the rules of the road – now it's time to bring it all together. Strategic communications is what reinforces your message and sparks inspiration across your organisation, making sure people sit up and pay attention.



This will likely combine elements of your employee value proposition and your return to office purpose for maximum impact – 'here's what you get from us, here's what we expect from you'. Storytelling can help articulate this in an emotive, engaging way, making the RTO feel like less of a request and more of a natural conclusion.

If you've planned any activations to help realise your return to office, these can be woven through your strategic communications – complimenting your RTO purpose rather than feeling like incentives, which can create short-term buy-in rather than long-term change.

Are you ready to return?

These six steps give you a framework from which to set your return to office up for success – but in practice, it can be trickier. You'll need to invest time and resources up front, but it will all be returned with dividends when people start regularly returning to work in person. And you'll feel it too. Workplace culture thrives off of connection – which is what most people want from a return to office.

Whether you need support through a particularly difficult stage, or would feel more comfortable with a strategic partner throughout this process, we're here for you. The complete employee lifecycle is our business, so we can make sure you've got what you need to handle any complexity that may come your way.

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