

COVID-19 - What Have We Learnt From These Challenging Times?

Monday 16th March, another day in the office, but things were starting to feel strange. A few cases of Coronavirus were on the news in the UK and around the world, but for many of us it was yet to be apparent just how big a disruption to everyday life was approaching. We were about to have a change forced upon us which would see the largest behavioural intervention of all times.

One week on, 23rd March, and it was very apparent things were changing quickly. The Government were now saying 'work from home if you are able to do so', Leonardo employees enabled to work from home had been instructed to do so since the previous week. As I am sure with other companies, our approach to communicating with employees and the outside world was having to adapt quickly as the crisis evolved. We had never had to communicate such big changes in a short space of time. How would it work? Well, I can confirm Leonardo, around the world, stepped up in every way. Firstly, they would do their best to ensure the safety of their people. Anybody who could work from home was told to do so as advised by the Government guidelines. In order to support this, the company had invested at an earlier stage of the pandemic in IT equipment and infrastructure to enable up to 70% of the company's UK employees to work remotely. Some of the workforce, in areas such as production, needed to continue to work on Government contracts as key workers on site. The Senior Team made suitable changes to their areas, put shift patterns in place and supported in every way they could to ensure social distancing measures were in place and safe working measures and PPE were set up. The canteen was shut but daily picnic lunches were distributed to those workers on site to avoid large gatherings and further chances of any contamination.

Having already seen the pandemic strike Italy, where thousands of Leonardo employees are based, we had been able to take lessons from their experience and plan from the very early stages how to respond to the emergency. A senior COVID response team was formed which held daily meetings making decisions across all UK sites and

produced a daily communication to keep all employees informed of the situation, what they needed to do, and provide support for health and safety and the changes to continue and adjust to the new environment we were all now working in.

We operate under tight security restrictions with IT platforms, but very quickly we all felt connected. WebEx and Skype were the new 'normal' ways of communication and keeping in touch with teams. Nobody has been furloughed, and the majority of the workforce has maintained a good level of resilience and positivity.

Travel restrictions were enforced from very early stages of the crisis and some long-term assignees returned to the UK from less favourable places in the world to work from their UK home and just be back with family during a time where the future was not clear. Additional communication has been kept with all assignees, wherever they find themselves, just to check all is okay. Whilst some are displaced from their host countries others are working with local government guidance in addition to our internal communication and sharing their experiences and concerns.

Absence reporting and monitoring the situation of all employees has been critical. Specific advice and support has been ongoing throughout. A wellbeing strategy is embedded to maintain the new working environment whilst keeping contact with everybody who is suffering from different impacts of the virus, whether contraction of COVID-19, shielding, or having to manage different working arrangements whilst juggling family needs and workload. Open channels are set up to support both mental and physical health at a time where people need to feel connected, and understanding there is a channel to say how you feel especially if suffering.

Across all sites you can now see the wide use of newer communication channels such as Whatsapp and remote collaboration with colleagues that had not happened on such a large scale before. It was important to get through this together and have an agile approach with the importance to foster the change needed.

Some tactical tools were put in place as an infrastructure to ensure the pulse continued and the employees continued to feel part of the company, not cast adrift. Positive energy came through the communications and

physical support briefings were shared from the Health and Safety Team. Nobody wants to suffer from 'Dormant bottom syndrome' do they?! Change is not the easiest thing to accept, but somehow through the speed and necessity of the requirement we appear to be riding the storm and adapting well to the new ways of working. The insight into our colleagues lives in different ways than we might have expected in the past and the empathetic approach from managers has all been part of the journey. Wanting to feel that somebody cares how you feel and not just what you are doing has been a key approach. Understanding your own mental health and what works for you is very important in not feeling isolated. How will you break up the day? How will I get through this alone? It is important to see progress and as a company Leonardo has supported every step throughout the journey so far.

Ten weeks on and improvements have continued each week, and we're now planning how the best parts of this new model of working can be extended into the future, even as the lockdown begins to ease. What will become the norm for the future? To what extent can we adopt some of these new working patterns?

Office layouts, signage and rotas are being drawn up. There is no expectation that we will have a working life quite the same as we have had in the past, so sharing new ideas and ways of working will assist us all in adopting new patterns and embracing life for the future.



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