

Creating positive work environments: The implications of COVID-19

Why is this important?

COVID-19 has changed the way we work. Since the beginning of the pandemic, more than one in three businesses in Aotearoa now offer working from home as a permanent option to some extent.¹

Of these businesses, 73% report that some employees feel isolated at home and prefer the team environment of the office.

In a recent report, these organisations said flexible working has reduced their teams' ability to collaborate (20%) and has had a negative impact on office culture (5%).

For other businesses, increased flexibility has presented a completely different problem with almost one in four employers surveyed (22%) saying working from home has been too successful and they have had to encourage people back into the office.

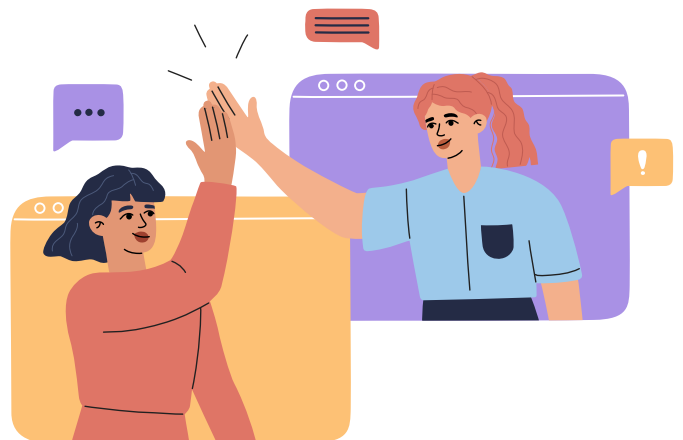
Almost 60% of businesses that now offer flexible working said it has been a positive move.

What can you do to support your staff?

Leadership and commitment

In the COVID-19 environment, communication is more important than ever. People leaders and managers can:

- Ensure organisational messages are relevant, transparent and offer realistic hope for a more positive future.
- Have a single place where people can access information.
- Check in with your team and ask how they're doing. Let them know it's okay to feel a range of emotions.
- Think about what supports your organisation can provide to your people over the longer term.
- Make sure communication with team members is two-way.
- Adjust organisational policies and processes to make them relevant in the new working environment.



¹ Southern Cross Health Insurance & Business NZ (2021). Workplace Wellness Report 2021. Auckland, New Zealand: BusinessNZ. Retrieved from <https://www.businessnz.org.nz/resources/surveys-and-statistics/wellness-in-the-workplace-survey/Southern-Cross-Health-Insurance-BusinessNZ-Workplace-Wellness-Report-2021.pdf>

Know your teams

- Know your team members, and their strengths and weaknesses as individuals and in teams.
- If you're working from home, establish routines, regular check-ins and de-briefs.
- Make wellbeing conversations part of the normal check-in process.
- Ensure expectations of the team are reasonable and realistic.
- Create a sense of control, hope and fun.
- Invest in team-building.

Have regular one-to-one conversations

- Ask questions such as “how are you today?”, “what’s important to you today?”, “what supports are in place?” and “what are the barriers?”.
- Focus on the changes you have noticed in someone’s behaviour, mood, thinking and reactions.
- Listen and help. You do not need to solve someone’s issue. Instead, ask, listen, help, and repeat.
- Evaluate and review. What is working? What do we need to change?



Helpful resources

Mental Health Foundation

Creating positive work environments

These resources provide practical tips to enhance and maintain wellbeing at individual, team, and organisational levels, with a focus on creating organisational or systems change towards a psychologically-healthy organisation and culture.

Workplace wellbeing during COVID-19

Resources to help workplace leaders create work environments where people feel safe, calm, connected and hopeful throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Open Minds e-learning

This free online training course helps managers support people experiencing mental distress or illness at work, with guidance about starting a conversation with someone who might be affected.

Health and Safety Association of New Zealand (HASANZ)

Find a [HASANZ registered advisor](#) to help you.

HASANZ also has a range of [COVID-19 related webinars and resources](#), including:

- Managing COVID-19 in the workplace
- Returning to work safely
- Personal leadership and working differently
- Healthy working from home.

WorkSafe

[Staying mentally healthy when working from home](#)

Guidance for workers who do office-type work in their home, or an equivalent location, rather than at their business premises.

Business Leaders' Health and Safety Forum

A range of [resources](#) for CEOs, including:

- COVID-19 vaccination policy support
- Protecting mental wellbeing at work
- CEO's guide to mental health and wellbeing
- Research: Lessons from the pandemic.

Business.govt.nz

[Managing the impact of COVID-19 cases in your business](#)

Advice for organisations on how to plan for COVID-19 affecting their employees, and how to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infections in their workplace.