

## Considerations for Reopening: Shifting Your Business from Survival Mode to Thrive Mode

This guide is designed to help businesses rebound from survival-mode and transform into thrive-mode.

It has become obvious that the impact of COVID-19 is more than a short-term pause, it will linger and follow us into the future. There is a need then to shift how businesses operate to get out of the current 'survival' mode and adapt to function within both the current conditions and the long-term effects.

Below are some key areas of consideration and trends that we feel businesses can begin thinking about to help take the first steps in moving forward. This is followed by tangible, practical advice that covers the importance of purpose guiding priorities, short and long-term planning, and people in virtualized workplaces.

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## Considerations

We recommend identifying the factors currently impacting your business. Accept these impacts as facts and then develop an agile and innovative path to advancement that can work within these limitations/factors. Examples of factors:

- **Government policy:** Understand how governmental policy and programs impact your business. By all means, simultaneously lobby for changes, but internally accept the current direction for what it is and plan accordingly. You cannot control what the government decides, so focus on what you can control and create opportunities.
- **Cultural perceptions:** You know your clients and customers so consider how will they react to your planned strategy. For example, if you believe your customers are likely to be cautious, an important step for your business will be to effectively explain the extra measures you have taken to ensure customer safety.
- **Economics:** Think: how have your clients or customers been impacted by the pandemic? How does this impact your business? How can you adapt your business to be more aligned with the new reality?

## Emerging Trends

The big questions to be thinking about here are centered around: what will the world be like after this pandemic? What trends are you seeing? What trends are data revealing? How can you adapt your business to these trends?

Some of the key trends we are seeing are:

- More businesses are planning to have at least a portion of their employees continue to work virtually on a permanent basis
- A reduction of commercial office space requirements/demand
- Higher wage expectations for front line workers
- Higher wage expectations for healthcare workers
- Potential wage freeze for public sector employees to help pay for government stimulus programs
- Change in government priorities and funding interests
- Industries like tourism, restaurants/dining, and retail hit hardest
- Industries like tech, health research, and nimble organizations able to shift production to address COVID-19 are growing during the pandemic
- Professional services like finance, IT, and HR are seeing an increased demand

## Specific Advice on Business Planning in a Pandemic

Below are some practical tips and important points to be considering that we think can help businesses as they begin to reopen and/or move forward in a COVID world.

### Strategy: Purpose and Priorities

Cement your business on its purpose. If this purpose has changed due to the pandemic, sit down and determine what the new purpose is. Then prioritize. Use your purpose, your values, to guide your priorities. Here are some questions to ask yourself to help with the process:

- What is your purpose? What do you do?
- Reframe and ask yourself what work your employees should **DO** in your business model regardless of whether there is a workplace to go to.
- How can your business best operate in 2020?
- What can you do right now, regardless of any change in the pandemic? What can you do next month?
- How can you create short-term plans that are nimble and able to evolve over the long-term? Focus on the now, 1-year out and 2-years out over 5-year plans.
- Agility is key along with ingenuity. How can you change? How can you harness creativity?
- Focus on a few specific things versus a grandiose and all-encompassing plan (helps to actually get things done).

### Strategy: Short and Long-Term Planning

Now is the time to critically assess your business strategy. Does it need to be adjusted in light of the recent pandemic? If so, what do you need to shift? Here are some questions to ask yourself to help with the process:

- How do you need to adjust your strategic plan? The assumptions used to create the current plan are no longer valid. Adapt assumptions to reflect the new reality.
- How can you maintain a [growth mindset](#)? How can you praise and reward effort? Who can you ask for ideas?
- What areas should you focus on? What areas will be most profitable in 2020?
- What can be digitized? How can you leverage technology?
- How can you shift operations to align with the pandemic?
- Brainstorm options – sell via drugstores, restaurants moving to grocery delivery as well as meals, modify production to meet a provincial or federal need for supplies, etc..
- Create a graduated plan: what can you start doing now? What can you do after some restrictions are lifted? What can you do while social distancing remains in place?

- Have contingency plans. We all want to see restrictions lift and the number of cases decline, but what if there is a second wave? What if the economy takes longer to rebound? Be ready to adapt.

## People

People are essential to every business. Engaging, protecting and leveraging talent is essential to business success. This is especially true during a pandemic. Here are some questions to be asking and tips to maximize the effectiveness of your people practices:

- **Repurpose:** What work needs to be performed under the new business model? How can existing staff be redeployed to these roles?
- **Engage:** How can you stay connected with your existing talent? Virtual team coffees? Frequent check-ins? Online teambuilding activities? Frequent touch points via text or email?
- **Maximize learning:** If things are slower, why not replace the time with learning opportunities? Are their new skills needed within your workplace? This is a perfect time to close these gaps. There are lots of available and free webinars, courses, and certifications. Encourage staff to take advantage of this. Funding may also be available through a [SUB Plan via Service Canada](#).
- **Government programs to help modify your workforce:** Service Canada offers a number of programs such as [work sharing](#) and [SUB plans](#) to support employers who may need to reduce available hours or to send employees on training to upgrade skills. Employers pay less wages as employees receive EI and reduced wages and employees retain their employment and receive a significant portion of their wages (up to 95%) even though they are working reduced hours or are off work while attending training.
- **Can't afford to work?** A recent phenomenon is employees who cannot afford to work as their take-home pay on the [Canadian Emergency Response Benefit \(CERB\)](#) is higher than it is when they work. This has been addressed in Ontario through the provision on an additional [\\$4/hour pay raise for front line and essential workers](#) by the province. NOTE that these measures will be temporary, however long-term expectations may change. Organizations should be thinking about these potential challenges and look at how they might address expectations with a more holistic view on what you offer to employees beyond just salary.
- **In person work:** How can you enforce social distancing in your workplace? Can you reduce the numbers who have to work on-site? Ideas: maximize virtual work opportunities. For those who do need to be physically present, perhaps segment staff or use split shifts – perhaps some people go to work Monday and Tuesday, others Wednesday and Thursday. Create a sign-up spot in your team collaboration tool so that individuals can indicate if they will be in. Limit the 'seats' that can get booked in any one day. The key is to reduce the on-site workforce, at least those present at the same time.

## Virtualized Workplaces

- **Work from home practices:** Help employees manage expectations. Encourage employees to find balance between home and work. Do you have core hours where people can work and interact? How can you support employees to work from home effectively with technology?
- **Childcare considerations:** Please remember employees who have children at home right now have no other options. A little compassion will go a long way. It is not easy to balance the demands of full-time work and 24/7 childcare.
- **Hours of work:** Ask yourself: are strict hours really needed? In virtual work environments the employment relationship shifts to high trust and managing results. Why not manage by deliverables? Hold your employees accountable for what they are to deliver versus managing them as workers. Assess what your employees are producing/contributing to your business versus how many hours they work.
- **Focus on accountability:** Give your employees the maximum flexibility to do the expected work and hold them accountable to do so. In most work environments, when the work is done and from where are far less important than the accomplishments.
- **Progress check-ins:** A challenge to managing results in a virtual environment is the loss of impromptu check-ins and visual 'cues' to get a sense on how things are progressing. [Project management tools](#), or structured check-ins can help in a virtual workplace.
- **Increased flexibility:** The world is more complicated now. Picking up groceries after work may no longer be feasible. Many services require appointments and or pre-arranged pick-up times. Focus only on the timings that matter (i.e. calls with customers/clients), be flexible with the rest.
- **Be productive virtually:** How can you digitize your office? Think of technology as streamlining processes not as moving in-person activities online. For example, use [collaboration software](#), don't email a document person to person like you may pass a document around and office.
- **Brace for increased absences:** We all hope we have flattened the curve, but new cases will arise. Be prepared that any of your staff could become ill or need to take time away from work to care for someone else. Knowing and planning for this possibility can limit the impact of disruption.
- **Org structure:** A 2020 org design is much more flat than historical iterations. There is less need to have layers of management and hierarchy. Focus on the work to be done and efficiency versus formality and structure.