Protect and value your employees as you deploy manpower to achieve efficient and productive operations for restart and recovery of your business

Support and empower your people to create a successful and versatile business. Previous working habits require overhaul to prevent the spread of COVID-19. You will need to get former staff and new entrants work together efficiently, by developing their skills, improving and optimizing their workplaces, and consolidating their operational procedures. You can intervene to support People, to adjust Place of work and to strengthen Procedure of working (3P Mode) to meet business goals and ensure employee welfare. Communication and trust are essential to get collaboration going.

Background

The COVID-19 outbreak and nation-wide lockdown implemented to limit transmission have presented unique business challenges to industries, especially Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. Likewise, the lives and livelihoods of your employees have been uprooted during lockdown and closure of your business operations. As restrictions are lifted, you will need to rebuild a productive work force and bring together experienced and new employees and change work practices to prevent spread of infections. As many manufacturing industries are labor-intensive, management of personnel is crucial to business recovery and business excellence plans.

Key questions that arise for employers are: How can employees be kept safe while in the workplace? How can maximum employees be retained when declined market demand and production limit revenue generation and business income? To what extent will manpower shortages or changeovers affect operations? How can skills gaps be overcome? These questions allude to the different types of manpower-related challenges:

✓ First and foremost, manpower availability has been affected by lockdown. Seasonal contractual labour may have migrated and may no longer be available in the same location as your business. This may have resulted in loss of skilled manpower critical to operations;

✓ Operations in the workplace may put employees at risk of infection with COVID-19 due to close proximity, physical contact and/or handling or operating machinery, workflow, tools and other items;

✓ You may need to hire new personnel to fill manpower gaps or adjust roles of current employees. Personnel may require orientation or training to start performing duties assigned to them;

✓ Due to a slump in market demand and, consequently, revenue generation opportunities, you may be faced with financial constraints that make it difficult to retain all employees;

✓ Due to changing – and already changed - market conditions, 'business-as-usual' that you were used to will not return. You may have to adjust production targets, processes and outputs, which may require new skills sets and competencies of your employees.
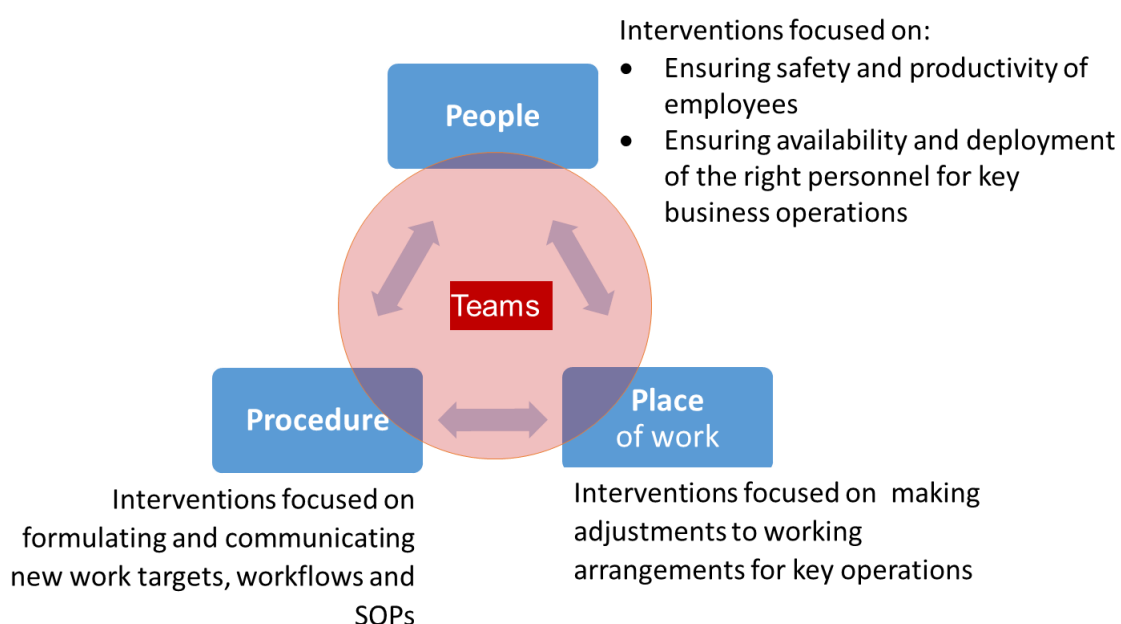
These challenges can be addressed in following manners:

✓ Measures that focus on protecting employees at the workplace, such as ensuring safety and protection of employees while delivering duties, ensuring future employment;

✓ Measures to improve efficiency and productivity of operations, such as training and skills development programmes, morale-building initiatives and optimization of work flows and operational practices and procedures.

These interventions will ensure that your employees are able to carry out their assigned duties and further skilled for their effective deployment in line with your established business goals.

Approach – The Three P Model

As a proxy, you have three points of intervention to make your manpower work well for your business, namely: **People;Place** of work; and**Procedure** of working – in short 3P model.

Interventions focused on:
- Ensuring safety and productivity of employees
- Ensuring availability and deployment of the right personnel for key business operations

People

Teams

Procedure

Interventions focused on formulating and communicating new work targets, workflows and SOPs

Place of work

Interventions focused on making adjustments to working arrangements for key operations

The distinction between People, Place and Procedure will help to create clear picture of who will carry out what work, where the work will happen and how deliverables will be completed. The following sections summarize these main approaches. A further set of common measures can be found in the accompanying **checklist** as well **as additional references** included in this module

People

People-related actions focus on ways to support employees while performing duties assigned to them. At the outset, employees might be reluctant to return to work for fear of COVID-19 infection. As an immediate measure, improve cleaning, sanitization and hygiene in your premises and supply employees with sufficient soap, hand sanitizers, face masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) that may be necessary depending on job. Support measures may also include provisions for advance payment of salaries or supply of essentials like food and shelter for contract workers as an incentive to remain in the location of the workplace and enable them to manage their personal finance constraints. You may also look into providing non-public common transport of employees to facilitate attendance and minimize infection risks during commuting. Another set of measures concerns relaxations or flexibility in contractual terms of work for employees. While some non-essential personnel may not be required right away, you could reduce attendance 'requirements' in the transition period, waive or shorten notice requirements for leave, increase allowance for sick or annual leave, such that employees can remain connected and employed even if they are not immediately required to resume full time duty. This speaks to the approach of strategically reducing labour costs, without resorting to reducing number of employed people right away, and indeed keeping labor that you may need in months to come as you strive to rebuild your business.

You can also focus on employee skills, competencies and agility with which new business conditions are adapted to. Manpower shortages will require new people to be taken on board, and their lack of familiarity with firm-specific processes would need to be addressed. Dedicated, on the job, training programmes, 'cross-training' (where personnel from multiple departments or processes work together to share knowledge and skills), setting up 'buddy' programmes for the orientation of new staff members may be considered. Keep an eye on the future your business wants to go, to ensure skills being developed are those needed to meet changing business requirements and market conditions.

These considerations and actions underpin the labour workplan for your enterprise.

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Place

Place-related considerations include adjustments towards establishing safe and efficient working arrangements for employees, so that their work can be done correctly with ease. That includes there being no risk to the employees' own health and safety, having the necessary tools etc. within arm reach and being able to quickly identify any omissions or faults. First and foremost, this includes prevention of COVID-19 spread through regular cleaning and sanitization of the workplace (including commonly touched materials, surfaces and common facilities). Next, adjust layout of the workplace with a view to minimize physical proximity and contact. For example, the workplace can be divided into specific zones based on sub-operations, and movement between different zones restricted. Workstations can be set up at least 6 feet apart, or dividers installed. Employees work on one workstation each, to avoid sharing of tools or materials. This time could also be used as an opportunity to implement workplace optimization techniques and procedures such as 5S (Sort, Set in order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain), with a view to make work flows more efficient.

Under place-related considerations, it is also advisable to think about where and how different activities are carried out withing factory/office premises. Face-to-Face meetings and significant gatherings of people can be replaced with meetings and discussions over digital platforms. These digital platforms can also serve to eliminate business travel. This approach points towards a rethink of where activities are to be carried out and if alternative options exist.

Procedure

Procedure-related considerations include workflows or protocols that need to be adjusted in line with changing requirements and business goals. For onsite employees, this would mean a change in the steps taken to carry out tasks or the way people interact with each other. This would also include a change in administrative procedures or guidelines that used to require physical contact/presence (e.g. biometric attendance systems), exchange of items, cash transactions, document submissions, etc.

While some employees would be in factory, warehousing and office premises, others are likely to continue working remotely. Think and plan how teams cancommunicate and how workflows and approvals can be routed for most efficient completion of work.

Manpower

With manpower shortages and changeovers additional monitoring and quality controls may be needed. Fewer employees managing extra workloads and new employees in unfamiliar conditions may dent productivity and quality. Increase inspection and oversight to ensure that quality benchmarks continue to be met.

The most useful are clear and easy-to-understand Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that help employees understand how to go about their work. Consider formulating a contingency work plan to set out adjustments in workflows in case critical personnel or a large section of employees are unable to resume work.

Action Plan

Formulate an action plan to detail how to manage manpower while resuming and rebuilding operations. Key steps are:

Step 1 : Labour Planning

Step 2: Working arrangements

Step 3: Team-building
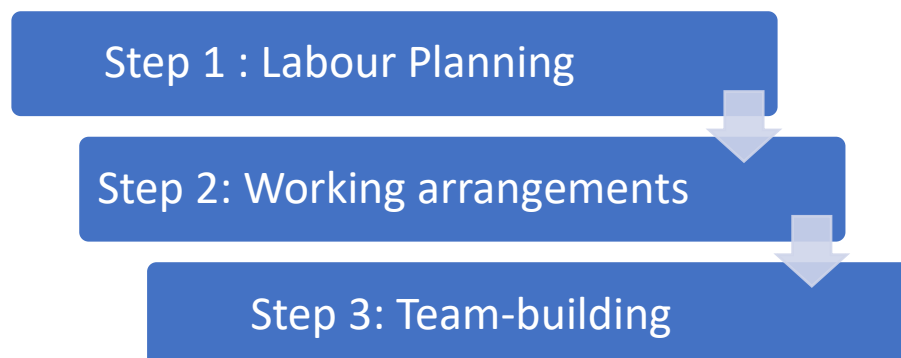
Step 1 - Labor planning

Planning how to deploy personnel involves an assessment of how many employees are available, which people are key to seamless business operations, identifying and addressing skills gaps emerging from unavailability and change over of previous manpower, and ultimately formulating plans to monitor and support personnel in their roles.

✓ Do a stock taking of how many of your earlier employees are available and willing to return to work

✓ Conduct an analysis of which roles are essential to your restart and recovery your business operations. Put these roles in either of the following categories: (i) Essential, (ii) Flexible and (iii) Others
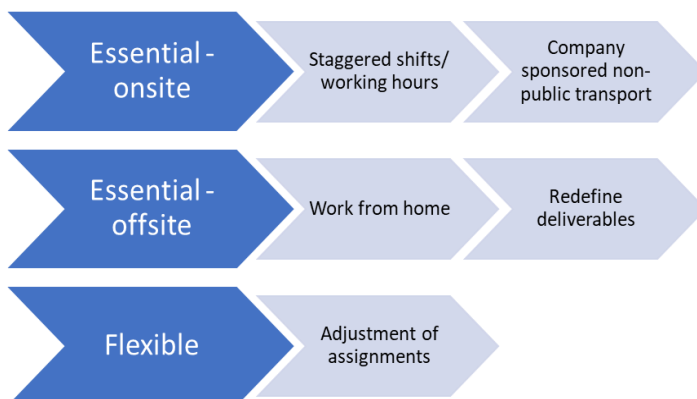
✓ Identify competency gaps (skilled/unskilled roles) due to manpower shortages and changeovers,

✓ Monitor, support and facilitate on-the-job training of personnel working in unfamiliar or newly-adjusted roles

Explore contingency plans/sources to replace manpower in case personnel fall sick or are unable to return to work due to lockdown-related restrictions; for example: manpower sharing arrangement with other nearby firms

Step 2 – Working Arrangements

The available and necessary manpower informs formulating new work or production targets and defining working arrangements and workflows for different categories of personnel. The approach to these adjustments is explained under the 'Place' and 'Procedure' topics of this module. Some important steps are highlighted below:

✓ Work with senior employees from all departments to decide on new (and realistic) targets, given the prevailing resource and labour constraints
✓ Outline different working arrangements for different categories of personnel

Essential - onsite	Staggered shifts/ working hours	Company sponsored non-public transport
Essential - offsite	Work from home	Redefine deliverables
Flexible	Adjustment of assignments	

✓ Formulate new workflows and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

Step 3 – Team Building

Another important aspect for consideration and action is promoting workplace cooperation and motivating employees to perform duties effectively. Firms benefit greatly from increased communication, information-sharing, skills development

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initiatives and active engagement of employees. Maintaining regular channels for two-way communication with both, on-site and off-site employees can help to communicate important business decisions, monitor work progress and address any concerns or challenges faced by employees. Improve workplace cooperation, communication and skills development

- ✓ Keep your workforce informed regarding business prospects and plans
- ✓ Communicate the changes in policies/working arrangements with stakeholder such as labor unions, contractors, suppliers and vendors as well
- ✓ Have frequent team meetings/discussions (in keeping with social distancing norms or teleworking guidelines)
- ✓ Educate employees on COVID-19 symptoms and prevention, do not assume people have all the information
- ✓ Sensitize workers on how behaviour and social interaction must change at the workplace as well as at home
- ✓ Encourage personnel to share know-how and experience to improve team outputs
- ✓ Evaluate if you need to add manpower with new skill sets to meet changing market conditions in the future

Overarching Strategies

As you review and improve adequacy and performance of People at work, Places of work and Procedures for working, keep an eye on the bigger picture for your company. Specifically:

- ✓ Balance potential need to cut costs with responsibility to retain employment
- ✓ Observe government advisories and legal provisions when deciding on manpower
- ✓ Think ahead: do not let go of employees with skills critical for your business for short term cost savings

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