



A HIROC Communications Guide to Returning to In-Person Work

Is this safe?

How will I adjust?

How exactly is this
going to work?

**Safety comes first
during re-opening.**

**And how you communicate
with staff is just as critical.**

As healthcare organizations across Canada prepare to return to in-person work, hard conversations are happening.

“Is this safe?”, “how will I adjust?”, and a common one: “how exactly is this going to work?”

Since HIROC Subscribers are across Canada in different jurisdictions with different COVID-19 situations and regulations, the purpose of this guide is not to advise how to re-open. But instead, this is curated advice from HIROC on how to handle the communications aspect of a return to the physical workspace.

1. Honesty is the best policy.

A lot of people learned just how important it is to be kind to each other during the pandemic. Part of this includes honesty, transparency, and being upfront about intentions and desires.

No matter what policy, change or pilot project your organization is planning, be sure to communicate well in advance. Employees should be fully, and fairly, informed long before changes are implemented.

Organizations may not have an answer to every question in the moment, but every question matters. Being honest with the fact that there may not be a definitive plan (yet), rather than ignoring the issue at hand, will be reassuring to employees.

2. Keep it simple.

If there's any time for clear, simple communication, this is it.

Now is not the time for ambiguity, jargon, or convoluted language. Your employees need to know exactly what's happening, when, why, and how.

Your employees communication and other needs have been evolving over the last year and it is important to avoid confusion during another difficult adjustment. Whatever changes you are implementing, communicate them in a simple, easy-to-understand way that leaves as little room as possible for ambiguity.

3. Ask the people who will be affected most: employees. Listen to them.

Surveys, town halls and the like are great ways to understand employee sentiments around re-opening. And, the follow-through is even more important.

Listen to them.

They want to succeed, and want what's best for the big picture of your organization's mission. Employees also know what works best for them at an individual level, so ask them.

4. Keep promoting a healthy work-life balance. Maintain trust.

When the pandemic hit, and working from home became mandatory for many, employers adapted to a new normal. In the vast majority of cases, it worked out.

Now, as we get ready to bring back employees, it's important to maintain the same level of trust you inspired in and gave to your employees during the pandemic.

It's important to intentionally communicate that trust, and promote balance.

A spotlight on how HIROC is evolving

At HIROC, we've been a fully virtual organization since March 2020.

Both our Toronto and Winnipeg (with a few small exceptions) offices have been closed since then.

As restrictions begin to ease across the country, HIROC is now laying the foundation to re-open our physical workspaces in a safe manner.

Here's what we did:

Safety first

The safety of our employees is of utmost importance and so we've made all the necessary adjustments around both offices to ensure they meet public health guidelines with respect to social distancing, handwashing, pre-arrival questionnaires, air quality standards, and many other vital protocols.

Sprint to success

As part of our current strategic plan, leaning on the fundamentals of design thinking is something we've been focused on. And so, we had an open call for staff to participate in a design thinking sprint on how best to re-integrate into our physical workspaces.

Sprint to success

With representation from every department, the team is currently in the midst of the sprint, researching best practices and trends and consuming literature reviews, seeking feedback from all staff and collaborating on a number of prototypes. The outcome will be something created by staff, for staff.

A hybrid model encompassing both in-person and virtual work is something being explored.

Multiple channels for feedback

Gathering all relevant data is key to ensuring everyone's voice is heard.

Right from the outset, the Sprint Team pushed out a survey to all staff, posing questions such as:

- How important is it to have a hybrid work model?
- What would be the optimal number of days to work in the office?
- How can HIROC improve the work from home experience?
- Share ideas to help ensure we have a successful hybrid work model.

98 % of HIROC staff completed the online survey.

In addition, Sprint Team members have been engaging with their departments throughout the process – keeping them informed and sharing weekly updates.

Finally, HIROC's leadership has made it a point to keep this initiative top of mind. We did this by including all relevant information and updates in the weekly blog from our CEO Catherine Gaulton, a recurring agenda item at the all-hands monthly staff meeting and providing a space for staff to speak up through check-ins and the internal Solution Box.

If you or your team would like to learn more about our sprint or if we can help in any way – drop us a line at communications@hiroc.com, we'd love to talk and share knowledge.