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Leading out of crisis:

Lessons learned in remaining resilient





Steadying strategies to lead the workforce

In the face of COVID-19, health care leaders and employer C-suites have worked to keep employees safe and maintain financial sustainability. It's time to take lessons learned to help stay resilient and prepared — now and in the future. This article will provide an assessment of what leaders can do to minimize the ongoing impact of COVID-19 while they build more resilience into their culture, systems and workflows.

"Having a plan to deal with this crisis is not a 'nice to have.' It's a first priority. There is a greater recognition we are all in this together. People are looking for the voice of leadership."

Seth Serxner, Optum Chief Health Officer and SVP of Population Health

Moving forward

The COVID-19 crisis demanded the creation of alternative solutions virtually overnight. However, as leaders guide their organizations out of crisis mode, they can assess new behaviors they have adopted and discern which should endure as more sustainable processes.



MOVING FORWARD:

Stay vigilant

1. Use data to monitor diseases

Data can work to provide strong, predictive models to anticipate needs. From disease spread to the impact on different populations, having a strong pulse on data insights will allow businesses to identify where shortages are likely, triggering a redeployment of resources to areas that need them most. This allows for quick response to equipment, human resources and facility demands.

2. Slow the spread of illness

Prevention is the first line of defense against every illness. Public hygiene, vaccinations, health screenings and other preventive treatments are all practices that leaders should encourage their employees to engage in regularly, for both general wellness and crisis preparation.

3. Be hyper-aware of transmission

Facilities should be equipped to prevent the spread of disease at all times. Leaders should look to add or enhance features in their workplaces to promote healthy work behaviors, including touchless public restrooms and easy access to disinfectant supplies. New procedures may include requiring sick workers to stay at home for a specified amount of time to limit exposure to others.

"If you can retain this memory as an organization and learn from it, and continue some of these policies, it will make your organization more resilient for other disasters — whether they're related to climate, the economy, health factors, or social turmoil. Whatever they may be, your organization now has experience that's going to help it remain sustainable."

Seth Serxner, Optum Chief Health Officer and SVP of Population Health

Moving forward

As organizations adjust to the realities of a crisis, the next priority must become finding adaptable solutions for the workforce.



MOVING FORWARD:

Increase connectivity

1. Roll out remote work options

Now that organizations have been forced to fully appraise their work-from-home accommodations, employing a remote work option comes with fewer barriers than ever before. Remote work can help prevent spread of illness. Allowing teams to work from home semi-regularly can keep employees up to speed on processes and allow them to work through complications when crisis isn't contributing additional pressure.

2. Offer virtual health services

In the future, employees will look for their benefit provider to support virtual appointments, which may even expand to physical therapy, coaching and care management. Virtual options will also be critical for employees who need to keep up with behavioral or mental health services, especially when facing uncertain times. This flexibility not only benefits employees in their regular routines. It also positions them to continue receiving treatments during times when one-on-one appointments are restricted.

3. Adapt to workforce demands

A crisis can have unexpected impacts on a workforce, leading to new expectations. Flexible staffing models moving forward will become the norm, especially as more businesses support remote work, and organizations must keep pace. Continually evaluating employee requests is critical to meeting demands and keeping employees safe.

4. Consider social connections

A workplace is often a point of community where people find connection and purpose. As employees work on adjusted schedules or remotely, the absence of these connections can have a negative impact on morale and individual well-being. Find ways to keep teams connected and motivated in the midst of change.

"As leaders, we must reassure people that this is normal. Your whole routine has changed. The whole way that you're used to working with others has changed. So it will take a little bit of time to adapt and get your rhythm. And we can help."

Seth Serxner, Optum Chief Health Officer and SVP of Population Health

LESSONS LEARNED

Handling the response

As leaders reflect on and analyze their response to COVID-19, there are many lessons to be learned from the very early stages of the crisis. **Here are some actions to build into your future response plans.**

1 Organizational crisis assessment

In unstable conditions, leaders try to respond to the seen and unseen. Everyone has different levels of information and perspectives to provide.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Create a multi-disciplinary task force to observe, identify pain points, assess and collaborate on solutions.
- Review currently available employee benefits and support services to make sure you understand what they are and if they are being fully accessed.
- Examine how to divert, redeploy or adjust human resources, real estate, employee benefits and other assets for immediate relief.

2 Addressing workforce anxiety and safety

In times of crisis, employees, members, patients and caregivers can be understandably afraid and frustrated. They look for strong guidance and fact-based leadership. It's imperative that workers also feel a sense of safety. If not, stress and exhaustion will follow.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Keep the dialogue open and track every employee concern. Share daily updates about levels of risk in your community or workspace.
- Create one communications hub for all crisis-related information.
- See if your current benefit provider is offering crisis training, financial coaching, or virtual mental and behavioral health support. Are there childcare benefits that can be redirected to support parents?
- Encourage employees to access support through virtual channels. Support employees to work from home if possible.

> "Communication at these times is all about overcommunication. That's one thing leaders can do to really keep a connection to their workforce through transparency, compassion and clear communication of the facts. When there's anxiety and uncertainty, people will often fill that void with negativity. So it's best to try to fill that space to build trust and credibility with the organization."

Seth Serxner, Optum Chief Health Officer and SVP of Population Health

LESSONS LEARNED

Pivoting to recovery



COVID-19 will be an enduring challenge for for some time. But leaders must simultaneously ready their organizations for what comes next. **Here are some strategies to build resilience into your organization's crisis recovery process and culture at large.**

1 Workforce flexibility

In a period of massive adjustment — such as shifting to virtual solutions or furloughing a segment of the workforce — leaders can ease the burden on their employees with a series of smart, strategic actions.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Employ IT to explore which digital tools can best support different business needs; e.g., status, meetings, collaboration, team building, secure file sharing, crisis updates. Consider all options. Make security a priority.
- Provide coaching for how to work in this changing environment, including how to help employees set limits while working at home. Consider how isolated some employees may feel and find new ways to create community.
- Redefine job descriptions as necessary to fit this remote environment or to solve crisis-related demands.
- Weigh potential partnerships with businesses to exchange needed services and consider whether you can outsource your employees to an area with heightened need.

2 Workforce recovery

Almost everyone identifies with their workplace as a community. It allows for connection and provides a point of purpose. That's why leaders must offer strong support now. After this crisis passes, organizations will be remembered for how they behaved.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Employ data or interpersonal outreach programs to identify high-risk employees, customers and community members, then proactively reach out to them.
- Consider waiving health plan costs, reducing copays or expanding benefits around virtual visits. Other relief options include adjusting PTO or enhancing childcare benefits.
- Help people understand how to access their health system — for both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 issues.
- Connect employees to the tools and services that will help them manage their conditions in place. What resources do you have that could be redirected to help members of your workforce stay resilient? Computers, tablets, phones? Meals?
- Reinforce access to the EAP and all available services.

Remaining resilient

Using recent experiences to inform future action, leaders can create or adjust their response strategies to improve culture, systems and workflows in the face of crisis. This type of organizational resilience will not only keep individuals safe but will build loyalty with employees and those you serve.

Implementing three levels of prevention

As we continue moving through the current COVID-19 crisis, the importance of preventive health measures has never been more apparent. There are three main stages to strengthening your organization's approach to prevention.

Primary
Work to ensure health

As the first line of defense, primary prevention manifests a more resilient workforce and builds employee loyalty by preparing and empowering individuals to pursue personal wellness.

Secondary
Arrest, suppress and subdue

Secondary prevention reduces the spread of germs and associated illnesses through early screenings, vaccinations, safety precautions and sanitation protocols.

Tertiary
Minimize impact, speed recovery

Tertiary prevention gives employees the option to safely comply with stay-at-home orders while ill, and supports individuals who require behavioral and mental health services during crisis.

> "The top three lessons from this should be prevention, prevention, prevention. This crisis has reminded us about the importance of the preventive side of our strategies around health benefits and services. To the degree that this could help us shift our priorities and infrastructure to help people, it would be a real silver lining."
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> Seth Serxner, Optum Chief Health Officer and SVP of Population Health

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