Covid & Work

Collaborating to promote safe, sustainable and supportive workplaces.

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"Lessons from COVID"

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- These times were unprecedented with no real plan in place.
- Rules and strategies were being made on the run by Govt
- The final strategy was based on a medical model underpinned by H&S practices already in place.
- The plan,
  - Minimise, isolate and segregate- all to manage exposure thus buying time for a vaccination programme to be rolled out.
    - The existing (and current health system could not have coped with large numbers of sick and dying people)
  - Provide economic security for those whose job or work was impacted.
  - Vaccinate quickly as many people as possible to mitigate those infected

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- The initial response is characterised by
  - Safety plans
  - Large amounts of information
    - Trusted, mis and dis information
  - Bubbles or groups of workers
  - Minimising contacts
  - Strict isolating rules for those ill
  - Conflicting messaging, rules and boundaries, masks, signing in, sanitisers, ID cards….
  - Alert levels to Traffic lights to "its all open".
- Overall employers did a good job assisted by their employees cope with uncertainty and fear with not knowing what was going to happen next.
- Businesses *pivoted* and found new and innovative ways of conducting work.
- Working from home was introduced almost overnight.

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- Working from home was a necessity rather than being novel.
- It was supported by,
    - Wrap around care
    - Policies and procedures.
    - Planned and demand driven contacts
    - Support and assistance
    - Information and technology
    - New words appeared Zoom and Teams meetings
    - It was new and to some degree exciting
    - Employers and employees found it could be done and that productivity remained high and staff enjoyed the flexibility.

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- However what we saw later on was:
  - Decreasing wrap around support
  - Connecting to people decreased
  - Staff were left on their own
  - No clear roles/responsibly were developed.
  - Expectations of work and work load were poor
  - Normal social cues for starting and stopping work were not present
  - Staff ended up doing more work, more home care and child minding
  - Over all it was BAU without staff being in the office
    - Leading to isolation/depression/fatigue/decreased social contacts…

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- Lessons learned.
    - Businesses can pivot when needed
    - Creating action plans (Alert levels etc) is great but exit strategies are also needed- how and when do we exit this plan. Business needs certainty.
    - Staff can be trusted to accommodate massive upheavals when there is wrap around support
    - Mental health and hygiene must be ongoing for hybrid working
    - Public Health strategies can be deployed successfully if there is an identified need and adequate resources put in place.
    - Use lead stakeholders when developing policy and programmes
    - Use business to promulgate the Public Health narrative is highly effective.