Continuous Improvement Review Process for COVID Response

Supporting Staff During COVID-19

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COVID Review Overview

1. Teaching and Learning
   i. Survey faculty (university wide)
   ii. Environmental scan of teaching resources, practises, supports and services, and policies and procedures

2. Mental Health
   i. Partnership with UFLORISH for UG and Grad Students
   ii. Developed UFLORISH for Staff and Faculty
ThoughtExchanges conducted in Fall 2020

1. UG students (FAS)
2. Graduate students (FAS)
3. Staff
4. UG and Grad Chairs (FAS)
5. Department Heads (FAS)
6. Department Embedded Support
7. Educational Developers
Staff ThoughtExchange Question

“What are the most important things we need to do to keep everyone connected and productive while working remotely and, in particular, what tools, resources or support do you need and what actions can we take to help facilitate this?”
Sample Demographics

- 78 staff participants
- 39% supervise others
- 37% in roles one year or less
- 58% have children or dependents
Compared to before COVID, to what extent are you able to focus on your work and maintain your wellbeing?

- Less: 59
- About the same: 24
- More: 16
Theme: Flexible Hours

**Flexible Work hours**  Improve wellness and create retention

4.1 ★★★★★ (26)

**Some flexibility on hours has been a key aspect of my success.**  With my kids learning at home, being able to work occasional evenings helps a lot.

4.1 ★★★★★ (25)

**Flexible work hours**  always "being at the office" tends to incur more end-of-day requests and these demands need to be balanced against other needs

3.5 ★★★★☆ (3)
Actions for Flexible Workplace

- Maintain flexibility in the work place during and after COVID with respect to hours and working at home
- Developed manager guidelines and resources for working remotely, flexible work arrangement for staff with caregiver responsibilities EFAP

http://www.queensu.ca/humanresources/coronavirus/work-guidelines-and-resources

- Remote Work Policy/Procedure in progress
Theme: Equity Considerations

**Continued flexibility and compassion**  Although we've adapted, this is still not business as usual. Flexibility and compassion are still critical and greatly appreciated.

**Offer flexibility and be inclusive to customize supports based on different staff needs and circumstances.**  We have different stressors right now, like childcare, etc., and flexibility can help us thrive through the continued uncertainty.

**Ensure we take into account everyone’s unique circumstances - be flexible and resilient while ensuring the work is proceeding.**  We are in this together and understanding the different pressures for individuals under remote work makes us a stronger team.
Actions for Equity Considerations

- Assess to ensure staff have needed equipment/supplies (e.g. chair, Internet) and workspace they need to work at home
- Support staff in accessing resources and checking in with them
- Recognize diversity in ability to work and in time of work and manage appropriately
- Identify supports needed and match to individual circumstances
- Remote Work Policy will also address these considerations
Theme: Operational Considerations

Support staff in carrying their vacation days into the next year. They have been working extremely hard and putting in extra time to support everyone. By not allowing them to carry over their vacation, this is penalizing them for something that has been out of their control.

Funding support for our use of personal resources. We are using personal computers, cellphones, space for work-related uses and this should be acknowledged financially.

As we (hopefully) prepare to return to in office work, flexible work weeks should be considered. Working slightly longer hrs to receive a day off every two weeks helps to manage work/life balance & prioritize staff wellbeing. Weekends feel rushed.
Actions for Operational Considerations

- Carrying vacation time; funding for work supports at home; parking costs
- IT support models of sharing expertise across departments
- Flexible work week
- COVID testing on campus
Theme: Communication

Communication, it's important that we all see the big picture but also the day to day issues everyone is dealing with. Regular updates please. In order to feel part of the ASC team we need to know what is happening. What are the top priorities and concerns.

4.0 ★★★★★ (32)

Information sharing is the most important piece that can get missed when not working on campus. Regular meetings to provide campus updates. There are many changes happening across campus that do not get relayed to some staff. Access to information needs to be available to all.

4.0 ★★★★★ (31)
Actions for Communications

● Regular and frequent
● Prioritize regular meetings and check-ins
● Train supervisors on how to check in
● Build community of practices to share best practices
Theme: Professional Development

Continue to invest in training for staff.
So important right now to prioritize preventive mental health training to increase awareness, build community and offer ongoing supports.

3.8 ★★★★☆ (30 votes)

When on-boarding new employees in a remote setting, consider providing them with a buddy who can help to answer questions and offer support.

3.6 ★★★★☆ (31 votes)
Actions for Professional Development

- Need onboarding training for new staff (perhaps assign buddy/mentor)
- Training on best practices to work remotely
- Training for interdepartmental connection and collaborations
- Create community of practices
- Cross train staff
Theme: Mental Health Support

Even though a more broken-up work day is helpful, developing some mental/procedural tools to help separate work life and home life is also important. Rather than "working from home", it often feels like "living at work". This can easily slip into a blurred sort of burnout.

Focus on mental wellbeing and maybe some training to that effect. Having kids home and trying to focus energy and time on work is hard. I really liked the take a break last Friday where I could connect with people.

3.6 stars (25 ratings)

3.5 stars (31 ratings)
Actions for Mental Health

- Communicate links to MH resources
- Increase Thrive events and provide ongoing resources and webinars on building positive mental health and self-care
- Partnership with Athletics and Recreation for virtual workout sessions
- Resources to support work/life balance
- Schedule mental health breaks during day
- Online mental health supports through EFAP

http://www.queensu.ca/humanresources/wellness-accessibility/employee-and-family-assistance-program
Theme: Create Connection

Small group or one-on-one meetings with functional and multidisciplinary teams continue to be crucial. These connections bring normalcy to working remotely. I don’t feel alone when I connect with at least a half dozen people every day!

3.4 ★★★☆☆ (32)

Introduce new employees not only to those they will work with daily but also those who they might normally work in near if in the office.

3.8 ★★★★★ (31)
Action: Create Connection

- Communication (new hires)
- Community of Practices
- Virtual coffee breaks
Next Steps

- FAS is creating an action plan with concrete next steps, metrics, and timelines to address concerns in short term and long term
- Monitoring and assessing progress on proposed actions will continue
- A webpage will be created where progress can be viewed
Take Home Messages

● We are in this together

● These are challenging times for all and we recognize that!

● Committed to supporting and are responding with concrete actions

● Grateful for the work you do every day

● Critical learning to help us in time of COVID but also opportunity to understand what we do well and how we can do better moving forward
Thank you for making a difference by sharing your thoughts