Restarting operations after the COVID-19 lockdown

PRACTICE SHARING FROM CHINESE PRINT SUPPLIERS

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of Covid-19 began in Wuhan, China in the final days of December 2019. After a protracted lock down period, many companies have now started to get back to work.

We've been speaking to print factories across the country to understand how they're coping as they restart operations, and the measures they're putting in place to keep workers safe.

This briefing note is one of the outputs of the **Book Chain Project – Creating Safer Workplaces** (2018-2020). It's a summary of what we've been hearing as we speak to printers about the measures they've been implementing.

We know that each country will face unique challenges, but we thought it might be useful to share these insights as other factories across the world start to think about reopening or scaling up production. We've also included reference to some of the useful guidance that is emerging from organisations like the ILO.

The Book Chain Project Team

WHAT ARE THE COMMON MEASURES TAKEN?

GOOD COMMUNICATION MATTERS

- When so much is unknown it feels difficult to communicate to staff. Even if you don't have answers right now, communicating simple developments will help keep workers informed and help them to feel less anxious;
- While you're closed, keep staff informed on Covid-19 updates and help them understand what is going on. When you're thinking of resuming operations, give your workers advance warning so they can get ready, and help them understand the measures you're going to put in place to keep them safe;
- ILO's guidance on Restructuring for recovery and resilience in response to the Covid-19 crisis (p.5-6) highlights the importance of social dialogue and is a useful resource.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE RESTARTING

- Pre-ordering essential necessities such as cleaning products, face masks, and hand sanitizers ensures that all employees have good access to these protective pieces of equipment;
- Suppliers have put together teams to map governmental advice onto their processes and systems – think about how you can work safely and the impacts that this will have on productivity. When you understand those impacts, start to engage customers early to explain how you're going to be working and how they can support you – forecasting, ordering patterns etc.;
- The sanitization regime of the factory can help prevent the spread of Covid-19 but can be particularly disruptive. The WHO provides useful insights in their advice for getting workplaces ready for Covid-19 (p.1-2) on what good sanitation looks like. To ensure that sanitizers are being used correctly and workplaces are being adequately cleaned, it's helpful to provide training for cleaners that are specific to your site;
- Some factories have installed pre-health checks, where staff report their health condition (incl. body temperature, and any suspected symptoms);
- Many suppliers set different dates for people to re-start work. This can help to avoid the issue of having all staff going back to the factory at the same time, allows training to commence for small groups of staff, and helps test the new systems and protocols.

Posters and protective kit (image from C&C Shanghai)
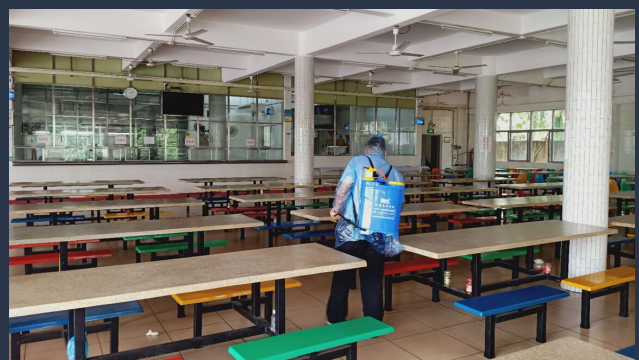
Cleaner sanitizing the canteen (image from Sheck Wah Tong)

RESTARTING

1. Review your policies

Internal Actions:
- As always, continue to have open two-way communication between all employees to keep them informed on Covid-19 updates, internal measures & policies. Be as open and transparent as you can;
- Review your existing policies - do they need to be amended or have a temporary addendum that applies to this post-Covid-19 period and gives workers the clarity they need?

The UNDP's self-assessment document of human rights due diligence and COVID-19 has some really useful checklists covering Health and Safety measures, Labour Rights considerations, and Environment & Community Impacts. Use these to guide and inform you as you think about appropriate policies, such as the areas to cover and the way to approach them during this period.

2. Protecting Employees

- **Health checks:** Factories have been providing a checkpoint to examine workers' temperatures and any potential coughs or fevers, as well as ensuring that there are supervisors provided who are responsible for the health checks in their team. That way they can spot early signs, and staff feel reassured.

- **Keeping the factory clean:** Factories we spoke to have introduced a careful and thorough sanitization of the whole workspace twice a day in the factory. When attempting to make sure that workplaces are clean, it may be helpful to create a detailed sanitization plan;
- Some factories have installed extra water taps and dressing rooms in the factory to encourage workers to wash their hands, with a detailed instruction poster near the taps. Posters and leaflets demonstrating how to wash hands can be downloaded from the WHO's website. These measures are in line with the WHO's advice on getting workplaces ready for Covid-19 (p.1-2), which additionally suggests having other communication initiatives in place such as guidance from occupational health and safety officers, briefings at meetings and information on the intranet to promote hand-washing (p.2).

- **Providing the right PPE:** Taking care of your staff means making sure that personal protective equipment, including face masks and hand sanitizer, is provided for all workers, as recommended by the ILO: Key Provisions of International Labour Standards Relevant to the Evolving COVID-19 Outbreak (p.12) and the EU-OSHA guidance on COVID-19: Back to the workplace - Adapting workplaces and protecting workers (p.3-4).

- **Personal action:** Putting in place basic safety practices such as asking employees to wash their hands once they enter the site, a workshop, or canteen, and requiring face masks to be worn in the factory is in line with the WHO's general advice on tackling Covid-19. The right awareness and education training is crucial. The Unicef guidelines on Family-Friendly Policies and Other Good Practices in the Context of Covid-19: Key Steps Employers Can Take (Steps 3 and 4) is a useful resource to refer to when designing training to help workers understand how to undertake these measures properly.

- **Understanding the needs of specific workers:** Some of your staff may have specific health and well-being needs as a result of Covid-19. These might include those suffering from bereavement at the loss of a loved one, parents with children unable to attend school, or staff with responsibilities for caring for elderly relatives. Understand what your workforce needs and think of potential ways of working that might help support those staff that may have specific needs. The Unicef guidelines on Family-Friendly Policies and Other Good Practices in the Context of Covid-19: Key Steps Employers Can Take (Steps 1, 2, 3 and 4) is a useful resource for considering how to specifically support parents returning to work.

- **Social distancing:** One of the biggest challenges is maintaining appropriate social distancing in a factory setting. The WHO recommends maintaining a distance of at least 1 metre between people in their advice for getting workplaces ready for Covid-19. Due to the close proximity of workers, special set-ups and arrangements in the production workshops, canteens and other spaces can be put in place to avoid workers having close contact and enforce social distancing. For example, factories have introduced different work patterns to reduce crowds in peak hour and at lunch time;
- Suppliers we spoke to have put in place measures to avoid face-to-face meetings and keep management team meetings online if possible. Where meetings have to be conducted in person, factories have implemented measures to encourage social distancing in the meeting rooms, such as having markings on the floor.

- **Limit external visitors:** Limiting the number of people on site can aid in preventing the spread of the virus. As a result, many factories have asked suppliers and clients to avoid unnecessary visits and have put in place a temporary ban on unexpected visits;
- For extra precaution, some factories require that external visitors have a health check before entering the factory and are only allowed to stay for a set short time.

A temperature check at a factory entrance (image from Golden Cup)

Workers washing their hands in the factory (image from Golden Cup)

3. Managing self-quarantine

- Due to staff returning to work from different key Covid-19 outbreak regions in China (e.g. Hubei, Guangdong, Henan etc.), some factories have put in place mandatory self-quarantine for two weeks. To help employees do this, companies have set up quarantine accommodation for workers, and each worker under self-quarantine is looked after by an appointed colleague to check his/her health condition and provide living support. In the meantime, factories implement policies to make sure workers are not being discriminated against and are receiving their regular salary, in line with the UNDP's advice for business on human rights due diligence and COVID-19 (p.3-5).

4. Emergency preparation

- Some factories have an emergency plan and point set up for any unexpected situations that may arise. The ILO has put together a Management Checklist for the Prevention and Mitigation of Covid-19 at Work that can help improving the response to and preparedness for Covid-19.

CASE STUDY 1

- *At Golden Cup, the company is paying for workers who have came from Hubei province to take a Covid-19 test.*
- *At C&C Shanghai, in the first month of production, employees who aren't needed in the office are able to work from home*

CASE STUDY 2

At Golden Cup, if a worker happens to have a high body temperature, he/she will be asked to stay at a temporary quarantine room to wait for a secondary check. If the symptoms remain the same, the company will inform the local hospital and help with the next testing plan.

Social distancing in the canteen during lunch time (image from Sheck Wah Tong)

Social distancing in the workshop (image from Golden Cup)

IF THERE WAS ONE TIP THAT YOU COULD PASS ON TO PEER FACTORIES CONSIDERING COMING BACK TO WORK IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

"A 100% preparation is very important. We started preparations one month ahead of resuming production. Companies should evaluate their workspace, employees and other resources to come up with a detailed plan with clear responsibility assignment between the team. Also, make sure you have all the necessities (including sanitizer, face masks, etc) in stock, based off your worker capacity"

- SENIOR OPERATION & MARKETING MANAGER AT SHECK WAH TONG PRINTING PRESS

"In-time communication with employees is key. Before we restarted production, all the workers were informed of the latest news regarding Covid-19 and what we have been doing to make sure the workplace is safe. Therefore, all employees were very cooperative when they went back to the factory. Education and training is also very important, so workers have the awareness and knowledge on how to protect themselves in the factory."

- HUMAN RESOURCE AND ADMINISTRATION MANAGER AT GOLDEN CUP

"Be prepared with all essential necessities, especially sanitization products. It is a team effort (especially within management) to make sure every measure is in place as planned."

- HUMAN RESOURCE AND ADMINISTRATION MANAGER AT C&C SHANGHAI PRINTING

APPENDIX

EU OSHA: *COVID-19: Back to the workplace - Adapting workplaces and protecting workers*

WHO: *Getting Your Workplace Ready for Covid-19 (19 March 2020)*

Unicef and ILO: *Family-friendly Policies and Other Good Workplace Practices in the Context of Covid-19: Key Steps Employers Can Take*

UNDP: *Human Rights Due Diligence and COVID-19: Rapid Self-assessmnet for Business*

ICTI Ethical Toy Program: *Purchasing Practices Guidelines for Covid-19*

ILO: *Checklist for the Prevention and Mitigation of Covid-19 at Work*

ILO: *Key provisions of international labour standards relevant to the evolving COVID19 outbreak*

ILO: *Restructuring for recovery and resilience in response to the COVID 19 crisis*