

COVID-19 Workplace Commons: Keeping Workers Well Case Study – 54gene

The [COVID-19 Workplace Commons: Keeping Workers Well](#) initiative leverages the World Economic Forum’s platform, networks and global convening ability to collect, refine and share strategies for returning to – and remaining in – the workplace safely as part of the broader COVID-19 recovery. The initiative is jointly led by Arizona State University and the World Economic Forum with support from The Rockefeller Foundation.

As part of this initiative, we have selected several dozen exemplary organizations to be **case studies**. Through multiple interviews with crisis management teams, Chief Human Resource Officers, and others, we have sought to understand their responses to provide you with a deeper dive into how a diverse set of organizations around the world have handled the COVID-19 pandemic.

54gene

54gene is a health technology company advancing the state of healthcare through large-scale discovery and translational research, advanced molecular diagnostics, and inclusive clinical programs for the benefit of Africans and the global population. Founded in 2019, 54gene utilizes human genetic data derived from diverse African populations, to improve the development, availability, and efficacy of medical products and diagnostics that will prove beneficial to Africans and the wider global population.

Question	Response
<i>When did your organization become aware that the COVID-19 pandemic would affect your operations?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Towards the middle of March when we noticed that companies around the world were shutting down to minimize the spread of COVID-19. ✓ At this time, it became apparent that we would need to scale back to a skeletal operation with essential workers until we had more information on the pandemic.
<i>How did your organization set up the initial response to the pandemic?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Management organized an informational session for all staff with guidance from the NCDC and WHO and created a Work From Home Guidelines document ✓ By the fourth week of March, a Remote Work Policy had been created and disseminated
<i>What has been your organization’s approach to bringing your workforce back (or keeping your workforce on site) to the</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Due to the instability of Nigerian infrastructure (electricity, water, internet, etc.), we made available a monthly stipend to support permanent work-from-home policies

<p><i>physical workplace during the pandemic?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ In September, we opened up the office for any staff who wanted to return, available to a limited number each day to accommodate social distancing ✓ Made available a staff bus to and from office to limit exposure during commute ✓ Established a Protocol for Testing Essential Staff to give employees access to our testing services ✓ Essential workers have been regularly tested
<p><i>How has your strategy varied depending on facility location? By type of facility?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ As our facility types are quite similar, our policies are consistent across all locations
<p><i>Are you requiring your workers to tested for COVID-19 as part of returning to the physical workplace?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Yes – staff who work directly with COVID-19 are regularly tested ✓ Tests have also been made available for permanent staff and family members living in the same household
<p><i>How do you integrate contact tracing into worker safety efforts?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ We have a system to track those who take the staff bus as well as those who come to the office each day ✓ For staff who have travelled into the country, a COVID-19 test must be carried out before they can come to the office
<p><i>What has been your strategy for workers who test positive for COVID-19 or show symptoms of it?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If any essential staff test positive, tests will be initiated for all other staff that work in close proximity and those residing in the same accommodation ✓ Any staff who test positive will be permitted re-entry after two weeks <i>if</i> they have been asymptomatic for two weeks ✓ A repeat test is not necessary as the virus is no longer infectious after a certain period. For person's with symptoms, entry is permitted 5 days after symptoms resolve provided the total period is more than 2 weeks
<p><i>What is an example of an innovative practice you have implemented that others might learn from?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The staff bus has been a great way to limit the exposure the staff have to the public during their commute ✓ A contactless sanitizing station was installed at the office entrance which all employees must use ✓ We periodically conduct tests for our lab staff ✓ We have made tests available for family members of staff who test positive
<p><i>What do you think will be most challenging in the next several months when it comes to worker safety?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ As time progress, it becomes increasingly challenging to ensure staff follow safety protocols ✓ A staff member has been assigned to monitor protocol adherence, and signs have been placed around the office as reminders
<p><i>Has COVID-19 made you rethink your physical/real estate investments or how your spaces are laid out?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Yes – our seating arrangement changed to accommodate social distancing and capacity has been reduced to 30% of normal

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ There is controlled access to various floors of the building to ensure we can contact trace if necessary
<i>Have you put restrictions on travel? Does this vary for business or personal travel?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Currently, business trips outside the country are quite limited. ✓ Staff who travel are required to take a test upon arrival in country, whether they travel for business or personal reasons
<i>Employee morale and productivity – how has COVID-19 affected your workforce’s output and team cohesion?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Many employees have experienced burnout from working at home ✓ While the output of the workforce increased, the team seemed to grow further apart. It became apparent that efforts needed to be made to draw the team together through virtual meetings and physical check-ins ✓ There was a significant increase in our volume of work in the initial months of the pandemic. Employees were encouraged to take mental health days and use PTO ✓ We have set up group training on subjects like stress management and tips on working from home ✓ We have initiated more engaging onboarding to give new hires a sense of belonging and an opportunity to learn about our culture and values ✓ We encourage managers to have daily group check-ins with team members so that staff can establish a routine
<i>Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about your efforts to keep workers safe during COVID-19?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Nothing additional