

Emotional intelligence training can help us manage COVID-19 anxiety

*For over a year, people's lives were disrupted on an unprecedented scale by COVID-19. Now, as governments lift COVID-19 restrictions and businesses reopen in many countries, many people are anxious about resuming life as normal. **Chao Miao, Shanshan Qian, and Ronald H. Humphrey** write that training in emotional intelligence may help both employees and the public cope with COVID-19-related anxiety.*

In the United Kingdom, Europe, the USA, and some other countries, the success of vaccine programmes has meant that governments are relaxing COVID-19 restrictions, businesses are reopening, and employees are being asked to return to work instead of working from home. Retail outlets, hospitality venues, restaurants, etc., are now free to welcome customers. Despite this progress, surveys show that many people, perhaps even the majority, are anxious about resuming life as normal. This anxiety can hinder the ability of employees to return to work and to work alongside their colleagues. It may also interfere with the successful reopening of many businesses, as customers may still be reluctant to return to normally crowded places, and these businesses may fail to attract enough customers to make staying open profitable.

It is not surprising that many people still have anxiety about COVID-19. For roughly a year and half, people's lives were disrupted on an unprecedented scale. Almost every aspect of everyday life was deemed risky; even going within two meters of other people was prohibited. Hugging relatives in care homes was banned, seeing friends was also declared a major health risk and prohibited. Weddings with friends and family members attending were declared likely to be super spreader events and outlawed. At the height of lockdown, only essential shopping was allowed, and those on shielding lists were told to shop for food online and to use home delivery.

Although the vaccines should be easing these anxieties, the news is still reporting concerns about the ability of the vaccines to protect against new and existing variants of COVID-19. Another wave of COVID-19 is spreading across the UK and the world, and there is still considerable uncertainty about how large or deadly the wave will be. Thus, it is understandable and even logical that people should be concerned about resuming their normal work lives and shopping patterns.

Training in emotional intelligence may help both employees and the public in general cope with COVID-19 related anxiety. Emotional intelligence helps people manage their emotions. When confronted with stressful, anxiety-provoking situations, emotionally intelligent people know how to calm themselves down and to think clearly about what to do. As a result, people high on emotional intelligence have better physical and mental health. This ability to manage emotions is also one reason why [emotional intelligence](#) is the best individual predictor of employees' job satisfaction. Fortunately, numerous studies have shown that emotional competencies can be taught.

The workplace is a good place to conduct COVID-19 training. Organisations should consider appointing people as emotional intelligence managers to oversee the training and to demonstrate its importance. Training in emotional competencies is best conducted over multiple sessions. People are not going to learn how to reprogram their emotional responses in a single session, but a surprising amount of progress can be made in just a few weekly sessions. Training at work would also allow the training sessions to focus on the anxieties particular to each setting. For example, employees in an office setting may have a different set of anxieties than waiters working in a restaurant where they must frequently handle leftover food and meet a large number of people.

Being around other people may be a key cause of COVID anxiety. After all, we have been warned repeatedly about the dangers of coming into close contact with others. Thus, online training before coming back to the workplace might be a good place to start. This might also be useful for businesses about to drop restrictions, such as the two-meter rule, wearing face masks, using shields, etc. that previously helped employees feel safe at work. Online training may also be more cost-effective in some cases and could allow businesses to train large numbers of employees quickly.

Consumers and the general public may also have to be educated about how to manage their anxieties during the relaxation of COVID restrictions. Otherwise, they will never visit shops, retail outlets, take trips, etc. Here, the mass media could play a helpful role. Newspaper articles, TV shows, blogs, etc. could spread the word about the importance of using emotional competencies to combat COVID anxiety. This could be supplemented by online training and free videos on how to handle specific anxieties. Governments and business associations could fund the development of these public education videos and promote them across their various platforms.

The road back to a normal life free of worries about an epidemic may be a long one. But with the right training and encouragement, it is a road that employees and consumers can travel together on.



Notes:

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