



How COVID-19 has highlighted the critical role of HR in supporting the business through times of crisis and change

Introduction

It is fair to say that COVID-19 has highlighted the critical role of HR in supporting businesses through the many employee-centred challenges of the pandemic. HR professionals have been catapulted to front and centre in managing both the economic and emotional impacts of the crisis from furloughing of staff to enabling remote working and managing the wellbeing and mental health impacts of the workforce.

The pressures of the crisis remain as HR teams manage the economic impact on the business and ensure healthy, safe and productive working environments for returning employees. It should be remembered that even though these are the most pressing challenges HR professionals are facing at the moment, they do need to be managed alongside the emerging challenges of strong leadership, positive engagement, effective resourcing and rebuilding performance levels. Put simply, HR leaders must ensure the opportunity for re-framing the wider HR strategy is not wasted.

Certainly the mass-mobilisation of a mobile, remote working population has been greatly facilitated by developments in technology and infrastructure. If digitisation was an emerging theme in HR strategy in 2019, it is now 'the' dominant theme in 2020. It is safe to say this crisis has highlighted the imperative to integrate business and technology processes and extend the effective reach of great people practice to a geographically dispersed employee base.

So where might the 'acceleration points' be on this digital journey. 4 immediate areas come to mind;



'Distributed' Development and Learning

If the physical classroom environment was seen as being dated before the crisis – surely it must be fighting for survival post crisis? Learning needs to be distributed to a geographically diverse workforce. From induction through to core skills and leadership development HR professionals need to ensure e-learning content and associated learning delivery frameworks support the virtual classroom. Digitised, bite-size learning delivered on easily via the handheld or mobile device was once an aspiration that will now increasingly be seen as core to delivering L&D commitments.



Measurement and Tracking

Strong analytics have been growing in importance in recent years across the HR profession, but the pandemic has accelerated the need for this as a core capability in the HR team. Good decision support will demand the right metrics and more focus on 'real time' information accelerating the adoption of strong employee 'CRM' technologies. Technologies which can support the pro-active tracking and management of the employee base and enable distributed management of everything from KPI tracking to employee case management.





Resourcing for the new world

If attitudes to work have changed then attitudes to employers will follow. Ensuring your Employee Value Proposition is refreshed to reflect new attitudes and realities will be key.

This inevitably flows into resourcing strategies; are we equipped to resource remote talent as a matter of routine? Does new thinking on remote working open up new and diverse new talent pools amongst groups and geographies which were previously considered 'out of reach'?

It seems inevitable HR leaders will need to be thinking of online processes which are underpinned by **integrated Talent Management systems** that enable 'reach' to potential hires who may never visit the office. Seamlessly integrating this to build end-to-end capability from role initiation through to contract and the associated digitised induction and on-boarding processes may become the new norm.



HR 'fitness for purpose'

HR will need to change too. Resilience is more than an emerging buzzword. We will see continuity and disaster recovery planning place much more emphasis on people and physical assets. This demands reflection on HR operating models and how well they serve us; Onshore/offshore, make v buy and the effectiveness of our vendors in maintaining continuity of service will force some very different strategies on the delivery of HR services.

Market realities will have an impact too. Predictions of job losses vary widely but there is no doubt that businesses will look to liberate cost wherever it makes sense. HR leaders will rightly want to protect the ability to deliver strong partnering support to businesses going through structural change but will be expected to look at their own delivery models.

RPA, AI, ESS, MSS and associated developments have presented 'point' solutions for particular problems with great success but may need to become mainstream as organisations look to enable cost reduction whilst underpinning remote, flexible working regimes.



We could of course go on. The challenges of managing performance, managing a sense of 'place' in lieu of physical locations and managing employee communications are just examples. What matters as HR departments emerge post COVID-19 pandemic is that HR leaders look to seize what is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to cement HR's position as central to the businesses ability to not just survive but also thrive.

More Information

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To find out more about the HR services we provide please email fiona.petrie@soprasteria.com.

We look forward to working with you.

