

Questions HR executives should be asking in the new normal and do they have the systems, data and insights to provide the right answers.

The current COVID-19 crisis has driven companies to quickly respond and adapt their businesses with leaner operating models and optimized processes. The goal is to protect customers and employees while preserving cash until businesses can regain some level of stability in the “new normal” that is still being defined. There is a human element in finding a balance between an employee workforce whose health and safety are the highest priority but that needs to remain productive while managing the stresses of their work and home lives. There are still many unknowns as companies reemerge from the pandemic but there are some key questions that HR leaders need to be answering now.

- 1 How can we determine our workforce [exposure risk levels](#) to help us take preventative measures and plan for support?**

To better determine the overall workforce exposure, companies can analyze employee demographic data such as location, age, and job duties to help identify those who are at a higher levels of exposure risk. HR Leaders can then prioritize preventative measures for higher risk groups, safeguarding work locations and protecting colleagues.
- 2 Which key roles in our company are lacking a business continuity plan and what is the risk to our business?**

There are critical roles at every level and across an organization where the sudden inability to work for an extended period will have a significant impact on the business. Clearly identifying these roles and understanding any gaps in the business continuity plan for these roles can help to develop the appropriate risk mitigation efforts to fill these gaps with transition plans in place.
- 3 How do we know which resources to retain and the impact to our business of furloughing or terminating resources?**

This is one of the hardest questions HR Leaders face. Understanding who to retain and the impact to business operations or strategic programs by terminating employees or contractors needs to be clearly understood as well as the cost and efforts required to restart operations or programs in the future. Most companies have already analyzed their budgets and strategic project portfolio to determine which initiatives are “must go’s” and which ones to put on hold. Determining the restart effort and cost for projects put on hold will aid companies in planning once the new normal is established.
- 4 What are the optimal “contact-less” interview, hiring, and onboarding processes in the new normal?**

Companies have made significant investments in talent acquisition focusing on a great candidate experience throughout the process. Even though video interviews have become more prevalent, final hiring decisions are typically made after in-person meetings with hiring managers and decision makers. Some of the most important communication elements are nonverbal and while video conferencing has matured, it has not wholly replaced the in-person meeting. HR leaders need to determine the best remote and contact-less interview and hiring process that works best for their respective companies which might include additional video interviews or more personality testing while maintaining a consistent and quality experience for candidates.
- 5 How can we help employees working from home manage the unique challenges, stress, and anxiety stemming from the juxtaposition of work and home life, especially those working parents who have children in distant learning?**

Employer [wellness programs](#) should extend beyond the office and will need to be modified in the new normal. Promoting or requiring breaks during the workday, meditation, exercise, fun virtual team building, or collaborative exercises can help bring employees the breaks needed to maintain mental and physical health.
- 6 Do our current employee policies include work from home policies, processes, and guidelines?**

Current remote worker policies but they may not be comprehensive enough for the entire workforce. Organizations should apply the lessons learned resulting from shelter in place mandates and revisit employee policies to address any gaps for extended work from home periods in the future. Extending these policies to a remote workforce is imperative in the new normal. Twitter announced recently that employees are now allowed to [work from home](#) the entirety of their career at the company.
- 7 How can we ensure employee health and safety once shelter in place restrictions are relaxed?**

Employee sentiment for returning to work will vary. Some cannot wait to get back to work and others will be more reluctant out of concern for safety and health. Communication and transparency on new employee safety measures combined with establishing protocols for when employees should remain home or can return to work will be critical. Allowing employees to continue to work from home until safety measures can be implemented will help maintain productivity and minimize anxiety in the workplace.

These questions must be central to any current HR strategy and in most organizations, the current answers are unsupported opinions at best. The external data we need, our internal HR data and the disparate data locked in our internal systems, are not currently set up to provide us the analytical insight we need to answer these questions. HR is faced with a new challenge of not just caring for employees but being forced to reimagine how we work and the consequences of the new normal. These questions highlight the need for HR and HR systems to provide data driven insight as part of a new normal HR strategy. We are not there yet and may not get there in time to optimally respond to this current crisis but HR departments that recognize the need today will be significantly better prepared for the next crisis.

#### About the Authors

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