

## Building resilience – the role of HR Directors

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&

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As many of us either remain in lockdown or are planning for moving from crisis to the next normal, we are left thinking through how a post-coronavirus world might unfold. However, workplaces are likely to look different as our business models change to adapt, and alongside this, the skills, structures, and processes companies will require.

We do not know how the world will look after we get coronavirus under control, but history tells us that we are socially conservative and always end up regressing back to the norm after wars and crises. As such we really need to be clear what we do not want to go back to. We must be clear and act to ensure we don't go back and our new normal just becomes the same old, same old.

There will be a short window of time where each business can either unconsciously return to as near to what we had before or consciously identify and create a new future, based on what has been experienced over these last few months.

So:

- What should HR leaders be considering now, that will allow their organisations to learn from this time and set themselves up for future success?
- Which skills have come to the fore and been critical in helping organisations survive and which have not?
- How should those positive skills, behaviours and processes be embedded going forward?
- How should they be encouraged, recognised, rewarded, and woven into the very fabric of our organisations to ensure ongoing resilience?

### **New capabilities**

HR directors are daily seeing new capabilities and behaviours presenting themselves, and not always from those individuals previously thought of as most senior or the most high potential. In the same way that society has had to reappraise its value of healthcare and caring professionals, do we need to think differently about what talent looks like, if we are to keep some of the speed, agility and adaptability businesses have experienced over this last quarter?

The world was already changing rapidly but the pandemic has accelerated this. Businesses have worked faster and more effectively than they ever thought possible. Many leaders are seeing how small, agile teams put together quickly to deal with the pandemic effects made

critical decisions faster and better. Companies have learned that a flatter organisation structure that delegates decision making to networked teams brings speed and effectiveness.

Leaders are increasingly prepared to embrace agile methods rather than agile structures; they are getting used to quick meetings held by videoconferences to solve problems, make plans and to give remote teams the authority to make their own decisions more than before.

Whilst social distancing and home working will continue for the foreseeable future leaders need to bring out the best in their teams and encourage collaboration, using their emotional intelligence to connect with people and connect people to each other, particularly when the context and challenge is so fast changing.

Businesses have seen the importance of accountability, creativity and innovation, and the value of those individuals that can work to create this, whether it be in new ways to deliver services virtually or to shift quickly to new products or creatively adapt to changing priorities.

As the economy rebuilds, we will need people who can objectively evaluate a broad range of diverse information to determine what is valuable and can be trusted. At the same time speed is delivered by those that can evaluate the risk and then take accountability for acting based on the information available, rather than procrastinating and asking for ever more detail on which to make a decision.

Organisations are also showing a deeper understanding of matching the right talent, regardless of where they sit in the organisation, to the most critical challenges the organisation faces. Leadership roles need to be focused on empowering rather than needing to own, be more fluid, with new leaders emerging from unexpected places with more emphasis on character and outputs delivered, rather than on seniority, technical expertise, or time-served experience.

Situational leadership, rather than organisational leadership, has driven much of the speed and effectiveness. Protecting this will be key if we are to ensure the best person to lead an agenda continues to be empowered in the future.

### **What can HR leaders do to learn from the lessons and ensure their organisations are fit for the future?**

Rather than breathing a sigh of relief and returning to normal routines when the crisis subsides, efforts should be made now to review what has gone well and why, and what hasn't, and who has shone in these challenging times.

Rapidly evolving situations expose existing organisational weaknesses, like an inability to make hard decisions or an excessive bias towards consensus. (This isn't suggesting that inclusion isn't hugely important in this fast-moving world, but you can be inclusive and decisive).

They also highlight who can rise to new challenges, take accountability, and deliver, collaborate, and create alignment, and most importantly, lead in ambiguity.

Given all this these are some questions HR Directors should ask themselves are:

- Who has excelled during the crisis and who hasn't and what skills and behaviours have come to the fore?
- How could we significantly increase each person's remit so that they may add more value to the firm in the future, and replace those that have not adapted and could become blockers to the change being embedded
  - How are these skills and capabilities different to those we measured and rewarded prior to the crisis? What should be added, or dropped from the set of skills we value and evaluate?
  - What subconscious biases or influences did we have in the way we evaluate people that the recent experience challenges? How do we mitigate these going forward?
  - What are the implications for our Talent processes, Performance management and Reward approaches? Recruitment, On boarding, Assessment, and Selection systems?
  - Does our succession plan need a rework? Have we previously looked at expertise and experience rather than the new capabilities and potential? How do we succession plan for a fluid organisational, looking at skill pools rather than hierarchy?
  - What needs to change in your structure and processes to enable decision-making to be easier and faster? Which bureaucracy gets in the way?

### Five top areas for action

1. As a priority, open a dialogue with senior leaders to identify what needs to be valued or changed in the way we evaluate talent, and then hold a top talent review using these new lenses. Ensure feedback is given to all top talent.
2. Develop your new set of capabilities or values and use them to reset what the firm values in its leaders and colleagues— you may include such things as accountability, collaboration, comfort with change and ambiguity, speed, resilience, agility, innovation, inclusivity and valuing difference. Above all identify the stars you have in these areas, regardless of seniority.
3. Ensure those new capabilities are included in your performance and reward systems. Measure individuals not only against 'what' they deliver but 'how' they do the job.
4. Define your critical jobs and consciously move the people with the best talent who demonstrate the new capabilities into them. Be brave and significantly increase their remit or seniority to ensure they can add maximum value. Iconic moves send a clear message to the broader organisation that the stated change in what is valued is genuine.
5. Make the new capabilities part of your attraction, selection, assessment and development approaches. Develop line managers to reframe their understanding of their role and what talent is, so that they are able to identify and develop the capabilities in others.



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