



Re-imagining HR: Decoding the New Normal

The pandemic has forced organisations to protect their businesses while putting in structures to recover and grow. **Chantal Free** from Capita plc discusses how this provides the opportunity for a hard reset, with **David Hobbs**

Organisations are faced with critical choices as they start to decode the implications of the new normal. This brings both opportunities and challenges – but the real potential lies in taking this moment to challenge the status quo. **Chantal**, Executive Officer for People Solutions at Capita plc, discusses the direction of travel.

How should businesses be looking at organisational design for a post-pandemic world?

We are in a period of unprecedented change and disruption, which is bringing both opportunities and challenges. We can mourn the fact that a lot of jobs are disappearing, but we need to stop being fatalistic. Acknowledge that those jobs – as they are today – are going but understand that potentially a lot of the skills that underpin them can be redeployed. Leaders and businesses need to move from seeing the world in terms of individuals in specific roles, to one where they look at the underlying skills

and capabilities in their workforce and how they can be reorganised or redeployed.

What does that mean for companies in terms of resourcing?

Organisations will have to be much more flexible regarding accessing particular skills. Rather than thinking 'I need to own that skill, and I need to reskill all my people', they will have to adopt a hybrid strategy that is more integrated in the wider ecosystem. >



It's going to be a combination of what skills do they build, buy or borrow. The latter could be skills and talent not employed directly by the engaging organisation but brought in to provide specific expertise or to support overflow capacity requirements, both for defined periods of time.

It means people having more varied careers, organisations being more fluid and more penetrable, as opposed to standing alone, and being part of a broader ecosystem. As a result, there will be lots more agility and a focus on getting work done fast.

How will the HR function change to accommodate this shift in behaviour?

For many businesses, HR departments have focused on full-time employees while the contingent workforce has been a matter for Procurement. This mindset needs to change. HR is going to be more about the overall accountability for getting work done in an organisation, whether the people who contribute to it are employees or not. So, HR must be responsible for the organisation accessing the right skills at the right time. This is how the shift of moving from jobs to skills will happen.

This will alter workplace dynamics. What will the new relationship between employee, team and manager look like?

There will be implications for that three-way partnership. Can you get the same level of trust, confidence or predictability with someone that is with you for a year, six months or three months, compared to someone who is an employee of the firm? That dynamic has still to develop, but we could compare it to the early resistance to remote working and the associated

myth that it would lead to a drop in productivity. It's something that we're going to have to learn from and to which HRDs will need to pay close attention.

Employment conditions may be volatile for some time. What response do you expect to see from employees?

I think we will have a group of people much more comfortable with being agile. They will use their underlying skills more flexibly and deploy them differently, for example getting involved in activities that don't mean being in a job for a number of years. Take accountancy as an example, where technology and automation are changing the profession. There will be people whose primary focus is looking for the next job identical to their current one, but there will be others thinking about how they can apply their expertise and skills in new contexts. That will be very empowering.

What is the HRD's role in the new landscape and how should they be working with the Senior Leadership Team?

The days when the HRD was only concerned about HR are long gone and that's the same for other functional roles in senior leadership teams. There is an opportunity for all the functional leaders to achieve what they've wanted for a long time – to be much more strategic.

What we're seeing, and COVID has shown this, is that today's problems are too complex to be looked at in a narrow way. You really need to have the CTO, the CHRO and the CFO joined at the hip to solve today's complex business problems, because they very typically have a technology element. But technology doesn't

work unless you layer it with change management and with the right skills and capabilities and the financial backing. It's about the functional leaders connecting and jointly solving common issues, rather than focusing on silos.

Do you envision any possible return to the status quo once the pandemic eases?

The circumstances in which we're working were already being disrupted by the digital transformation. They have been even more so with the pandemic. There is a responsibility on organisations and leaders to move forward and resisting the temptation to revert to a status quo. The dilemma is how to successfully conduct the change so that they continue to move forward while making sure that wellbeing is safeguarded. There isn't the option to stand still because that will not protect an organisation's workforce, its business or its clients. ■

VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE

To explore more on this subject, join the [Criticleye People & Performance Virtual Roundtable: Reimagining the World of Work](#), on Thursday 11 March.

Chantal Free will be joined by Agnieszka Tomczak, Chief HR Officer of Vesuvius plc and Mandy Ferries, HR Director at Amazon UK, to debate the issue.



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