

## SECTION 28 A – ADDITIONAL

### **TAKING A VIEW – COVID 19 IMPLICATIONS AND RESPONSES:**

At the time of writing (very early 2021) hopes of an early victory against the COVID-19 contagion have faded as numerous countries continue to see rising numbers of infections. The lockdowns, school closures, travel restrictions had significant negative impacts on several core businesses such as the tourism, hotel and airline industries.

However, there is also a glimmer of hope like some online firms had benefitted from distance purchases and the continuing vaccination roll out. But for HR on the other hand, the clamour for best advice and guidance has never been stronger. Our emphasis earlier in the programme on a key HR deliverable as being strategic advice and counsel has never rung truer.

But the issue now lies on what that advice should be. During the first twelve months of the pandemic, it was clouded with uncertainty, marred by claims for a new normal workplace without necessarily understanding what that needed to look and be like and perhaps a well-intentioned rush to try to assist organisations and businesses without a considered view is being taken.

In this brief additional “Taking a View” section we will attempt to take that more considered view while acknowledging that 12 months in, this is easier than earlier in the piece but is still extremely challenging.

## **New /Next Normal vs Old Normal Best Practice:**

It seems very valid to make the initial point that the below businesses and organisations are better placed to respond to the Covid-19 challenges than those still mired in more traditional HR approaches.

- Business and Organisations that have worked hard to implement an HR business partner model.
- Business and Organisations that deliver impactful services that aid organisational success.
- Business and Organisations that use data analytics (business and people) to assess progress.
- Business and Organisations that apply a solution-centred mindset to challenges.

However, one could argue that without the old normal best practice in place, COVID response will be less effective and delivering the intended business and people result will be difficult unless the organization has already achieved reputational recognition as an employer of choice for:

- Hiring talented individuals
- Involving appreciative leadership and management style
- Organising companywide engagement activities
- Offering continuous learning
- Providing demand led career opportunities
- Introducing brands with history of performance success

Therefore, it is important to have a strategy to implement this old normal best practice and then be able to incorporate your short and long term COVID responses.

### **COVID-19: Key challenges and opportunities and best responses.**

The immediate challenge brought about COVID-19 is meeting the threat of closure or significantly reduced income for many businesses through cost reduction, government assistance or service reductions to bare minimums whilst continuing to maintain a safe and productive environment to the workforce. Some has managed to weather this challenge, some has not, and some has managed to continue thriving.

Furthermore, much of this challenge has revolved around how to treat staff, to continue or become an employer recognized for people best practices and to keep advancing technology in order to aid staff contribution whilst staying safe.

The immense need for social distancing and staff safety has brought flexible working (FW) into the limelight like never before. FW has been around for at least a generation but suddenly varying start and finish times, varying work location options (home, remote), advanced tech-enabled access, live virtual and online learning, to name a few, became a combination of “answers” that allowed some businesses to progress despite the COVID-19 limitations.

Nevertheless, this was not a panacea, as some people had more appropriate surroundings for working from home than others or some preferred the people contact they were used to in the office while others suffered from the isolation and needed more interaction from their management and colleagues.

But the key take-away of organisations from this first difficult year is to listen more to their staff and to offer flexibility where the range of possible options are available to differing needs.

The advice and counsel HR can offer, then becomes more complex than we would prefer. The need for listening basically mirrors the staff messages I have been hearing on workshops which mainly came from individuals working in busy urban centres who are tired of the daily travel and appreciates the creation of remote work centres for better balance. Think of Bangkok, Manila, Tokyo, London as examples.

### **POST COVID 19 – A different environment and thoughts for a response?**

There seems a little doubt that some of the learning and responses of the last 12 months will last long into the future and become the mainstream practice as the pandemic fades.

Looking forward as we see the first glimmer of hope of the new/next normal, what can we expect?

On the business side, probably a steady return of the consumer as businesses and markets recover, increase in employment and for spending to become more possible.

Additionally, for leisure travels to increase along with business travels but the former at a faster pace.

For innovation, continued tech advancement for easier communication and productivity, efficient supply chains, learning supply improvements and so much more.

Business strategies as well requires more scenario planning such as a detailed best and worst-case scenario plans for cost and income.

Finally, for employment, a more flex and in-demand workforce that has the capacity to choose and re-choose employers based on work experience and according to which flex opportunities will be offered. It must be noted than an organisation's success is still predominantly linked to attraction and retention of the best talent.

**So, in this context, what further advice and counsel can we, in HR offer our organization and business customers to help them be the employer of choice for the talent that they need in order to succeed in the new/next normal?**

- **Implement old normal best practice** of the 5 key services and track analytics to determine impact and improve over time. This should make up 80% of your response.

- **Introduce or extend flexible working** to all possible/relevant roles and be prepared to offer flex options to differing people as determined by their needs.

- **Emphasise the need for increased communication for all remote workers** and listen to suggestions. Highlight the best options and track implementation through engagement/pulse surveys.

- **Offer additional support** for the wellbeing of those who continue to need it.

- **Encourage agility and flexibility in leadership** as we are still working our way through significant difficulties and unforeseen challenges so opportunities and options will emerge as we progress. Therefore, flex responses at speed will aid competitiveness and attraction of talent.

- **Elicit data on progress being made from all sources**, particularly about brand reputation and impact. Take glassdoor ratings for instance and feed this to business leaders on a regular basis with further improvement suggestions for their next steps.

**GOOD LUCK AND STAY SAFE!**

