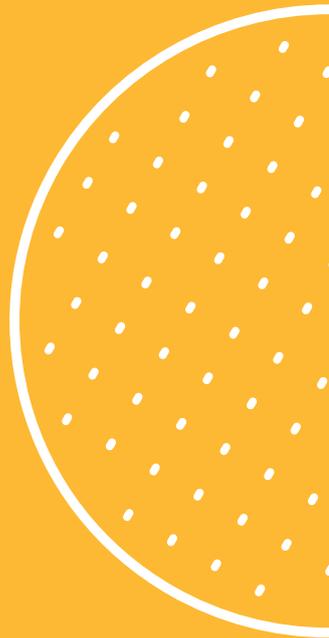


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Emerging through Covid-19: Resource Planning in a Virtual World

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Resource Planning in a Virtual World

Reviewing your hiring process on an ongoing basis is always a good idea. Taking a strategic view of talent acquisition in your business will help you prepare better for the evolving nature of how candidates engage with companies. Considering variable terms of employment, such as different types of employment contracts, where employees may be located, and what compensation and benefits you wish to offer has become even more important as Covid-19 has changed both employer and candidate considerations and requirements.

Your resource plan should consider a number of different elements to ensure you have identified the appropriate skills and capabilities you will need for the future. These include:

- ✓ the number of new opportunities you expect to create
- ✓ the promotional and development opportunities on offer for your current staff
- ✓ the budgetary factors that need to be considered
- ✓ the locations of your registered offices
- ✓ the technological and security supports for remote working
- ✓ the hiring tools available to manage virtual interviews and onboarding

At a time when hiring is for the most part being conducted virtually, it's even more important to review how your current talent acquisition process operates. Consider what adjustments are needed to ensure you have the right structures, capability and technology systems to be effective at the various stages of the selection process of each recruitment campaign you run.

When considering your hiring process, think about the experience you would like candidates to have as they engage with your company. Having a strong employer brand is important as it helps candidates understand what's good about working with your business and will help you attract the right talent. A positive employer brand increases the job pool of potential candidates, improves how your company is perceived on social media and can often reduce the time and budget required to hire the right people.

Your employer branding will encompass your Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and give you an opportunity to present yourself as an attractive employer. It will also incorporate the candidate experience, ensuring it is positive, lasting and engaging throughout the hiring process. It will help you to attract and retain your top talent for the long haul.

Hiring in a virtual world

Converting your recruitment process into a digital experience broadens the scope and nature of your candidate communications. Sharing what it is like to work in your organisation via videos, photos and employee testimonials can help you to build and communicate your unique employer brand. During the selection process it is important that you provide candidates with a good indication of what it is like to be an employee so that they can make an informed decision of whether they are a fit for your company and culture.

Some of the same challenges experienced in sourcing and recruiting great talent will still exist when hiring virtually, such as:

- ✓ Promoting the role to your target audience and connecting your company's promotional collateral in an engaging manner
- ✓ Making the application process easy and straightforward to use – don't have too many steps for the candidate to follow in order to submit their CV for consideration
- ✓ Positioning your employer brand and presenting the opportunity in the right light so that it is compelling to your audience
- ✓ Capturing the culture and essence of what it's like to work in your company and the opportunities for progression and development candidates can hope to experience when working there

Some of the essential principles for effective hiring using virtual channels are:

- ✓ Develop comprehensive and easy to understand job descriptions that clearly set out the duties and responsibilities of the role. Clarify where the role will be based, and if it will be fully remote, hybrid or on-site. If the role is based remotely, outline the jurisdictions that will be considered. Also communicate whether you are open to a flexible working model
- ✓ Ensure your interviewers are trained to conduct online interviews using video and other online tools
- ✓ Enable hiring managers to make informed decisions swiftly so that you keep talented candidates engaged throughout the process and through to offer stage
- ✓ Explain the selection process to candidates from the outset so that they know what to expect at each stage
- ✓ Explain the technology that will be used and encourage candidates to test their internet connection in advance of the interview time. Develop a guide for candidates so that your time is well spent, and candidates are prepared
- ✓ Explain the dress code and interview process, how many people will be on the panel and the expected duration of the interview
- ✓ If a technical or an aptitude test is required, give candidates sufficient notice of the submission date
- ✓ Be responsive and engaging in all communications with candidates, making it easier for them to stay connected with the process
- ✓ Try to avoid the distraction of the background setting of the candidate's screen and ensure there is no unconscious bias in the decision-making process
- ✓ Establish a scorecard matrix of how to assess a candidate's skills and cultural fit

Smart technology can assist you to manage the recruitment process in a time-efficient manner. There are a number of well-designed applicant tracking systems (ATS) on the market that can be used as stand-alone tools, as well as modules within HR Information Systems (HRIS) that you may already have in place.

Once a decision has been made, follow up with references and background checking as promptly as possible and ensure all the company preconditions are clarified before getting the documentation with the final offer sent to the candidate.

When discussing any job offer with a candidate, explain the workplace set up that is currently in place and set expectations. This is especially important if there is an extension of remote working or a period of office-based working, or if there is a hybrid working model in place from the outset. It is also a good time to explain the onboarding process and what candidates can expect as they progress to the joining stage with your company.

Onboarding virtually

An employee's first impression of an organisation has a significant impact on their integration within the team and their overall level of engagement. The onboarding process is critical to the successful integration of any new employee. Any existing induction programmes should be adjusted to ensure new employees can be effectively onboarded to a virtual workplace and yet still feel connected. Providing an onboarding experience that is as stress-free as possible will help the new employee feel connected to both their team and your company while working remotely. This will ultimately enable them to be more productive.



Inducting a new employee online

Virtual induction should be more condensed than traditional face-to-face or on-site-based induction sessions; however, employers should ensure that all relevant information is shared with the new employee as early in the process as possible. Use a variety of communication channels, such as sending information by email, or providing access to the shared drives or the employee portal. The advantage is that the onboarding and induction information will always be there as a good source of reference.

Where possible, try to use a combination of video, slide presentation, guest speakers and interactive activities with the various induction sessions. Try to limit the sessions to a maximum of two hours with a break of 10-15 minutes in between. This will avoid the new employee becoming overwhelmed with too much information at once.

Develop a virtual tour of the workplace or site, so that new employees have a sense of what the workplace looks like and the location of the various departments and facilities. This will help to develop a deeper connection between employees and your company and set expectations for when they will be able to attend the office or site sometime in the future.

Another onboarding suggestion is to have short video clips of various employees in the organisation speaking about their role, what their experience has been and how employees in their department stay connected while working remotely.



Develop a work from home “Buddy System”

Buddy systems are always helpful to welcome and integrate new employees, and this is certainly the case when you are welcoming a new employee to a virtual team. It is important to identify the skills and capabilities needed as a buddy and select a team of buddies across the organisation. You should provide buddies with the necessary training and support, so that they can be effective and dynamic in their role. A new employee should be introduced to a buddy in the same team or function, with the buddy playing an essential role in helping them settle in, especially in the current circumstances where they are starting their new role remotely.



Preparing for the new employee

Engage in a series of communications with new employees before their start date so they are already looking forward to joining the team and have some information and material to familiarise themselves with your company. Set out the induction programme so that they know what to expect and introduce them to their buddy so that they can connect with them early in the process.

It is critical that new employee induction is well planned, that they can access all relevant drives and accounts that are needed for their role, and that time is scheduled to help them navigate the various systems and sites. You should provide new employees with information on how your company operates in relation to the sharing of information and collaboration between teams. This is also a good time to explain the cyber and system security protocols that are in place and their duty of care in safeguarding company confidential information.



Connection points

Establishing regular check-ins and staying in touch with a new employee is really important and a good investment of your time and attention. Not only will it go a long way in building an engaged relationship, but you will also understand how employees are getting on early in the induction process and if they need any additional supports. Schedule meetups with colleagues over the first few weeks and establish an opportunity to meet as many colleagues as possible in a proactive and structured way. This will help with relationship building and create an environment for collaboration and networking internally. Developing an internal networking toolkit will be very beneficial for everyone throughout their time with the company. The more support a new employee gets at the early stages of their employment, the more engaged they will be and have a better chance to contribute and add value.

Tips to consider:

Communications: Consider what information you need to share with your employees. Try to avoid sharing information that the new employee is unlikely to need, especially in the first few months, so they don't get overwhelmed. At the same time make sure they get the important information as early as possible. Getting the communication and information flow right is critical



Relationships: Establish contact points early on so they get to build a healthy connection with their manager and key individuals such as the go-to person for all employment and payroll matters

Company information: Try to pitch presentations at an appropriate level and ensure they are tailored to take account of the area the new employee is joining and the industry they will be working in. Relevant company information such as company handbooks and policies and procedures that will apply to them should also be covered early in the process



Culture and values: From the outset, create a connection to the culture of the organisation. Communicate your company values so that they can become anchors from the outset. Setting expectations regarding performance without overselling the opportunity will set them up for success

Engage and reassure: The first few days and weeks of any new job can be unsettling and stressful; therefore it is important to design the induction programme to be engaging and to reassure the new employee that they have made the right decision in joining your company



Graduates and internships

Opportunities and access to intern and graduate roles may have changed for your business because of the pandemic. Given the uncertainty of the workplace, you may have put intern and graduate roles on hold. However, it is important that you continue to access talent and invest in graduate skills to build a talent pool for the future.



Offering internships and graduate programmes can be hugely beneficial to your company as they allow access to a talent pool that could be significant contributors to your business in the future. Graduates and interns can bring fresh thinking, increased diversity and new skills into your company. Your business may also benefit from an increased understanding of the academic environment and the programmes of study that the students and graduates are undertaking. And of course, it is a chance to engage in the local community and build relationships with local colleges and the local pool of students.

Supporting candidates to access and engage with internship and graduate opportunities may be challenging within a remote or hybrid working environment. The process therefore needs to be a positive experience. Continue to engage and build relationships with colleges, universities and other third level institutions, sharing details about your company and the opportunities that exist both virtually and on site. Your company can still host career fairs and make the digital experience efficient, informative and engaging. Candidates need to have sufficient information and access to job descriptions, understand the experiences of others in the company, and have a deeper understanding of what the organisation stands for, especially on topics of diversity and inclusion, sustainability and ethics, the environment and community in which they are located.

Whether you choose remote or hybrid working, it is important that you continue to create opportunities for interns and graduates to engage formally and informally. This is important for new recruits in general, but especially when employees are entering the workforce for the first time. All talent initiatives such as induction training, probation management, performance reviews, mentorship programmes and general job training will need to reflect new ways of working. Training will be very different, so establishing new channels for collaboration and networking with peers needs to be structured and monitored. Buddy and mentoring programmes will now be more important than ever to ensure knowledge gaps are addressed and new employees are able to contribute and thrive in the new workplace environment.

As you monitor and review your company's policies and procedures when adjusting to new working practices, it is important that they continue to reflect current and developing employment legislation. Your business should provide access to opportunities and progression in line with equality legislation, and address the current health, safety, and well-being of employees and their work environment. That includes undertaking a review of workstations, even where employees are based at home. Some graduates or interns may be in rented accommodation with limited space and so it may be a challenge to set up a workstation that meets the correct ergonomic standard and security safeguards. It is also important to address the overall well-being of employees, as mentioned in the Employee Health and Well-Being guide, and ensure that supports are in place for all employees to access well-being initiatives.

Career progression and succession planning

The Covid-19 pandemic has transformed every aspect of our working experience and has impacted the financial position of many companies. It is therefore no surprise that it will have had an impact on opportunities for progression and on the career paths that were already established. However, progression and growth won't have stalled completely; every experience and challenge encountered is an opportunity for personal development, growth and adaptability. Your company should continue to build and develop new skills and provide opportunities for employees to gain new experiences. You should encourage employees to network and build relationships across the business, regardless of whether they are working on-site or remotely.

Even if new roles or promotional opportunities are not immediately apparent, it's important to continue to plan and focus on professional development so that you have the relevant skills available to deliver future business growth. Covid-19 has been a disrupter in so many ways, but like all disrupters it also creates opportunity. While career development is likely to look and feel different for the next while, it is still important to identify and address developmental needs within your business.

It is important to keep employees focused on their development so that they are ready to embrace opportunities within the business when they arise. Virtual learning technologies offer new opportunities for professional development, regardless of whether employees are in the workplace or working remotely.

Try this advice to help keep your employees motivated:



Through your performance management process, encourage your employees to identify their personal goals and how they wish to develop. Take some time to discuss with them where they want to go in their career and what they might like to do in the next 12 to 18 months



Help your workers assess their current skill set and identify with them the skills you will need to have in the business in the future. Encourage them to attend webinars and workshops on subjects of importance and try to facilitate them putting their new skills into operation when the opportunity arises



Consider using 360 tools where your high potential talent can get feedback and input from colleagues, mentors and managers so that they are realistic in their endeavours and can identify the support they need



Encourage and facilitate your employees to move beyond their comfort zone and put themselves forward for some challenging assignments or a body of work that will really test them. Maybe consider a global assignment, or the chance to join a working group to look at a new process flow within the organisation. These are all good learning opportunities



Encourage employees to generate new ideas and not to be afraid to pitch them to the business. This can be achieved virtually through structured collaboration and innovation hubs. Innovation and creativity are always important – so provide ways to let employees showcase their ability



Sometimes it can be helpful to recommend a mentorship programme for an employee or for them to become a mentor and join an inhouse mentor panel



This might be the time too for employees to consider taking up some voluntary role outside of work or identifying ways that they can apply their skills for the enhancement and development of others less fortunate

Developing structures to support employees stay focused on developing their careers and realise their aspirations within your company is always a good philosophy to follow. Now at this time of a changing landscape, it is important that your top talent see a future with your business and remain passionate about the opportunities that may arise in the future.

Summary:

Talent is critical to the success of all businesses. Having a structured acquisition and retention strategy that embraces the new virtual landscape will allow you to access a broader talent pool to grow your company.

- ✓ Adjusting how you search for talent and how you bring candidates through the selection process is the first step in designing a resource plan for the future
- ✓ Embrace the digital and virtual tools available to get access to the talent you are seeking
- ✓ Prepare your selecting team so that they have the skills and competencies needed to operate within the evolving talent acquisition environment. Interviewing and assessing candidates virtually is not the same as the face-to-face experience
- ✓ Onboard employees using smart and effective virtual tools
- ✓ Don't forget the human factor, build your new processes to allow for new ways of engaging and building relationships
- ✓ Ensure you have a strong and impactful employer brand that is meaningful to your current employees and makes a positive impact on the candidate experience aligning with your culture and values throughout
- ✓ Have an onboarding process that is effective for employees working in both a blended and virtual capacity. Make all relevant information easily accessible and communicate as often as possible
- ✓ Consider the skills and capabilities that your business needs over the next 18 months and develop a company-wide training plan to address any gaps
- ✓ Even where promotional opportunities are not immediately available, continue to offer employees access to developmental activities – these can include formal training, new projects, business coaching and internal mentoring

