

HR sector must prepare to lead in post-crisis world

Human resources professionals have suddenly found themselves at the forefront of business planning



Derek McKay

The Covid-19 crisis continues to test the resilience and flexibility of business continuity in many countries. Big decisions, some of them difficult, have already been made quickly in an effort to adapt to

the fast-changing landscape of recent weeks.

In normal circumstances, business strategy tends to inform the HR agenda. In recent weeks, however, we've seen HR professionals contribute more to driving key elements of business strategy such as resource planning, performance, productivity and costs.

As organisations seek to move out of the initial phase of their response to Covid-19,

they now need to consider the medium-term challenges they face, and start planning for the "next normal". What will the economy, their sector and their working practices look like post-crisis?

As employees have been settling into a new set of work practices, the initial priority has been to ensure an amended and functional way of working, rather than focusing on productivity.

As more employers begin to look ahead, there is an acceptance that businesses must now focus on what needs to happen in the months to come, and HR will play a crucial role in this.

Professionals in the field will be required to lead on key

initiatives and processes such as internal communications, performance management, learning and development and employee engagement.

HR as it was in the pre-Covid world will no longer have relevance in this "next normal".

The effective management of remote workers, the health and well-being of all, supports for parents and non-parents, and for employees during uncertain times, will be front and centre.

This will be coupled with a need to support the business and its line managers. Re-sourcing plans will be needed to ensure that employees can still receive mandatory training, for example, and that

health and safety standards do not slip.

Numerous other issues are still on the table, such as the induction of new employees, the management of staff on probation and the handling of annual leave. To stay ahead of new and emerging challenges, HR professionals must think strategically and re-prioritise.

Our most recent HR barometer survey found that recruitment and retention were the two top priorities for HR professionals this year. Covid-19 has changed that. For HR now, the question is: what should the current priorities be?

HR professionals have the tough but necessary task of realigning people strategies

with the new reality of business. Retaining top talent should never be out of sight, and maintaining good employer-employee relationships is perhaps more crucial now than ever. How organisations treat their employees during this time will have an impact on their reputation as employers, now and in the future.

Each sector will differ in terms of how it can effectively plan and manage the employment landscape post-crisis. HR professionals are in a unique position, and must take the opportunity to lead.

Derek McKay is managing director at Adare Human Resource Management