Virtual Working Group:

HR for HR

11
participants
from
10
C A H R S Companies:

Bloomberg
Boeing
Bristol Myers Squibb
Colgate-Palmolive
Corning
Harvard Business Publishing
Novartis
Polaris
Samsung Electronics America
Verizon

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October 27, 2021

The Human Resources function has taken on a central leadership role throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As many organizations begin to bring back some employees to the office and redesign work in the hybrid world, HR's importance has only increased. New workspaces, ways of working, career development models, and flexibility policies have been high on the list of priorities for most companies, and with their implementation come new opportunities and challenges to the HR function. CAHRS member companies that attended this working group came together to share how they are addressing these new challenges, with particular emphasis on how these new priorities are being implemented within the HR function.

Working group participants expressed interest in a range of topics including how to cope with the growing number of resignations, best practices for mitigating and preventing drops in employee engagement, upskilling employees and creating new career paths, and how to help employees' wellness and mental health. In addressing these and other ways that the HR function can better support its own employees, the following best practices emerged.

DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS

Career Developent

Be transparent about career paths. One company's exit interviews revealed that 70% of people that resigned were looking for greater career development opportunities. In response, HR created a document that clearly laid out possible career trajectories within the organization. Additional information about what needs to be done to advance within the organization (e.g., specific core, technical, and management competencies) and about the hiring process for certain jobs (e.g., some jobs require a committee's approval) was also provided. This resulted in clearer conversations about advancement possibilities (both within and beyond HR), helped employees have better conversations with their managers about how they can acquire the skills necessary to advance, and removed a lot of the political and unconscious bias issues that might otherwise keep employees from being promoted.

Emphasize experiences over roles. Some companies' employees expressed dissatisfaction with their advancement, or lack thereof, creating concerns over potential turnover. Some HR managers found that much of this dissatisfaction was eased by pointing out that certain experiences—not certain job titles—are oftentimes needed before employees can move up the career ladder. Whenever possible, it may be a good practice to encourage employees to ask, "what experiences do I need to advance?" rather than, "what jobs do I need to hold?"

Emphasize the interpersonal. Another company found that since the pandemic's onset, HR employees often focused on taking courses, getting certifications, and acquiring technical skills, and yet were confused as to why

these efforts did not result in promotions. In shifting to remote work, it seems that many employees have forgotten to develop interpersonal relationships and build the credibility needed to advance. Finding opportunities for employees to lead difficult conversations with employees or work alongside senior leadership, for example, can go a long way in boosting engagement. This can also reorient eager employees towards more realistic expectations about their advancement.

Create more intermediate positions. Oftentimes advancement is not possible because people stay in senior roles, unintentionally blocking newer and/or younger talent from moving up the career ladder as quickly as they would like. To address this, one company created a new intermediate role called "people partners" whose sole focus is people-related issues of HR. For example, while HR business partners plan change management initiatives, HR people partners implement the planned changes and receive training on the employee experience. This approach resulted in happier HR employees with more focused roles. However, caution should be exercised in adopting this practice; another company noted that when they did something similar, the training required for the new role inadvertently created a "have" and "have not" dynamic and resulted in the new role being much more sought after.

Mental Health

Upskill managers on mental health. One of the biggest challenges in managing mental health is the inability to identify when it is deteriorating. Holding workshops on how to talk about signs of concern and how to address them can be hugely beneficial, both for HR and non-HR employees and managers. Focusing on providing these workshops to senior leadership may be the most beneficial. One company noted that doing this resulted in their CHRO talking about mental health struggles much more openly on social media, and ultimately led to a work environment where talking about mental health became normalized.

Create partnerships with community groups. An alternative to holding mental health workshops might be to outsource mental health training to local experts. One company explained that through creating a partnership with a local mental health advocacy group, they were given access to various programs on mindfulness and meditation, and offered employees up to 16 hours of training on how to be a mental health "first responder" in the workplace.

Offer retention bonuses. With the sharp rise in resignations, companies expressed growing concerns over the mental health of survivors (i.e., employees that remain after others leave) and the stress that comes with increased workloads. Retention bonuses were one practice suggested as a way to retain employees and acknowledge the extra work they are taking on after their coworkers' departure.

Reprioritize how and what work gets done. Because of the difficulties associated with recruiting during the pandemic, many companies have had to redistribute work responsibilities several times. After a certain point, one CAHRS member noted, work can no longer be redistributed and employees are faced with the harsh reality that their workload will be greater for the foreseeable future. To better manage these increased

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workloads and prevent employees from burning out, workers and managers should categorize work responsibilities into things that need to get done as soon as possible and things that can wait. If it does not need to be done today, it can be put aside for another day. Relatedly, HR workers should learn how to tactfully say no to the non-essential demands of non-HR employees. A simple "not now" or "we are saving this for later" enables workers to focus on what really needs to get done.

Remind employees about existing mental health benefits. Few employees bother reading all details of their benefits packages, and those that do rarely do so after they are initially hired. Reminding employees that they can access therapy services, for example, and providing information on how to learn about and access all of their mental health benefits can help alleviate mental health struggles.

Encourage employees to take a day off. Many HR workers have accumulated vacation days or paid leave during the pandemic but have been reluctant to use it. Managers should leverage what they know about their workers to determine when they are struggling, and push their employees to take a day or two off in order to decompress. This is something that is very difficult to implement at the organizational level but should be heavily encouraged at the individual/managerial level.

Training

Deliver training in new and interactive modalities. Now that much of our work lives take place in front of a computer, employees seem to have less patience for 60- or 90-minute training videos. Several companies noted that they have seen higher engagement by hosting discussion panels in which several subject matter experts offer advice and answer employees' questions. Another company was considering virtual reality training for some of their technical roles.

Deliver training in smaller chunks. If videos are still the best way to deliver training, consider breaking them up into smaller chunks. One company stopped using their standard 60-minute training videos and instead offered more micro learning through training modules with three- to five-minute videos. They found that this led to employees paying more attention despite the increased attentional demands going on in their work and personal lives.