

CAHRS  
Virtual  
Working Group  
Series:  
Rethinking the  
HR Operating  
Model

17 participants  
from 14  
CAHRS Companies:

American Express  
Boeing  
Boston Scientific  
Cigna  
Colgate-Palmolive  
CUBIC  
Ecolab  
General Electric  
Hormel Foods  
McDonald's  
Medtronic  
Polaris  
Terex  
Workday

## Session 2: Adjusting CoEs Post COVID-19

March 17, 2021

The COVID pandemic and recent social/political events have had tremendous effects on the workplace. Business leaders across all functions are required to fundamentally rethink how to operate and lead in this new era, and Human Resources is no exception. Given that, CAHRS organized this series of working groups to explore how HR has adjusted to operating during the pandemic and is preparing for the recovery. In this second working group of the series, the discussion was focused on **what changes HR centers of excellence (CoEs) have made, what has been learned, and how it will impact their strategies moving forward.**

## DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS

### Additional COEs

Several companies reported recently adding new CoEs. They noted that these changes were not necessarily driven by the pandemic but were accelerated and validated through what happened during the course of it.

- **Organizational Development CoE.** Several companies that have experienced major transformations have implemented an organizational development CoE to facilitate more sophisticated organizational design in response to evolving business strategies. Examples of the CoE's mandate included organizational design, team effectiveness, and change leadership.
- **Program Management CoE (HR Advisory Council).** The business model and talent work of many companies has become increasingly complex in recent years, which has heightened the need to improve transparency, connection, and collaboration across different CoEs. To that end, several companies have initiated a program management CoE and/or advisory council represented by senior HR and CoE leaders. These groups are charged with facilitating more consistent communication from CoEs to company leaders and maximizing the utilization of resources by helping CoEs set priorities, share internal best practices, and understand what others are doing. Some companies have the members of the advisory council rotate every 12 months.
- **HR Strategy CoE:** Several companies have also implemented an HR strategy CoE, which was considered an enhanced talent strategy CoE since it was better aligned with companies' new business strategies and focused more deeply on improving managers' and employees' experience. The new team was responsible for the

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This Summary Report was prepared by Brad Bell for participants of the Adjusting CoEs Post COVID-19 Virtual Working Group.

The Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies (CAHRS) is an international center serving corporate human resources leaders and their companies by providing critical tools for building and leading high performing HR organizations. CAHRS' mission is to bring together Partners and the ILR School's world-renowned HR Studies faculty to investigate, translate and apply the latest HR research into practice excellence.

continuous recruitment as well as planning for the future workforce and the return-to-work phase.

#### Other Strategies

- **Training & Learning.** Companies were interested in how to scale learning and deliver virtual materials effectively. However, even though more training content was being transferred to online platforms, companies recognized that some activities should be performed in-person. They agreed that more efforts should be invested in determining when to prioritize in-person learning experiences and why.
- **Internal Mobility.** Companies reported that their leaders were more open and accepting of internal mobility than they had been pre-COVID-19. Planning to continue and enhance current internal mobility practices, some companies were working on redesigning their career management and leadership training programs accordingly.
- **Workforce Forecasting.** Workforce forecasting has been very challenging given the ambiguity and uncertainty of the current situation. To tackle this, some companies had one team do the usual forecasting tasks and another team handle new data requests and scenario planning. Other companies decided to decouple headcount forecasting from capability forecasting because headcount projections have become more uncertain during the crisis but capability forecasts are more enduring.
  - **Headcount Forecasting.** Some companies were intentional about starting to educate their leaders on workforce planning. Instead of hiring new employees for every new task, leaders should consider other options such as extended partnerships or contractors first in order to save cost and enhance flexibility.
  - **Capability Forecasting.** One strategy that companies employed to improve capability forecasting was to actively attend to team leaders' feedback in addition to performance evaluation reports. Accordingly, training programs aimed at helping leaders to identify and describe the skills they need for their teams were considered crucial.