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Virtual Working Group:
Disruption and its Implications for Talent Strategy

November 2020

Talent Acquisition

Participating Companies

American Express
Ecolab
HP Inc.

For companies that conduct campus recruitment as part of their talent acquisition plan, COVID-19 has caused them to think of innovative ways to approach and connect with students without accessing their campuses. For example, some companies have invested efforts in leveraging video conferencing, chat rooms, and online information sessions to help students to learn about career opportunities and benefits of working at their companies. Much attention has also been paid to how to best onboard and organize engagement programs for new employees without in-person interaction. Despite those challenges, transitioning campus recruitment to virtual does bring some benefits, at least in the short term, such as reducing logistical costs which can later be reinvested in building recruitment technologies or developing training programs. However, whether such a reinvestment should continue post-pandemic is unclear because we know little about its pros and cons.

A talent acquisition practice that has been more widely adopted as a result of COVID-19 is internal hiring. In an effort to avoid layoffs, companies are reluctant to admit new people—rather, they are supportive of talent mobility from negatively affected business units to others that have been performing better. While this practice shows a great potential in helping companies to protect their current employees as well as to find appropriate candidates for new job vacancies, it can be challenging to virtually facilitate a smooth internal talent transition from unit to unit.

Even though much has been changed under the impact of COVID-19, diversity and inclusion (D&I) are still among the most important criteria on companies' talent acquisition guidelines. In fact, some companies emphasize that they pay more attention to D&I currently because they have fewer opportunities for external recruitment and thus every new hire plays a more important role in reflecting the companies' values and the community in which they are doing business. To that end, they attempt to make sure that job candidates as well as interview panels are both diverse. Another diversity issue discussed in the working group is how to correctly define and efficiently practice D&I across different cultures and regions.
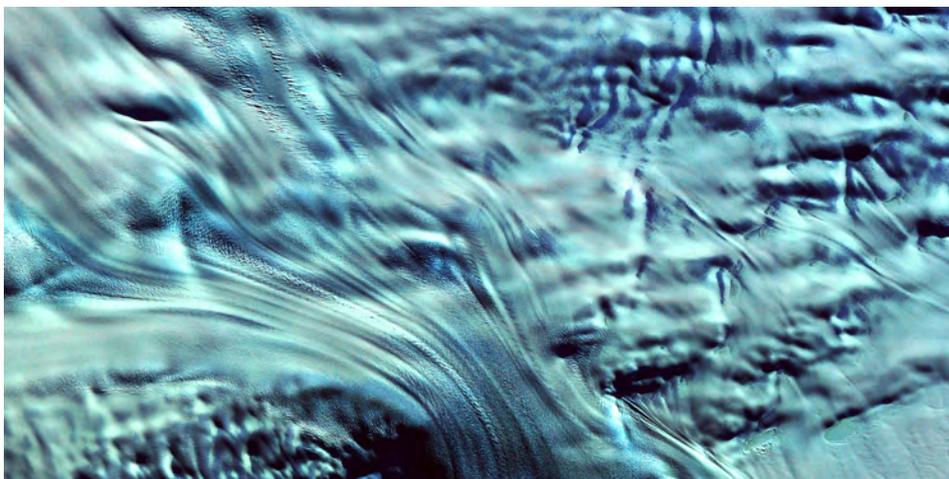
Talent Development

In addition to talent acquisition, COVID-19 also presents numerous challenges related to talent development. In particular, companies are focusing attention on how to help employees navigate virtual work environments.

Virtual work training: Virtual work definitely requires multiple new skills, ranging from technology-related skills—such as utilizing and optimizing available technology tools—to virtual interpersonal skills—such as managing relationships outside team meetings. In addition, as the business environment has become highly uncertain and ambiguous, it is critical for employees to be able to predict, adapt, and initiate new working methods. With an increase in the number of essential employee capabilities, companies feel the need to organize more training programs to ensure employee productivity. One lingering question is how to decide which skills they should focus on given the limited resources and time they have. Companies also recognize that different populations might have different needs, which suggests that they should invest efforts to identify the competencies required to be successful for each population and embed training accordingly to support the required skill development.

The Future of Talent Strategy

The CAHRS companies who participated in this working group predict that the workplace post-pandemic will not be the same as it was pre-COVID-19 Therefore, their talent strategies, especially in terms of acquisition and development, are also expected to change.

1. Talent Acquisition

While it is nearly certain that future campus recruitment activities will consist of a hybrid of virtual and in-person activities, companies have not yet decided which activities should be virtual and which should be in-person. However, there are several internal and external factors that will inform such decisions.

In terms of internal factors, having part of the recruitment plan remain virtual can reduce logistical costs and save significant time. For example, companies can post jobs on Handshake and set up only a few information sessions, which can be assessed by many students. However, they recognize that it is still too soon to say whether such a recruitment approach results in any undesirable outcomes—such as a reduction in the quality of talent—or not. In addition, companies stress that there should be some in-person components in the future campus recruitment plan to create customized experience and strengthen their employer brand. This is especially important for newly established or less known companies. In terms of external factors, a company's campus recruitment plan can be impacted by other companies'

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branding strategies and student preferences. For example, a company may have to conduct most of their campus recruitment in-person if others are doing so. Further, students might have different preferences in terms of recruitment mode. Some students are not affected or even thrive in a virtual environment while others can only perform to their fullest in a traditional in-person environment.

No matter what the future holds, companies think that they will continue to use technological tools and platforms in their recruitment process. Companies also agree that they will increasingly place more emphasis on job applicants' self-awareness (e.g., knowing their strengths and weaknesses) and learning agility (e.g., quickly learn, relearn, and unlearn) than their technical proficiency.

2. Talent Development

Given that companies are likely to allow a mixture of home and office working post-COVID-19, much of their talent development efforts will be distributed to help employees better structure their workday as well as effectively communicate within and across teams. In order to mitigate the risks of low team cohesion and employee morale associated with limited in-person interaction, companies may require employees to go to the office for team meetings and team-building activities, and allow employees to take on multiple projects to introduce novelty into their work lives. Further, companies may invest in setting clearer career paths for their employees, especially for those who will work mostly at home, so that they will not feel disadvantaged from promotion and other types of career advancement as opposed to others who work at the office more frequently.
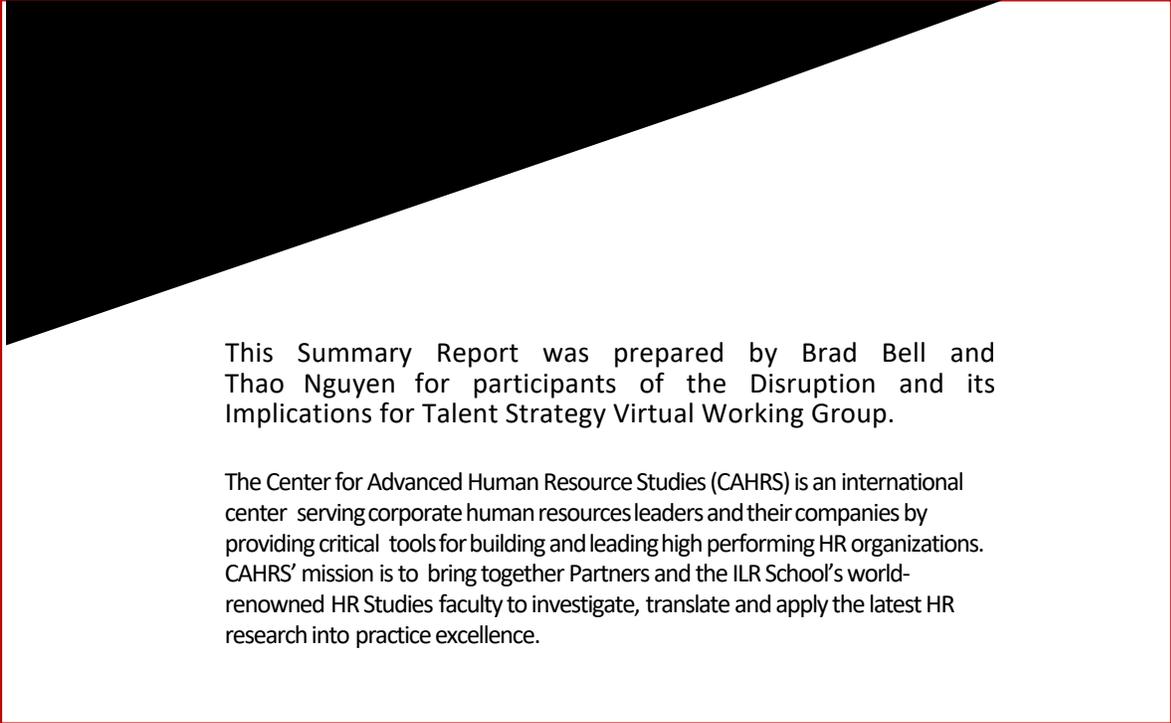
This Summary Report was prepared by Brad Bell and Thao Nguyen for participants of the Disruption and its Implications for Talent Strategy Virtual Working Group.

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