



Scottish HR Leadership Group

# **Specialist Culture Forum – ‘what will the new world look like?’**

29<sup>th</sup> April & 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020

**FWB Park Brown**  
Executive Search

*In response to the Covid-19 Health and Developing Economic Crisis FWB Park Brown (FWB PB) is working closely with the Scottish HR Leadership Group to provide constructive support which also includes discussion forums and Q & As.*

On Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April and 6<sup>th</sup> May, Alix Meekison facilitated two specialist HR forums focused on organisational culture. Francis Lake, Head of Organisational Development at Virgin Money provided his expertise and insight into the cultural challenges and changes faced during the Covid-19 crisis, as well as considerations for the future. The forum encouraged an open discussion with sharing of experiences across a number of cross-sector HR professionals. A range of topics were discussed, summarised below:

### **How Culture is Being Impacted Now**

To some extent, emotion is taking precedent over rational thinking during the crisis and people are connecting more heavily with emotion. The way businesses make people feel, will affect how people think and in turn, how they perform. Employees tend to work and perform better when they have a sense of purpose, value, trust, inclusion and security. It was discussed however, that each of these factors are at risk at the moment due to the heightened economic uncertainty caused by the crisis. Culturally, this is likely to cause challenges for employers and employees.

Ascertaining how people are feeling right now was considered key to addressing some of these challenges. Various examples were shared amongst the group with respect to what organisations are doing to engage with their employees and check-in on their wellbeing. Examples included:

- Zoom sessions – bringing together small groups of 10 people across various parts of the organisation, purely to discuss their lockdown experiences, what they have enjoyed about the change in circumstance and what they perhaps aren't enjoying so much. The use of larger forums, run by HR facilitators over a 24 hour period as a drop in/drop out session were also discussed. Multiple sessions can be run periodically, to assess thoughts and feelings at different phases of lockdown / return to work. These enable a much larger concentration of employees to raise questions, concerns and provide qualitative insight to how the workforce feels on a broader scale.
- Engaging on a social level – research has indicated that remote workers typically have less than 8 informal connections in a week, whilst office workers have around 38 informal connections, highlighting the lack of social connectivity available to a significant number of employees right now. Many participants were using quizzes and competitive games to bring their people together. One participant highlighted that their organisation had set up a weekend session, which was proving particularly valuable for employees who are perhaps living on their own and may be lacking social interaction at the weekends.
- Coaching trios – bringing together groups of 3 individuals who operate across different levels and disciplines within the business, and perhaps in different

countries. The focus is on helping employees build relationships, as well as understanding what is happening in other parts of the organisation, in different global locations.

Capturing the feedback from some of these more formal sessions was considered vital. For example, by asking employees for their top 3 feelings around their lockdown experience, this was allowing the organisation to categorise these emotions and feedback generally to the senior leadership team the workforce's mood. This was also assisting senior leadership develop and prioritise any forthcoming communications.

The wellbeing of the workforce is a significant concern for employers and some participants discussed having challenges trying to get employees to open up about how they feel. In these instances, continuing to raise awareness of the organisation's offering (e.g. mental health champions, access to wellbeing apps such as Calm or Headspace), and perhaps opening these up to family use to encourage conversations at home was suggested. More and more organisations are seeing an uptake in their mental health related programmes and some participants had in the last few weeks launched access to Calm or Headspace apps as an additional tool for employees.

### **Future Cultural Shifts & Considerations**

It was discussed that the urgency around the crisis is starting to lift and the focus is turning towards the future. In the banking sector specifically, there has been a huge shift in consumer behaviour, with more customers signing up and utilising digital banking methods in recent weeks. These changes will accelerate strategic plans for many businesses and will determine how the organisation is shaped moving forward.

From an internal perspective, organisations have started to plan how the workplace will look and operate once lockdown restrictions start to be lifted. Many participants were managing questions and concerns from employees around getting 'back to normal'. It was discussed that there is a huge mindset and cultural shift still to happen in this respect, as it is likely that there will be a fundamental change to the way we work and therefore, reframing the conversation as stepping into the future, may be helpful. Encouraging employees to give their thoughts and ideas on how things could work moving forward was also discussed in relation to this point. Many organisations had initiated one to one conversations between people leaders and team members, to discuss their thoughts and feelings on the return to work.

Some participants were already having the conversation with employees now around the fact that once lockdown restrictions do begin to lift, this does not necessarily mean they will be attending work immediately. Many organisations are working on the basis that this change is long-term, and employees are likely to be phased back to work in groups to ensure their safety. Post Covid-19 and the lifting of restrictions such as social distancing, some organisations were considering utilising offices as collaboration spaces, breakout zones and project working.

## **The Scottish HR Leadership Group**

Primarily the Scottish HR Leadership Group will focus on the advancement of the profession in Scotland plus have a development and mentoring framework. Our aim is to ensure an interesting, diverse and experienced group of senior practitioners across all sectors who can develop talent and as business leaders contribute and influence the broader societal agenda.

The purpose of this forum to allow Senior HR Leaders to share their own experiences and gain further insight, thoughts and idea and to allow more connectivity within the HR community given the evolving global COVID-19 pandemic.

Summaries of the discussions will be posted on our news section and also on LinkedIn.

For further information about any of these forums please contact us via:

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Keep safe and well.

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