



Scottish HR Leadership Group

Specialist HR Discussion Forum: Are your people remotely interested?

28th April & 5th 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 Tuesday 28th April and 5th May, Alix Meekison facilitated two specialist HR forums alongside Harriet Moll and Paul Gray of strategic communications specialists, Charlotte Street Partners. Titled 'are your people remotely interested?', Harriet and Paul led a thoughtful discussion around engaging with employees through crisis and the challenges and faced by both employers and employees when working remotely.

Video Communication Tools

The use of video communication tools has escalated rapidly during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a number of businesses utilising Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype and other methods to continue to engage with the workforce. Whilst this is proving effective to some degree, there are aspects of communication that these virtual formats don't allow for. 'Zoom fatigue' is now being widely reported as being taxing on the brain. For example, the lack of non-verbal cues means that individuals are having to listen intently and for sustained periods of times. This makes it more difficult to adapt to conversation naturally, and may make it more difficult to pick up how others are feeling. As a result, there may be employees who find the use of video conferencing (particularly where this is used frequently throughout the day) exhausting. It was suggested that what has worked initially for businesses may need to continue to evolve and even more flexibility may need to be introduced.

Some employees may be missing the incidental conversations that often happen in the workplace and the natural riffing on each other's ideas. Setting up informal communication channels that replicate office life as much as possible was recommended in order to combat some of this, as well as 'walking meetings' over the phone, which have proven to stimulate creativity.

The following National Geographic article was referenced as part of our discussion with respect to video conferencing:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/science-and-technology/2020/04/zoom-fatigue-is-taxing-the-brain-heres-why-that-happens>.

Managing Concerns

Many organisations have had to take unprecedented measures to preserve cash and jobs as a result of the Covid-19 crisis including furlough and salary sacrifice, which for many employees is causing anxiety around income and the future of their role within the business. As a result, many participants had concerns around their internal communications potentially appearing ingenuine or insensitive. It was suggested that listening and auditing the mood of the workforce is key. Providing opportunities for employees to give their opinion on what the business is doing well, and what might be improved, may give organisations more insight into how the workforce is feeling. In large organisations, creating group forums

for employees to share their thoughts was recommended, perhaps led by an employee representative who can capture questions or concerns raised.

Keeping communication lines open and transparent was also recommended. Employees are likely to value honesty, and employers should feel comfortable explaining the decisions they have taken, the rationale and what this means for everyone.

As many businesses start to look to the future and life after lockdown, there may also be some concerns raised from employees around returning to work. Some participants were already experiencing this, or anticipated they would and were seeking guidance on how best to manage this. It was highlighted that some employees may struggle to communicate their concerns openly in fear that this may be perceived negatively. Making it obvious to employees that it is ok to raise their concerns and worries should be a priority. This will allow employers to ascertain the reasons why employees may have a concern in the first place, as well as ask what it is they want the business to do to put their mind at ease. Consistent communication around what the organisation is doing to adhere to the guidance from government, and perhaps providing photographs or videos of the workplace so that employees can visualise the 'new' workplace, may be powerful during this phase. Key to overcoming some of the concerns employees may have is communicating and explaining the process and providing comfort around the fact that the business is doing its utmost to protect staff.

Interacting with employees and getting their ideas on the return to work may also prove fruitful and help to weed out any concerns they may be having. Some participants explained that some of their best ideas throughout the crisis have come from the workforce. New leadership skills are emerging in different ways – giving employees agency during this time to come up with new ideas and have an impact may be a useful engagement tool.

Connecting with Society

It was discussed that the crisis is hugely emotive for people, both on a personal and professional level. Organisations are being praised for any support they are giving to the wider public (e.g. the NHS) as well as their employees, and sharing community stories may be encouraging a deeper connection with staff. Even where organisations may not necessarily have strong CSR or philanthropic programmes in place, their staff are taking part in activities that support the wider public (e.g. clap for carers or fundraising), and celebrating these is considered important.

Social connectivity has been somewhat diminished as a result of the lockdown and this is likely to be having an effect on the productivity and performance of some employees. There is no doubt that the crisis and subsequent shift in how we are able to go about our everyday lives is having an impact on employee wellbeing. All barriers are down and some of the typical avenues to expend our energy or frustration are no longer there, e.g. going to the gym or meeting with friends. Employers are cognisant of this and are keen to encourage as much connectivity as possible through different means and mechanisms.

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:

Alix Meekison
Secretary, The Scottish HR Leadership Group
e. secretary@scottishhrlg.com
t. +44 (0)131 539 7087

Keep safe and well.

Disclaimer

The information contained in these documents is confidential, privileged and only for the information of the intended recipient and may not be used, published or redistributed without the prior written consent of The Scottish HR Leadership Group or FWB Park Brown Ltd.

The opinions expressed are in good faith and while every care has been taken in preparing these emails, The Scottish HR Leadership Group or FWB Park Brown Ltd make no representations and gives no warranties of whatever nature in respect of these documents, including but not limited to the accuracy or completeness of any information, facts and/or opinions contained therein.

The Scottish HR Leadership Group, FWB Park Brown Ltd, its subsidiaries, the directors, employees and agents cannot be held liable for the use of and reliance of the opinions, estimates, forecasts and findings in these emails.