





**COVID** has upended many traditional HR practices. Some of the most important challenges faced by HR managers are due to ongoing shifts in talent management that have accelerated during the crisis. There is an increased reliance on technology which has altered employee expectations of their employer and today this is proving to be the cornerstone for **Working from Home**.

But let's not forget for many HR teams the focus has been on maintaining operations, the long-term impact on culture and HR issues has yet to be measured or even resolved.



### Some Key HR Trends

1. **Leadership** - taking responsibility for failures, new models for well-rounded leaders and specialists
2. **Culture** - building trust and maintaining values in all key groups
3. **Thriving in a Crisis** - seeking out those whose optimism and energy in a crisis will empower others
4. **Return to Office** - creating the best fit for individual work requirements, personality, home needs and the business. 1 size will not fit all
5. **New Structures** - leaner and meaner HR!
6. **Combatting Detachment** - maintaining connections, commitment and engagement, social networking, fighting talent theft and burnout, building communities
7. **Skills Mapping** - with shrinking talent pools and rapid skills redundancy identifying future potential closer to home
8. **Empowering Performance** - shifting from a policing approach to work
9. **New Pathways for Development** - embracing technology and informal development
10. **Personalisation** of the work experience to improve engagement, networking and moving towards creating communities
11. **Digital tracking** to monitor progress but also provide a listening architecture

## 5 Key Questions

None of us can predict how this will all work out. We need to ensure that we learn from recent events, improve resilience and ensure HR systems and processes are fit for purpose. Here are some questions you need to think about.

1

How confident are you in your organisation's ability to survive the next crisis?

- Lessons Learned
- New opportunities
- Unexpected gains
- Future scenarios
- Partnerships
- New redundancies uncovered by the pandemic
- Preparedness
- Organisational resilience

2

What's it really like to work around here in the 'New Normal', will this work in the future?

- Connecting with our values
- Building trust with all stakeholders
- Climate
- Happiness, health and well-being
- Meaningful work
- Diversity
- Organisational structure and function

3

How can we help our employees create a great place to work that is also competitive, flexible and viable in the future?

- Changed work patterns
- Altered expectations
- New routes for recruitment
- Retention
- Create comforts/technology
- Who can they talk to

4

How much of the traditional HR Management framework should remain intact in the future?

- HR Structures and Processes
- WFH Policy and Practice
- Presenteeism
- Engagement

5

Is your L&D team a powerful force for change across the organization or a cost?

- What we learned about development
- Forces for change
- Key issues
- Resourcing L&D
- New skills
- Intimacy in a zoom world

## Key Points from the Team

- Clients have vast e-learning resources that "they" have built over the last 10-20 years that are now being used in the on-line virtual sessions (the resources are often linked/built around frameworks). Are these being accessed and utilised to the full by internal and external parties who are providing development?
- Employees juggling between online/in person work, meetings and teams
- WFH is still an active issue. In particular, how do companies engineer in social and cross team interaction? WFH appears to have impacted negatively on younger members of staff and is impacting productivity, this is also true of some more mature members of staff however, this is related to technology, whereas the younger generation's issues are around culture and decision making
- Wellbeing remains an important issue
- Focus on cost reduction. T&D seems to be particularly under pressure. Potentially there could be a move away from group development to individual coaching
- Pressures and difficulties in recruitment
- The challenge of internal training and development of young staff/ new graduates. Although more experienced staff have been happy to work remotely this has meant that the youngsters aren't getting the right experience from directly working with the older ones
- People are "zoomed out", it is harder and harder to get people to turn on their cameras during training
- If Simon Sinek was worried about a loss of soft skills and human interaction in these generations beforehand, I think we'll see that this becomes more accentuated as communication becomes less intimate
- Lack of interpersonal skills may cause an impact in lowering EQ, especially in empathy as people are more isolated, and on top of that, miss the opportunity to read body language and expressions
- There also seems to be a trend whereby some staff are resisting the request to return to the office, leaders need to have a sound rationale for return and my observation is that some seem to be struggling with, however, thought needs to be given to the factors that produce high performing teams and what this mean in a hybrid model. Roles and responsibilities may need to be reviewed/renamed to clearly identify roles which are suitable to the various styles of working
- Concern by leaders that some of the gains made by working remotely will be lost, (due to people returning to the previous practises). Therefore trying to identify, capture and maintain such gains will be important in establishing them as the new normal.
- Importance of not just skills, but attitudes eg adaptability and coping with uncertainty are attitudes

## China Post COVID by Jamie Dixon from Shanghai

### Lying Flat Culture

The government is driving a significant shift in culture over here right now. There is a trend amongst the youth called "**Lying flat**" which is their response to the extremely competitive nature of work in China, and ever increasing cost of living. Some people are choosing to just give up and live a minimalistic lifestyle because they don't see the point in working so hard for so little reward. The government is trying to encourage people away from this trend and get them back to working hard because it's important for the economy.

### Unhealthy and Unproductive Working Practices Clampdown

We have heard that the government is cracking down on unhealthy and unproductive working practices. There was a recent scandal in Alibaba where one female employee was sexually assaulted after a night of drinking with her director and a client, and also related to the above trend I mentioned, working excessive hours like with Alibaba's 996 culture is one of the things driving the "lying flat" culture. I heard that companies like Tencent for example are being encouraged to stop their staff from working at the weekend.

### Covid Policy

One other issue unique to China is the current pandemic situation. China still has a zero tolerance policy towards covid. Any outbreak means an extremely strict clamp down with many travel restrictions and other restrictions. China is probably going to struggle to get out of this zero tolerance policy because whilst other nations suffered significantly last year, the fact that these other nations have had so many infections means they are getting closer to herd immunity, whereas China hasn't had enough infections, nor do they have enough uptake of the vaccine. Plus, because they haven't had enough infections, they don't have enough data to verify just how effective their vaccines are. In fact, the vaccines may not be that effective because one of the recent outbreaks came from a dock worker in Ningbo who had actually had both shots of his vaccine, then got covid from contact with a foreign crew member on a ship, and had to be quarantined.

The government has to be extremely cautious in opening it's borders here because the distribution of resources is quite uneven. For example, the other week my father in law travelled to his hometown (a third tier city) from Shanghai and was put into 14 day quarantine due to there being an outbreak in Shanghai, whereas I travelled to a first tier city (also departing from Shanghai) and was allowed to travel freely with no restrictions or quarantine whatsoever. The first tier cities have significantly more resources so can respond to any outbreak very quickly, so can afford to be a bit more relaxed.

Also, expect frequent domestic travel disruptions due to the strict nature of covid controls whenever there is an outbreak in China.



## **China Post COVID continued**

### **Education Industry**

Education companies are being cracked down on. China's population is ageing and so the government is encouraging families to have three children. However, many families are reluctant to because of the cost of living. As education is a big cost when it comes to raising kids over here, the government has taken action to limit children's after school education. Consequently, practically an entire industry has been wiped out almost over night, with many people's livelihoods being uprooted. For parents, whilst this may save them costs, for some it represents increasing costs as they are now forced to choose private one to one tuition as opposed to group classes, and it can definitely represent an increased time burden as their children's after school activities have been cancelled.

### **Politics**

Political situation is very tense, and many of us foreigners in China, and Chinese overseas, are really feeling it as we are stuck in between. Lots of uncertainty, lots of anxiety, and lots of negative, triggering and racist comments coming from both sides. It's quite unpleasant to be in this situation right now. For employees working in multinational companies, expect people who have not been in China to have an unrealistic perspective of what's going on over here based on what they've been reading in the news over there, and frankly the same from Chinese people not really understanding what's going on outside of China based on what they've been reading in the news over here. Lots of potential for misunderstandings.

### **Further Links**

- 4 day week <https://www.4dayweek.com/>
- <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/whats-next-for-consumers-workers-and-companies-in-the-post-covid-19-recovery>
- <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/its-time-for-leaders-to-get-real-about-hybrid>

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