

## What Every HR Professional and Business Leader Should Know

Over the past few months we have constantly heard that customer expectations have changed. As John Harvey-Smith once said: 'If industry is not changing then it is dying' and I would suggest that customer expectations are continuing to change at a rate that has not before been experienced. As organisations start to recover from the effects of COVID, HR professionals will be expected to provide strategic support to business leaders to enable them to create advantage in the marketplace.

Areas that are likely to come under the spot-light include the need to align organisational structure, talent, leadership and culture to business strategies that will continue to change in line with changes in the marketplace. If organisations are to be able to respond to change with speed and scale, then the HR Professional will need to exhibit a high level of business and financial acumen, have a thorough understanding of the Value Chain (working back from the Customer) and of the inter-departmental interactions required to support it.

In many companies staffing costs can be high. Having an understanding of the business in context - customer needs, industry dynamics, external trends and market competition – is essential if the HR Professional is to create business value, through the cost-effective delivery of human resources, and have a strategic impact whereby such value can be relayed to the end Customer. However, radical changes to the world of work, as seen during the COVID lock-downs, can create their own problems.

One area of concern is the loss of both staff and organisational development through remote working. The retention of talent can often come down to the ability of an employer to provide continued development to their staff. A great deal of staff development takes place in the workplace either through the communication of lessons learned, by over-hearing conversations or by watching what is happening around them. Much of this development tends to create changes within the organisation that adds value through improvements to systems and processes that add value both to the Organisation and the Customer with the speed and scale required to ensure business growth. Most successful businesses rely on structured platforms that encourage the collaboration required to turn this 'tacit' knowledge from being lessons identified to lessons learned – having moved away from the old-style structures that resulted in isolated silos. When looking at remote working there is a need to ensure that individual silos are not being created; whereby it is only the individual that is identifying a need for change as this adds little, if any, value to the organisation as a whole. How will such knowledge be communicated, given that there is a need to understand the context in which the learning has been identified? How much time would this take up given that learning in the workplace is often constant due to constant changes to customer expectations? There is also a need to ensure that those returning to the workplace are provided with support.

In addition to the need to cater for employee welfare on their return to the workplace, having been working in isolation or having been furloughed, there is also a need to ensure that they are brought up-to-date with changes to systems and procedures as well as looking at any restructuring that may have been, or is, necessary due to changes in the marketplace. There is a particular need to look at any additional training that may be required due to such

changes and also to look at 'skills fade', especially for those that have been on furlough, will they also need to be provided with refresher training? Have there been changes to Health & Safety procedures in their absence? What cultural changes have been identified in their absence? What learning have they identified that might benefit other members of staff and the Organisation itself? It might be advantageous to provide a structured return to the workplace; to include re-induction training.

Changes in the external environment waits for no man. Whether the employer decides to continue with remote working, move to hybrid working or have staff return to their original working environment, there is a need for HR Professionals and Business Leaders to work together to inspire the workforce and ensure that HR Strategy provides full support to aid business growth.