



How the pandemic helped HR

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No one was prepared for what 2020 brought to us. In March 2020, most of Europe was in lockdown and things took a 180* turn. We had to adjust, and do it quickly...

We started learning on the go how to be a part of a socially distanced society and still manage to be as effective and productive. Human Resources (HR) departments were no exception. For a profession focused on people and working very closely with the teams, that meant facing a number of challenges. All job-related activities were remote for an indefinite period of time. We had to engage people through Microsoft Teams and Zoom calls, welcome and onboard our new colleagues in virtual offices and continue to communicate effectively with 60% less capacity that is our non-verbal communication.

Although this may seem like a drastic change, accompanied with chaos, miscommunication and many blurred lines, we made the best use of the situation. The pandemic, if anything, helped us to become better and stay focused.

Flex working

Being a part of the IT world, remote working was always an option, but now we took it a step further. In times of uncertainty and a pause in most public functions, many of our colleagues were left to work while taking care of their families with online schooling or taking care of infants as nurseries were closed. Others had to share "home office" with their families or roommates and lead important business meetings during a family crisis.

Giving flexibility to our teams was crucial. The option to modify working hours and adapt to your personal situation was a game changer. It allowed everyone to feel more comfortable in this new situation and also empowered the marginalised group of working mothers to stay professionally active without it affecting their personal lives negatively.

Adding benefits adapted to the lockdown were necessary and received positively by the teams.

Yes, mental health is crucial

Together with Flex working, we shifted our focus more than ever before to mental health. Working from home can be overwhelming and basically a slippery slope to a burnout. You can easily work your way through the day without proper breaks or decent meals. As much as we tried to stay close to our teams and do regular check-ins together with our management teams, everyone was affected differently. For some it meant that they were alone in their homes for months, others dealt with no work-life balance and the rest were simply missing face-to-face interactions with their teammates and found it hard to continue working.

We encouraged our colleagues to talk more openly about mental health: we emphasized the importance of everyone's "right to disconnect" and take care of themselves. Creating numerous webinars and internal documents with tips on how to prevent burnout and be productive from home. We try to send information, how-to-guides and raise these topics even after the pandemic is over because it helped us realise that well-being means motivated and engaged people.

Communication is key

We all understood the value of non-verbal communication, once we were not able to use it any longer. At least 60% of the communication is perceived through a non-verbal platform with our body language, facial expression, gestures, etc. and those help us express ourselves and communicate effectively.

During the past year, we focused on improving our communication through workshops, brainstorming sessions and training materials. Starting from the leadership level, we work on better synchronization and the ability to identify different behaviors and ways to handle it. To continue collaborating flawlessly when remote, HR worked on all internal channels, promoting a culture with communication in center. We became much more aware and appreciative of everyone's time, strict with our meetings and in general attentive to little details.

Digital Transformation in HR

Once everyone was working from home, HR as a department had no option but to follow along. We started, and are still undergoing, many transformations in HR to respond to the ever so changing IT world. We have an entirely remote process of onboarding and induction, performance management and hiring. Being able to interview, assess and hire people without seeing them is challenging, but with the right mindset and tools, absolutely possible. Luckily, we have a bunch of very tech savvy people, which makes it easier to come up with ideas.

The informal moments in the office have disappeared as well, so we moved those to our digital channels. We became more understanding of the struggles of people working remotely and we are making greater efforts to make remote HR work.

Pre-empt and embrace

We were given an opportunity to learn and achieve even more than we ever thought we are able to during this bizarre period. We started to embrace challenges and we went outside of our comfort zones, as it was the only way forward. HR needed to learn how to be well prepared for what is coming next, to analyse feedback more effectively, consider options that were new and innovative and not be afraid of changing the way we think. We weren't going to be successful in this new world with the old methods. One of the drastic changes is related to not only look in the past for answers and solutions but trying to design your future and where you would like to be as a company.

HR initiated an Employer Branding project to navigate that as well as different internal committees for major topics – engagement, performance and team building. One of our corporate values states – We Lead so we lead the change we would like to see in the company.

Conclusion

Even though the pandemic has created a set of individual and organisational work-life stressors, the Human Resources team of HeleCloud managed to adapt to the circumstances. We learned to value all wins and successes—large and small, and to not forget that change is hard for everyone. As a People's department we had to adapt to it quicker and help the rest of the team as well, which was not an easy task and we are trying to improve our processes every day, step by step.