

# 12-point crisis management plan for HR teams – webinar FAQs

In April 2020 LACE Partners hosted a series of three webinars that were designed to give HR teams support and guidance on navigating through the Covid-19 global pandemic that has affected businesses of all industries, shapes and sizes.

For those of you that were unable to attend, you can watch an 'on demand' version at [www.lacepartners.co.uk/webinars](http://www.lacepartners.co.uk/webinars).

During the webinars there was a Q&A session whereby delegates could ask questions. This document is a compilation of some of the questions that were asked by delegates that attended. The 12 point plan itself – which formed the basis of the discussion for the three webinars – can be viewed via the LACE Partners '[Managing Uncertainty](#)' webpage, which also features videos, blogs and links to the HR on the Offensive podcast.

If you have any further questions about the 12 point plan, or if you'd like to speak to a member of the team about how LACE Partners can help you with your crisis management requirements, please feel free to reach out to us on +44 (0) 20 8065 0310 or email [info@lacepartners.co.uk](mailto:info@lacepartners.co.uk).

## Questions from webinar 1: HR in crisis – a 12 point plan

- 1. Organisations I am speaking with are talking about how this experience has opened up their appetite for risk (needing to make quick decisions and being able to cut through red tape 'like butter') and also the 'success' they are seeing in remote working with a medium term opportunity to reduce costs through more home working. Any thoughts on this from the panel?**

We are definitely hearing that organisations are seeing the benefits from remote/home working and are looking to retain this capability post-crisis. This may mean that businesses take the opportunity to reflect on and change their operating model going forward to incorporate an increased level of remote working and, as a result, reduce costs in office space for example. However, the changes some businesses have made to accommodate this temporary shift now will not be fit for purpose longer term, so more investment in infrastructure (hardware and software) may be required. On the point about risk appetite, the crisis has certainly challenged all of us to speed up our decision-making processes and governance structures to be agile and responsive. We should try to retain this where we can and challenge ourselves on the need for the level of approval required for key decisions going forward.

- 2. Should we postpone a review of our T.O.M. (Target Operating Model) until later? In some industries don't they need to start that now?**

In our view, you should be looking your business TOM now, depending on your capacity to dedicate the necessary time and attention whilst in crisis-mode. Ask yourselves "what are we learning from this current period and what can we apply longer term to be more efficient and effective moving forward? How are our customers, suppliers and employees responding to the changing ways of working?". Waiting until the recovery is underway will be too late, especially when it comes to making decisions about the critical skills and capabilities you need in your business going forward. By reflecting on the TOM during the crisis and gathering the necessary information to make decisions to change the model, you will be able to effect any change more quickly as the recovery kicks in.

- 3. How can we come up with a quick work from home policy but also provide necessary support to the staff (helpline, devices, etc)?**

Practical guidelines are key. Two key elements to consider are: 1) Line manager guidelines – what are the practical 'guide rails' you need to have in place to manage people when home working, and 2) Employee guidelines – what are the principles you want the workforce to apply when working from home? These need to include reference to flexibility to accommodate their personal circumstances e.g. childcare / home schooling, frequency of engagement and communications channels, a focus on wellbeing and clear guidance on how they can ask questions.

What you don't need is long policy documents. The guidelines can be specific to the Covid-19 crisis as you can build out a more detailed home working policy once you are clear how much you want to retain home working when back to BAU. So just provide clear and simple guidance. A simple one page of A4 on how you, as a business, expect everyone to operate and what they can expect from you as their employer. And a specific set of guidelines for line managers and how you are asking them to connect with their teams more regularly and look out for engagement and wellbeing issues.

**4. For those organisations that aren't being hit as hard as others during this period, how do you balance employee engagement in merit/bonus season vs what is ethically/morally appropriate?**

This is a key decision for the executive team and the HRD will be expected to guide the business on this. Consider the views of your employees, customers and suppliers, plus what your competitors are doing. Employees who have been working hard and potentially putting in extra effort over the crisis are likely to have an expectation of some degree of recognition if the business is performing well. The challenge will also be in striking the right balance between executive pay, employee reward and, where relevant, share dividends. The answer is likely to be industry specific. For example, the supermarkets are no doubt experiencing high demand and revenues. But customers are unlikely to respond well to news of big pay-outs for the senior team if they haven't been able to keep the shelves stocked with the products they want or offer effective home delivery services during the crisis period.

We have also seen the negative market reaction to businesses who are planning to pay executive bonuses and/or dividends for example whilst furloughing staff or making redundancies. The scrutiny on reward will be higher than ever over this period so it will require more careful consideration than normal and the HRD/Reward Lead will be a critical part of this decision-making process.

**5. What are the short versus long term decisions organisations are making regarding benefit policy changes (flex choices, pension contributions, PMI, life benefits)?**

In the short term, benefits such as gym membership are no longer relevant but other benefits become increasingly important such as wellbeing and health insurance. We are seeing more organisations look at their wellbeing packages with sharper focus and making short term changes to improve the relevance to the recipients during the crisis, either by modifying existing benefits or offering new benefits (such as Employee Assistance Programmes). We anticipate that organisations are more likely to move towards flexible benefits to give their employees more choice in selecting what is relevant to them with the flexibility to make changes to their selections as easily as possible.

**6. Are organisations making different choices for LTIP allocation (exec pay decisions versus rest of workforce - base pay and bonus)?**

Answered above – question four.

**7. What is your view / advice on keeping connected and looking after the wellbeing of those who have gone on furlough?**

It is important to keep furloughed employees connected to the organisation. They will want to hear how the business is performing. But the type and frequency of the connection should be determined mostly by the employee. Consider asking which channels they would prefer to be contacted through. Continue to invite them to your business/'all hands' updates and any online social activities you are offering to keep the whole team connected.

Consider offering to continue with their one-to-one line manager meetings but maybe less frequently or for shorter sessions (being careful to ensure these are communications sessions rather than 'work').

As you make decisions on when furloughed employees will return, they want to engage more with the business and their line manager in the few weeks leading up to this. On their return, consider how you communicate their return to the rest of the business and, if needed, offer some form of mini-onboarding process depending on how long they have been on leave.

## 8. Given the people impact, what role do you think the HR function should have in the creation and maintenance of business continuity plans?

Reflecting on the effectiveness of existing business continuity plans will be a key activity as we emerge from the crisis to make it fit for purpose going forward. As the impacts of this crisis have been so focused on people the HR team will have critical role in the review. This cannot really happen until there is sufficient 'headspace' in the business to reflect on the lessons learned from the crisis but is best done when the crisis is still fresh in the mind. Consider capturing learnings each week as a mini-reflection exercise so you do not lose sight of them before consolidating this into a more structured lessons learned exercise post-crisis.

## 9. What lessons are we learning about converting a business to a virtual organisation- what are the short- and long-term consequences likely to be?

As we emerge from lockdown, businesses will need to reflect on the impacts of working remotely/virtually to understand what has worked for them vs what has not. Employees are likely to have appreciated the personal flexibility but at the same time missed the social aspects of being based in their normal place of work. HR teams need to gather this feedback to contribute to any decision on what to retain in any revised operating model for a business.

Employees have the right to request flexible working and, depending on how things have progressed during Covid-19, it may be harder for businesses to say home working is not an option going forward. HR teams also need to gather information on employee productivity and engagement during the crisis for those who have worked virtually to input to the decision-making process. See our above response on remote working for more on this.

## Questions from webinar 2: Supporting and engaging your people during crisis

### 1. We are four weeks into our work from home situation, our engagement has been amazing, and we are starting to see that the 'new norm' is forming. What types of engagement activities are other HR teams getting involved in that we could draw inspiration from?

We have heard of lots of great examples of engagement activities from different businesses and HR teams. Our view is that variety is key, keep trying new things and mix it up as much as possible. Make sure you are asking employees for ideas, consider setting up a new forum just for this or use any existing bodies. Some companies are using their CSR and LGBT groups to come up with suggestions for example.

Don't feel you need to create your own solutions. There are lots of podcasts, webinars, keep fit programmes and cookery sessions (just as examples) that you can share with your employees as ways in which they can keep themselves positive during lockdown in addition to any support you provide in house.

In terms of communications, try to have different people to take the lead on activities and calls to vary the experience and point of view.

Think about collaborative working and getting different teams to work on different initiatives or projects together. It encourages parts of the business who perhaps do not work together as much to start engaging with those just outside of their immediate team.

One other consideration is what to do about any regular employee survey or pulse surveys that you may normally have run at this time. If you would usually run your annual engagement survey over this period, you may not feel it's appropriate, at least in its usual form. Maybe reshape any survey content to be specific to Covid-19 so the data you gather leads to action plans that are relevant in the current crisis.

### 2. Are you seeing organisations with a global base struggling with global versus local principles of how to support employees when local government support varies so much?

Yes, global organisations need to rely on their local HR and business teams to be on top of their relevant government guidelines and schemes. The speed of response required means local teams will need to assess the options, understand the implications, and make local decisions. Most global organisations we talk to are developing a common set of principles to responding to the crisis which local teams can then use as 'guide rails' as they navigate locally. You may want to put in place more agile governance arrangements so the global team can have input to any decisions that vary from the 'guide rails' provided.

### 3. How are other businesses coping with their mental health support and is there any ideas on how to tackle this in our own businesses?

There are several options to consider:

- Investigate the coverage of any existing Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) you already provide – clarify the services they provide and re-communicate these to your workforce
- If you do not have an EAP in place, investigate if this is something you want to implement (you may need to sign up for a minimum period)
- Consider sharing the details of relevant charitable/not for profit organisations that provide support in this area e.g. Mind, Samaritans
- Educate line managers on the symptoms to look out for in their teams and what they should do if they are concerned about an employee's mental health – provide guidelines, communicate policies, supply details of the support available.

### 4. How would you recommend we retain positive engagement with furloughed workers?

It is important to keep furloughed employees connected to the organisation. They will want to hear how the business is performing. But the type and frequency of the connection should be determined mostly by the employee. Consider asking which channels they would prefer to be contacted through. Continue to invite them to your business/'all hands' updates and any online social activities you are offering to keep the whole team connected. Consider offering to continue with their one-to-one line manager meetings but maybe less frequently or for shorter sessions (being careful to ensure these are communications sessions rather than 'work').

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A similar variation of this question was asked on webinar one. See questions seven for the response from the first webinar.

## Questions from webinar 3: Creating the 'new normal'

### 1. As we transition back to business as usual (BAU) how can we ensure that we maintain the positive qualities people have developed during this time, such as better resilience and working with uncertainty, so that becomes part of the companies culture?

It will be important to understand what worked well, what managers did well, how front-line staff responded etc – there will need to be a systematic way of gathering this feedback either through surveys or line managers or focus groups for example. As part of the 'lessons learned' session we have recommended, it may be appropriate to review your organisation's values and behaviours to see if they reflect the positives demonstrated during the crisis and whether they need to be amended going forward. Employee and line manager input to this process will be critical.

### 2. There are several steps that you mentioned we need to take as a business when we are looking at getting back to normality. Could you briefly outline these?

During the webinar we spoke specifically about cyclical HR activities and how these may be impacted by a period of time when people weren't working e.g. on furlough leave or have been working from home

which may mean their outputs are less visible. Consider the fairest way to navigate this and what line managers will need to know:

- Performance management and talent management, particularly mid-year performance/talent reviews – What performance information do you have? How visible are your people's outputs? How do you treat employees who have been on furlough leave? How do you review the performance of people who have been on furlough?
- Pay and bonus reviews – if there is a mid-year review you will need to consider how to treat the period during lockdown as per performance reviews. At the end of the year, it will be important to provide guidance on how pay and bonus decisions should be made to ensure those who were home working or on furlough aren't disadvantaged whilst employees who were required to come into the office/workplace during the crisis are suitably recognised. How do you handle commission when some teams are furloughed?
- Engagement survey – when will the next one be run?

Also consider whether anyone who has been on furlough for a longer period may need onboarding support to refresh skills and capabilities and get them back into full productivity as soon as possible.

One element that will need careful consideration is holiday. Most people have not been taking holidays and there is likely to be a sudden demand for time off as we all emerge from lockdown. Giving some practical guidance on holiday approval considerations specific to this period will be important to ensure the business is not exposed operationally just as it is getting back up to speed. But at the same time, it has been an intense few months and employees will need a break to recharge so balancing that demand with the needs of the business to generate revenue to make up for any shortfall will be a challenge. And line managers will need to know how to handle the surge of holiday requests they are likely to receive!

### **3. I am interested to hear how companies in 'at risk' industries can hold onto their top talent if they cannot afford bonuses/LTIP/material reward in 2020. Could you provide some advice?**

The answer is likely to be industry specific and it will also depend on what your competition is doing so market data will be important. Employees who have been working hard and potentially putting in extra effort over the crisis are likely to have an expectation of some degree of recognition. But they will also understand that this is directly dependent on how the business (and the industry) is performing. Clarity and honesty from leadership is key, as well as ensuring reward principles are consistent at every level including the Executive teams.

### **4. Managers will have a lot on their plates to get their businesses up and running/increasing productivity when this is over. How do we ensure they don't forget the important people processes i.e. performance and talent management - it could easily be forgotten or de-prioritised?**

Perhaps there should be an acknowledgement that line managers will be 'up against it' as we see the recovery take hold and that therefore the normal approach to cyclical processes like performance and talent may need to be tailored to recognise they may have less time, or deferred by a few months depending on when the recovery happens. That does not mean the processes are less important but taking a 'lighter touch' approach could be beneficial.

At the same time, as stated in the above question from webinar two (question number four from webinar two – in this document), it may be necessary to modify the processes anyway to account for the fact that a large portion of the workforce may have been furloughed or working from home.

It is about being practical and empathetic to your line manager population whilst continuing the emphasise the importance of effective people management.