

COVID has
changed the
hiring landscape,
but how have HR
adapted?

LEADERSHIP INSIGHT FROM





HR

*Leaders
have
navigated
warp
speed
changes
like never
before*

A raft of rapid changes for HR leaders

The financial crisis of 2008 defined Finance Directors and Finance Managers as heroes for guiding businesses through this period of hostility.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has had several different and monumental challenges, many of which have put HR leaders firmly in the spotlight.

Almost over-night, organisations had to adapt their people strategy whilst focusing on business survival. This saw HR leaders being thrust into the helm; having to quickly pivot their workforce to be able to work productively from home, manage new safety requirements, manage virtual lay offs and implement furlough schemes, retain a focus on employee motivation and mental health with also an increasing focus on timely communications to employees about these rapid changes. Despite this lengthy 'crisis management' list, many were conscious that maintaining an eye on business continuity was also critical, and hiring practices have undoubtedly been massively impacted, both from a strategic perspective but also from a practical perspective.

The Impact of Covid-19

CSG Talent explore the impact on hiring practices across different organisations and the challenges HR Leaders and Hiring Managers have faced over the recent months.

Utilising case studies from a small number of leading organisations across different industries to provide a snap shot, we look at some of the immediate impacts

on hiring requirements and other adaptations these particular organisations have faced, from the impact on hiring, interviewing and on-boarding to the impact on people policies and internal communications.

We highlight some of the changes these industry leaders have had to make to combat these challenges, the changes that are likely to have a long lasting legacy and highlighting best practices that HR leaders need to consider as their people and talent strategy continues to evolve rapidly.

CONTRIBUTING LEADERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT



Laila King

Senior Talent Acquisition Manager

Founded in 2011, Personalis, Inc. is a growing cancer genomics company, providing advanced genomic sequencing and analytics solutions to support the development of personalized cancer vaccines and other next-generation cancer immunotherapies.

With over 200 employees, Personalis is headquartered in Menlo Park, California, USA.



Tanya Meah

People Director

Ground Control is a rapidly growing external maintenance company, providing Grounds Maintenance, Landscape Construction, Design, Arboriculture and Winter Maintenance to commercial properties across the UK. In 2019 Ground Control was awarded The Sunday Times Top Track 250 for leading mid-market private growth companies.

Initially established in 1973, Ground Control's headquarters are in Essex, UK.



Katie Castleton

Recruitment, Training & Development Officer

Anglo American are a leading global mining company. They use innovative practices and the latest technologies to mine, process, move and market metals and minerals products and to discover new resources which are the essential ingredients in almost every aspect of modern life. With headquarters in the UK, they have projects and operations globally and over 90,000 employees.



Derek Carter

HR Director, Head of Talent Management

Strong Roots produce innovative plant-based food, with a commitment to revolutionizing frozen food. Their range offers consumers convenient, vegan, healthy meals for home cooking. Originally established in Ireland, the fast-growing company now has offices across Ireland, UK and USA.

A photograph of a wooden desk in an office setting. On the desk, there is a silver desk lamp on the left, a black office chair in the background, a white mug, a silver laptop with the Apple logo, a pen holder with several pens, and a notebook with a pen. The background is a plain grey wall.

The impact on hiring

63%
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As economic uncertainty and budget constraints continues to impact many organisations, senior leaders are unsurprisingly reassessing their hiring plans. **Fifty-four** percent of organizations have delayed candidates' start dates and **31%** have cancelled internship programs, according to Gartner research. In addition, **63%** of recruiting leaders report that more than half of their job openings are currently frozen.

With the news headlines and employment statistics globally painting a fairly grim picture on a daily basis, it is clear the impact of Covid-19 is going to be making it's mark on the hiring market for some time yet. However, some industries, clearly have been impacted more than others, and there are many organisations operating in industries less severely impacted by the pandemic who are in the fortunate position to continue with their hiring plans.

CSG Talent have spoken to several such organisations who have been able to continue hiring in some form or other to understand how these particular organisations have been affected.

LEADERSHIP QUESTION



Q: How have your hiring requirements been affected in the recent months?



Laila King Personalis

A: We are actually continuing to recruit and hire at the same level, or in fact at a growing level. Indeed we have had to hire another recruiter due to the growth we have seen. The sector we operate in; geonomics has been less affected by the pandemic and additionally, we went public last year so investment in the company has helped drive growth.



Katie Castleton Anglo American

A: We were recruiting a number of priority hires that were all still able to go ahead.



Derek Carter Strong Roots

A: Fortunately we have had an up tick in demand, and we received funding last year, so we have needed, and been able to, continue with hiring the roles that are important for our day to day operational and longer-term strategic efforts. But this doesn't mean we don't have to be cautious and really look before we leap and spend our money wisely.

We've had 8 campaigns overlapping, or happening purely during lock down, 7 of which are now filled. We do feel fortunate; consumer behaviour is changing, with consumers more focused on healthy food and storing food and online sales have increased. All of which is currently positively affecting sales for Strong Roots.



Tanya Meah Ground Control

A: In some areas of the businesses, we've placed a hold on recruitment, whereas in other areas of the business it is full steam ahead. This is very dependent on the types of roles and the different sectors they operate in, for example there has been a drop off in grounds maintenance with the hospitality sector.

42 people have been recruited since mid-April over the last 3 months, which is only a little bit behind what would usually be recruited and there are still a relatively high number of live vacancies.

Has COVID-19 impacted your career priorities?

47%

of candidates feel that COVID-19 has made them **reconsider their career path**

Not at all	26%
Choose employer over promotion	12%
I would like more flexibility	15%
Reconsidering my career path	47%

CSG Talent LinkedIn Survey. 573 votes. May 2020

Despite government interventions in many economies, there are still millions out of work and a widening candidate pool as a result. LinkedIn have reported their number of views per job has almost doubled since March.

Equally, the imposed lock downs present in so many countries globally has given many individuals time to reflect, space away from their workplace and as result, a number may be considering a career move, as CSG's recent poll indicates. But are those organisations that are continuing to hire seeing the impact from this increased candidate pool?

LEADERSHIP QUESTION



Q: Are you seeing the impact of a widening candidate pool?



Tanya Meah Ground Control

A: Pre-covid there were shortages of candidates, with more roles than candidates, however the market has now been changed on it's head!

The availability of candidates has also changed – they are now much easier to get hold of and interview.

Certainly one positive we have taken from the pandemic is that always looking internally first has been triggered by the situation. We now have a greater focus on promoting and finding from within the company in the first instance.



Derek Carter Strong Roots

A: We have found the number of applicants has increased generally. One interesting case is our new Sales Director role in USA. We had **over 500 applicants** through LinkedIn and I don't care how big your team is, no one can efficiently and effectively screen 500 applicant CVs. That's a big haystack and we're looking for a very special needle!

So, I communicated with them all and told them we needed to do something different. **Hence a survey they needed to complete and a short video application.** Within 36 hours we had 46 survey responses and 15 videos (the rest will follow with their videos before the deadline). So far, it's giving us a really rich insight to them, as well as it being more interesting for the applicant, and giving them a hint of the personality of the company. **We'll likely emulate this in future campaigns.**



Laila King Personalis

A: Whilst a move to remote working for some of our roles has widened our talent pool, we are still seeing there is a skill shortages for qualified candidates so for us, it is still a very competitive market place. In fact, we are finding that passive candidates are now harder to attract – we are finding many of them are reluctant to move on in these uncertain times. There is a general sense they want to stay put until they feel comfortable as they value their perceived stable position.



The impact on interviewing practices and onboarding

Hiring Managers has COVID-19 impacted your HR and Hiring processes? If so, what has seen the biggest changes?

41%

of hiring managers feel that the **interview process** has seen the biggest changes as a result of COVID-19

The interview process	41%
Candidate onboarding	24%
The hiring process	19%
People policies and benefits	15%

CSG Talent LinkedIn Survey. 147 votes. May 2020

Those organisations that have taken steps to hire have seen some very clear changes within their hiring practices. CSG conducted a poll to understand where the greatest impact has been and the candidate assessment / interviewing process has seen the biggest changes.

Virtual interviews became commonplace overnight and with everyone quickly adapting to new technologies; Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google hangouts in their daily lives to maintain contact with family and friends, the apparent ease of switching to virtual interviews was unsurprising.

A Gartner HR Survey of 334 HR leaders on April 13 shows that 86% of organisation are now conducting virtual interviews.

We asked how the interviewing process has had to evolve and whether these changes will leave a lasting legacy.

LEADERSHIP QUESTION



Q: How did you adapt your interview practices?

Tanya Meah Ground Control

A: Previously, all interviews were face to face. Time would be spent in HQ and there would be experience days in the field.

However, all interviews are now virtual, including competency behavioural interviews. This approach has been extremely positively received – there is a super quick turnaround with leaders availability made easier. There are no meetings to organise, no travel and candidates are taken through the journey quicker.

‘Experience days’ are now also virtual, lots of activities are organised through Zoom, covering different aspects of the job. Those colleagues

working in the field still have to do this in the field but with social distancing in place.

It is likely we will keep virtual interviews in the future. The face to face meetings will then be more about; who we are, an opportunity to meet the team and your manager and ensuring a connection with those people.

In relation to candidates, one thing we are finding is that there is now also more of a focus on the emotional side of things. Candidates are needing more support and assistance going through the candidate journey as many have lost jobs and confidence is rock bottom. They may need more hand holding to achieve positive outcomes. It’s important not to write these candidates off!



Laila King Personalis

A: All interviews are now done through video conference calls using either Zoom or Google hangouts.

Some candidates do well on video interviews, others not so well. Some have never done a video conference call so there is a need to do a trial run so they know what to expect. We have a coordinator who will always welcome candidates - they check in on the candidates and resolve any technical issues.

It is important that both Hiring Managers and interviewees know what to expect – it’s important to manage this and the aim is still to deliver the best candidate experience.

There are many benefits to operating in this way; there is increased flexibility in scheduling interviews and we can operate at a greater speed. There is a clear benefit to candidates in no longer having to commute to interview either.





Derek Carter Strong Roots

A: Our previous approach would have involved a face to face first round interview.

Occasionally, where it's across borders, this would be done on video call with me, but at some point they would certainly meet someone, e.g. the hiring manager, or Sam our CEO, face to face. For very senior hires, it was important for Sam to spend time with them to have a longer, more in-depth conversation, so this is obviously hard too.

However the move to online is a change that everyone is happy to accept and is understanding of. It can be just as effective if it is approached in the right way and you know what you are going to get out of it. Let's face it; face to face interviewing is a big demand on everyone, including the applicant.

The negatives are that there are no tours of the offices for people to get a feel for the company, you can't build rapport or put people at ease quite so easily and you can't necessarily read behaviours and responses in quite the same way, something which forms a big part of a recruiter's skillset usually. However, we now use a couple of emotional intelligence assessments for senior hires, this helps to close the gap of not being able to get to see them in person and read their behaviours.

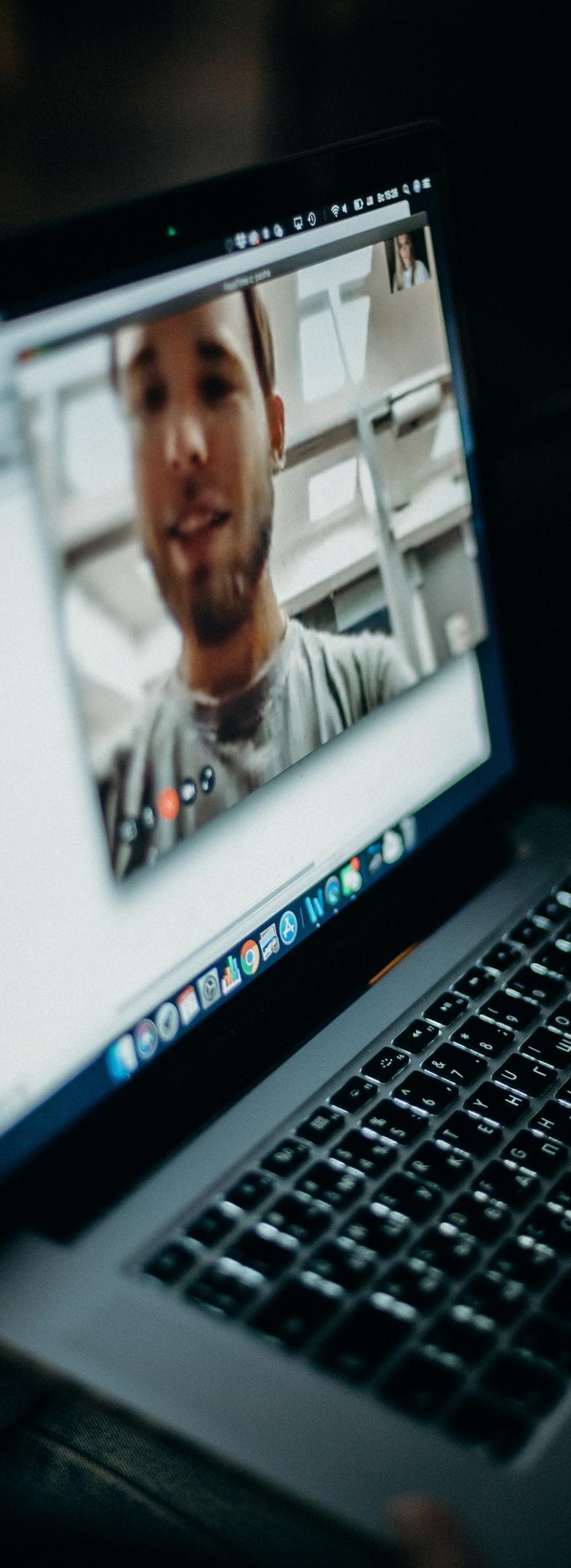
Recruiters, and companies, will also be dealing with, in some cases, candidates that have been unemployed, or had significant personal challenges, or loss. The best recruiters will not be tone deaf in their communications and will assess and shortlist with this in mind. It's important to picture them as a human first and a candidate second.



Katie Castleton Anglo American

A: All first and second round interviews have been virtual, where previously we would have had all face to face for those within a commutable distance.

We have then only offered a site visit, with restrictions and following the government guidance to the final candidate, before an offer is made.



This new way of interviewing will clearly mark a seismic shift in the way companies operate going forward; the obvious time and cost efficiencies for both candidate and employer will mean that we anticipate seeing at least first round interviews continuing to be conducted in this manner for many organisations as standard.

However, there is a need to look at the whole candidate experience and really assess if this new approach is still delivering what it should throughout the candidate journey. Beyond this, there needs to be an increased sensitivity in this difficult economic climate, to ensure candidates don't feel overwhelmed by a competitive market and they may need that extra level of support dependent on the recent circumstances they may have faced.

As Gartner highlights; "The most successful organisations provide candidates with the same level of information and feeling of connection with the organisation as they would have with an in-person interview or onboarding experience."

Equally, with a large proportion of the workforce now working remotely, candidate onboarding HR teams have been tasked with a quick change, with virtual communications again taking centre stage; with virtual inductions, training and team meetings being conducted via various collaboration technologies.



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LEADERSHIP QUESTION



Q: How have you adapted your onboarding practices?



Derek Carter Strong Roots

A: We send laptops to people's homes and ensure they are set up right to enable them to work at home safely but our approach now is online and more "just in time" than "just in case" so as not to overwhelm people.

Previously, the first day would have been spent meeting Heads of Departments face to face, tasting products, having a tour of the building and attending a number of meetings. Currently, it is a "just in time approach" with lots of Teams calls; the first couple of hours is spent with HR, then the hiring manager drip feeds introductions as needed.

However, building relationships is obviously more of a challenge now. New starters are missing the excitement and buzz of joining a collective of people. They have effectively been 'robbed' of the usual experience so it's something we are very conscious of and trying to overcome through 'All hands' virtual meetings, regular team quizzes etc.



Katie Castleton Anglo American

A: HR inductions are all now conducted remotely using Microsoft Teams and other virtual communications.



Tanya Meah Ground Control

A: We had just 4 days to turnaround our altered onboarding approach including a Virtual induction day and robust orientation plans. We take pride in our world class inductions so this was a high priority for us.

Each new colleague has a detailed orientation plan for the first month in which we have incorporated 'meet & greets' both virtually and in person where appropriate and according to government guidelines.

We have been overwhelmed by the extremely positive feedback we have received from the new employees who have gone through this new on-boarding experience.



Laila King Personalis

A: All of our onboarding is now done virtually through our internal system and online meetings are set up with HR and IT.

All the computer equipment is shipped out. The Hiring Manager then sets the plan for the day and training.

The impact on people policies and internal communications

Whilst immediate changes have had to be adopted to interviewing and on-boarding, many organisations have also had to make rapid changes in order to mobilise entire workforces to work effectively and productively from home, whilst trying to balance employee's mental health, and enhancing and adapting company wide communications.

With the drastic impact lock down has had, this now shines a light on employees' individual circumstances and how greater flexibility is clearly going to become even more of a necessity; effectively fast-tracking a new hybrid approach of working.

This move to remote working also has implications in terms of opening up the talent pool for organisations if they are prepared to keep this approach for the longer term. We asked our clients how they have adapted and what they believe will be around for the longer term.

What do you find is the most positive thing about working from home?

51%

of candidates voted for not having to commute

Not having to commute	51%
More time with loved ones	26%
No office distractions	15%
Home environment	8%

CSG Talent poll completed 300 votes May 2020



Q: How have you adapted your people policies and your benefits?

Laila King Personalis

A: Our CEO previously wanted people working in the office. However, traffic is a big hurdle in California and takes up a lot of people's energy and time so the sudden and drastic shift to remote working has definitely had its positives. **The CEO's vision has shifted and he can really see the benefits of working from home.** We are likely to see this continue.

Obviously certain colleagues do still need to be in the office / laboratory, so we are focused on making it safe for them to do so.

It has widened the talent pool for us (apart from laboratory based roles remain local), for example 3 of our recent hires have been made in the middle of the country.

Our Exec team have emphasised the importance of giving people whatever they need in their home office to enable them to work effectively – **employees have been offered \$500 to buy anything for their home office to make life easier.**

We've had a real focus on doing what we can to support employees to remain productive – it's important to focus on employees' individual circumstances to meet their needs. For example, in certain cases we have supported employees financially to help put childcare into place. Equally, many colleagues are unable to take vacations right now, so the company has offered to 'buy' holiday leave back.



Tanya Meah Ground Control

A: We've obviously had to adapt to include an increased amount of remote working and we anticipate there will be a greater move towards flexibility in the future. We actually surveyed colleagues about how much time they believe they need to spend in the office and we are also surveying operational leaders on the impact working at home has had in order to determine how we approach this in the future.

This possibility of remote working opens up a whole new talent pool for us including working parents so it completely changes the potential talent we can access. Previously there was a geographical map of where we could recruit from.

I anticipate and hope we see improvements in Equality, Diversity & Inclusion as a result of this - a significant plus of having greater flexibility. Quite frankly, it is vital that we start to see this happen across organisations and industries.





Tanya Meah
Ground Control



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Derek Carter Strong Roots

A: Luckily, we had a head-start on working from home. We've made the effort, while staying focused on output rather than which hours are being worked, to balance hands-off empowerment with arm-around supportiveness. Some of our folks with families and kids have had to flex to more piece-meal hours throughout the day and week but have appreciated the flexibility to do this. However, it can be hard for employees to switch off so we needed to make sure people were looking after themselves – we have a duty of care, so ensuring people have the right equipment (laptop stands etc), simple things like reminding them to move and prompting them to take annual leave.

Summer Hours also made a difference – again, something we had since last summer anyway, where it was a paid half day on Friday for June, July and August. Some of this will definitely stick

around - we have had the ability for colleagues to work from home 1 day a week since last year anyway and will likely increase this by Q4 this year but we will take a scientific approach to this. **We'll be phasing back into our offices when we're given Government clearance to do so and we've run a survey to gather people's preferences and fears but retaining our culture is still very important for us so the office environment will still remain important.**

One thing that is important is that the most interesting learnings will come 6 to 12 months from now and we should be ready to examine ourselves and our approaches to talent selection. For example, if companies increase their appetite for remote working, then they are able to cast a wider net and increase the diversity of their workforce – whether around location, disability, or family situation.



Katie Castleton Anglo American

A: The business is being as flexible as possible with its workforce, facilitating and encouraging home working wherever possible, according to the needs of individual employees and their families.

Strict health guidelines are in place for those employees who cannot work from home, and all sites are operating with enhanced safety measures, such as increased hygiene, social distancing and temperature checks.

We have also reviewed our well-being offering and now have a more rounded package of support in place.



Q: How have your internal communications had to adapt as a result?



Tanya Meah Ground Control

A: Our internal communications have been enhanced significantly over the past few months!

We now have a company wide weekly update which is posted on YouTube, a weekly Zoom call with the SLT, a 'Going Viral' Weekly newsletter which is focused on employees well-being, daily communications from the MD and regular touch point surveys to check in with employees.

It is important that we include everyone in these communications – even those without emails, for example, we will send those colleagues text messages and direct them to hidden pages on the website so they can view all of our internal communications. We also continued to run our Annual Employee engagement survey and we received extremely positive results on the back of these internal initiatives, in fact the best results since the survey launched in 2014! We also went through an Investors in People assessment right in the middle of lock down and were delighted to achieve a Gold.



Laila King Personalis

A: With an increase in remote working it is easy for people to feel isolated and not part of the team. However, we have been conscious of this and tried to rectify this with daily / weekly catch ups or 'stand ups' via Zoom.

Our CEO also started running a virtual 'all hands' meeting on a Friday every week to ensure people aren't working in silos. He takes this time to introduce new hires and questions can be sent ahead of time for him to address. His focus has been to put employees at ease during these uncertain times and announcing things like new employees is definitely helping. I anticipate this is something we will continue with in the future even if we may reduce the frequency of it.



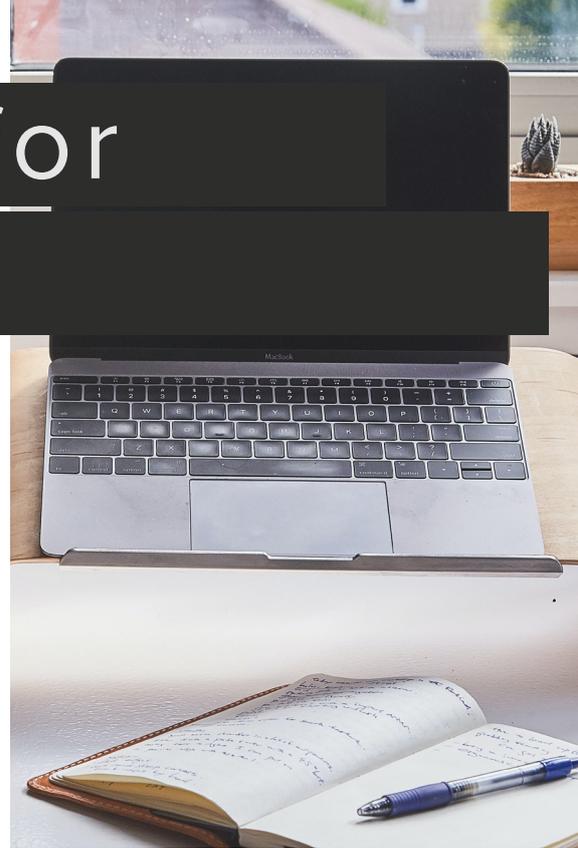
Derek Carter Strong Roots

A: We have had an increased focus on communications. Everyone has looked to the whole HR family to create new information and communications in relation to Covid-19 itself and our response to it (which has been difficult given the different situations, stages and requirements of our 3 office locations), but aside from this **it's mainly been a matter of getting the right communications out to people at the right time.**

We've encouraged and adopted daily and weekly practices with line managers checking in on their colleagues; Teams calls, a UK weekly quiz, our company-wide Zoom update, recipe sharing, circulation of relevant articles and our Deepak Chopra mindfulness programme. We've really encouraged everyone to maintain contact and communications. **We've continued to recognise milestone birthdays and have even sent surprise door step deliveries of healthy snack packs to colleagues.**

An opportunity for positive change

The sudden move to remote working is what is likely to leave the most fundamental and lasting change on the hiring landscape. HR Leaders, whilst sounding a note of caution of the importance of retaining internal relationships, company culture and an enhanced focus on internal communications, are also focused on the opportunities an increased amount of remote working presents in the future; from an employee well-being perspective but also potentially from a Diversity & Inclusion perspective and the ability to attract a wider and more diverse talent pool.



Without doubt 2020 has been a year like no other, change has never had to be implemented so quickly and rapidly across society. Whilst it is easy to focus on the negatives and challenges in the current climate, in even the most testing circumstances, positives often emerge.

What we have highlighted through providing just a small snapshot of how some organisations have responded is an insight into not only the impact COVID 19 has had on some HR leaders but also what changes we might expect to see in the future.

The roller-coaster ride of the recent months has put HR practitioners firmly in the spotlight, and it ultimately represents a big opportunity for these HR practitioners to claim their place at

the table. What will be important is how they reflect on the recent changes, how they assess and report on them and then the action that is taken as a result.

- How much time has been saved by conducting online interviews?
- How much shorter is the campaign duration?
- How have costs reduced?
- How has efficiency been maintained?

Keeping an eye on the future and demonstrating the business impact of amendments to processes is what will really carve the way forwards for HR leaders.



Derek Carter
Strong Roots



It's natural with all the changes going on that people have turned to the entire HR family for help and for answers... So we need to make sure we don't squander the opportunity to really have an impact and prove our worth.



THE GLOBAL TALENT EXPERTS

LEADERSHIP INSIGHT FROM THE
GLOBAL TALENT EXPERTS