



Managing through crisis and
preparing for the post-outbreak era

A LEADER'S PLAYBOOK
FOR A YEAR OF TWO HALVES

A man wearing a bright yellow raincoat stands on a dark, pebbly beach. In the background, a large, dark-colored umbrella is open, and the ocean waves are visible under a grey, overcast sky. The image is framed by a white border that is slightly tilted.

Although the two halves of 2020 will look very different, it is impossible to do well in any cycle without thinking about and planning for the next one.

A year of two halves

Without question, 2020 will test not only the leadership acumen of senior management, but also the ability of organisations to operate in the face of extreme ambiguity

Starting as a localised issue, the coronavirus (COVID-19) has now reached most nations, impacting organisations across the globe – with dire consequences.

Already, thousands of people have died, hundreds of thousands have become ill and health services have been stressed way beyond their capacity. For most, the pandemic – and response to it – will be the most significant, and most concerning, event they have experienced. It has cost organisations billions of dollars in lost revenue (potentially up to \$1.1 trillion by the end of 2020¹). It is clear it will result in a significant drop in economic growth around the world.

At this stage of the COVID-19 outbreak, organisations need to deal with two equally important factors – keeping employees and their families safe, and ensuring business continuity as much as possible. Leaders are scrambling to secure supplies, keep fearful employees motivated to work, and planning for the future while dealing with the here and now.

But eventually, like other Black Swan events, the virus will end. And when it does, organisations need to be ready.

In today's turbulent world, some organisations have become better at planning for and mitigating against risk in the face of a crisis. They have resiliency built into their structure. But for many others, this could be a time of confusion, fear, and rash decision-making.

Unfortunately, in our increasingly ambiguous, volatile and inter-connected world, unanticipated events like this are likely to happen more frequently – and leaders will need to be more agile, transparent, and forward thinking.

These attributes will be key to navigating 2020, which is likely to be a year of two halves.

The first will be spent dealing with safety, containment, continuity, and contingency planning – a time for prudent, agile leadership. For those that can keep productivity high, and employees engaged and motivated during this first half, the next phase will be centred around taking advantage of the pent-up demand in the global economy through incentives, recruitment, and innovation.

¹ Oxford Economics Latest Global Outlook - March/April 2020 oxfordeconomics.com/

Although the two halves of 2020 will look very different, it is impossible to do well in any cycle without thinking about and planning for the next one.

For organisations to respond now and plan for recovery, they must learn to operate in a state of constant disruption. In a time of unknowns, one thing is certain: what has worked in the past is unlikely to keep working in the future. New habits are forming quickly – people are working from home and consuming products and entertainment in very different ways out of necessity.

Building a culture that not only tolerates this shift but thrives in it will separate the winners from the losers.

This may mean thinking differently about performance and target setting, to keep teams motivated and ensure everyone works collectively for a shared purpose – even when working remotely. It will certainly demand a proactive and empathetic communication response from leaders, who will need to consciously demonstrate the values and behaviours they wish to encourage across the organisation.

But it should not necessarily mean putting recruitment and retention plans on hold. In challenging times, the quality of your talent can be the ultimate advantage. Retaining your top people has never been more important, and future recruitment strategy will be done through the lens of recovering and resetting after the crisis.

Ultimately, leaders will need to adapt quickly to changing circumstances – shifting from a measured, inclusive approach today to setting the pace in the second half and making up for lost time.

In this playbook, Korn Ferry experts share their insights on how to do just that, guiding you through key considerations for talent management and operational performance through both halves of the year.



Michael Distefano,
President, Korn Ferry Asia Pacific

**Join Mike's webinar on 2 April
as he discusses the crisis
response with the Korn Ferry
experts** **[REGISTER HERE](#)**



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Chapter 1

Leadership: now is the time for adaptive leaders

In times of crisis, people depend on leaders to provide clarity and hope. Fear can be contagious, breeding irrational behaviour and anxiety – and in business, this can lead to lower productivity and employee engagement.

While no one can be certain how the impact of this virus will continue to unfold globally, one thing is known: we will experience another business crisis again in the future. Leaders who can use this disruptive period as a time for self-reflection and an opportunity to re-frame their mindset are likely to be better prepared when the next crisis comes along.

“This may be an opportunity to test what Korn Ferry has identified as a new model of leadership, the capacity to ADAPT,” suggests Charles Shao, a Korn Ferry Senior Client Partner located in Beijing. (More on the ADAPT model at: www.kornferry.com/self-disrupt)

This is the time for agile leaders who can anticipate change – such as the necessity of working remotely – and turn it into a positive new way of working. They can also drive a sense of collective purpose and optimism, accelerate innovation and test new ideas, partner with others, and build trust.

So how can you keep responding to such volatile market demands, find new ways to create and act on opportunities, and keep your teams aligned to a common purpose?

Tim Wiseman, an Associate Client Partner based in Hong Kong, says now is the time for an ‘expansion mentality’. “Don’t retract. Many healthy organisations are taking this time to set themselves up for a big move.” He gives the example of a hotel that is taking the opportunity to carry out a remodel it was planning for next year while some floors are unoccupied.

In another example, a global consumer product brand has ramped up its digital outreach while foot traffic to physical stores remains low. By doubling their digital efforts, they are taking this opportunity to get closer to the customer and build a strong sense of community around their product, which in turn anticipates a significant shift in the way their products will go to market in the future.

Adaptive leaders can anticipate opportunities like this, while also using strong communication to build trust and engagement within their teams. This will set their organisations up to thrive through recovery.

As an investor, Warren Buffet is known to use down cycles as opportunities to grow. Leaders can use the same mindset within their organisations with the following five principles in mind.

Over-communicate to overcome uncertainty

People need reassurance that there is a plan and a path forward, so now is the time for what Tim Wiseman describes as 'exhaustive evangelising'.

If town halls and coffee chats are impossible while teams work remotely, build communication channels via WeChat and WhatsApp groups or run video seminars. CEOs can share daily 90-second video updates to keep everyone aligned and build a sense of community around new tactics and plans. This gives everyone a common language to take to clients and partners.

It's even more important to stay connected with your team at this time, and create routine ways for people to work together so they feel like they're fully supported as part of a team.



Leadership in times of high uncertainty

BE

Calm

Control your emotions. Stress and negativity can be contagious, and can shut down your neocortex – and with it, your ability to reason and problem-solve.

Confident & positive

You are highly skilled; no one understands your business and context better. Your instincts are often the best judgement.

Courageous

Be willing to launch without guarantee of success. Endure – as a leader you have to hold steady, persevere, and persist.

Empathetic

Show people you care and understand their situation. Know where your people are in the grief curve.

Resilient

Be an energy bringer. Practice ‘Creative Abandonment’, ignore what drains your time and resources and concentrate on the must wins.

Be authentic and humble

Leaders are now living with uncertainty and ambiguity, and it's acceptable to say you don't know all the answers. Listen to employee concerns, and acknowledge there are sometimes no easy solutions.

If you don't have the answer, bring your team together to discuss and experiment with solutions – focus on testing new things quickly. Being transparent and open in this way may feel uncomfortable, but it can go a long way to building credibility and trust – with staff, customers, shareholders, and the wider community.

Make hard decisions once

Some leaders will need to make difficult decisions in the interest of long-term business continuity – such as reducing labour costs through staff lay-offs or forced leave. Tim Wiseman recommends being really clear and upfront about your plan, or it could be toxic to morale.

“If you know there will be headcount reduction, or you need to close down a loss-making project or pull back from a market, be compassionate and clear – don't mislead or give mixed messages,” he says. “And if you have to do this, do it once and then move forward.”

Look after your ecosystem

Leaders may need to prioritise where their energy goes – and your best talent and clients should top the list. For example, when Chinese firm provided face masks, which were already scarce, to clients very early in the outbreak, it sent a strong signal that it wanted to keep them safe.

Similarly, it's a common mistake to neglect development of high performers during economic tension – especially when you are relying on them more than ever. When the market recovers, they are likely to jump to new opportunities first. Give them the recognition they need to feel valued right now, in addition to opportunities for personal and professional development. This is one of the highest drivers of employee engagement.

Leadership in times of high uncertainty

DO

Express a vision

It is everyone's 'north star'. It guides and motivates and you cannot 'over do' it.

Communicate a lot, authentically

The only thing faster than the speed of light are rumors. Tell the real and informed story of what's happening.

Act!

In difficulty always default to a bias to action: Decide - Accept - Feedback - Self correct.

Seek clarity

Face the world as it is and not how you wish it to be, even on unpopular topics and thorny issues.

Keep it simple and purposeful

Remind people what's really important - common goals, clearly understood. Practice ruthless prioritisation on your main goal.

Take care of yourself

Although it seems the weight of the world is on your shoulders, you still need to take time for yourself – to sleep, to exercise, to spend time with family. Only then can you be available for your team – because working intensely under pressure for months on end is not sustainable.

This includes taking time to build emotional intelligence. “The four domains of Emotional Intelligence (EI) – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management – can help a leader face any crisis with lower levels of stress, less emotional reactivity and fewer unintended consequences,” says global EI expert Daniel Goleman on how leaders can cope through trying times.²

One impact of the virus is likely to be permanent change to the way organisations work. This is your opportunity to learn how to work in a more agile way, including virtual working and rapid prototyping.

This is a critical moment to develop the leadership capabilities you will need for a very different future. Are you ready for the challenge?

²[Emotional Intelligence Skills for Handling Crisis, Korn Ferry](#)



Chapter 2

Culture: making the case for change

Sometimes it takes a crisis to force change upon us and make us re-think our assumptions. The current pandemic is a true test of any organisation's culture – how well its people and systems can operate under unanticipated pressure.

A global Korn Ferry study³ identified that 'driving culture change' ranks in the top three global leadership development priorities – and that disruptive change can be a catalyst for a shift in culture.

Sharad Vishvanath, Korn Ferry's APAC Regional Culture Expert based in New Delhi, believes this current crisis is certainly an opportunity to embrace that challenge.

"Many organisations already recognise that what got them to this point will not get them to the next," he notes. "And a left field event like this will result in people asking, 'what can we do better?' The way they work, their organisation's DNA, is the only way to solve such major challenges – on the supply chain, on customer demand, on employee safety."

An organisation's culture is shaped by its collective values, beliefs and behaviours – and in turn, it determines how people perform. If a large proportion of people adopt new

behaviours, processes & systems consistent with a shift in strategic direction, the culture will start to change. But it needs to begin at the top: when leaders change their behaviours, teams will follow.

There are two elements to culture

- 1. Your organisation** – all your processes, protocols and systems
- 2. Your people** - behaviours, motives and values, how they build and manage relationships

These two elements need to align with the organisation's purpose and create a shared understanding of what 'high performance' or 'customer focus' or 'nimble & innovative' means.

Here are four things leaders can do now to shift culture, so they can be ready to manage the next period of growth – and be more resilient in the face of the next crisis.

Recognise your weak points

Start by considering your organisation's Achilles heel. Is it agile enough to provide freedom within broad guide rails? Does it have the tenacity to get through tough decisions?

You need agility in both your organisational structures and your people. It's not enough to simply assess talent (or new hires) for their agile capabilities because they will become frustrated by processes that hold them back.

This may require a governance review to enable faster decision making, or new workforce models such as temporary 'gig economy' contracts to allow the business to scale up and down more flexibly.

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Build capabilities quickly

Strong organisational cultures typically have a clear focus on people – clients and teams – rather than products and tasks. This crisis might be a good time to take a hard look at talent, and work out what people need to adjust quickly to the new behaviours required.

But it's important to use data, not instinct, to make these assessments. Ring fence your top talent, and make sure you have the right leaders in place to drive engagement and work with agility.

“We're helping clients carry out assessments right now – and also conducting training virtually or in person on coaching skills, collaboration and thinking outside the box,” notes Sharad Vishvanath.

Set up centres of excellence to manage the 'new normal'

We may also see fundamental changes in workplace habits as a result of enforced behaviour changes. By embracing more flexible work arrangements, many employees may find new ways of working that are more productive.

Unnecessary meetings and 'zombie routines' could become a thing of the past.

Managers may finally recognise they don't need to physically monitor individual performance – they can trust their teams to work with autonomy. Leadership structures may pivot from command and control environments, to collaborative ecosystems of talented people who can solve complex problems.

These simple things can have a significant impact on workplace culture. They are tangible ways to build a sense of individual empowerment.

However, you will still need a centre of excellence framework to set broad guide rails. People need boundaries – such as how you innovate or fund R&D, or how you use the lens of the customer to allocate resources or segment opportunities.

Culture is at the core of an organisation's response – during good times and bad. If you are handling disruption collectively, with a strong sense of purpose, you'll drive positive employee engagement and successful outcomes. And if there was ever a time to change, this might be it.



It's important to use data, not instinct, to make culture assessments. Ring fence your top talent, and make sure you have the right leaders in place to drive engagement and work with agility.



Organisations that can get employee engagement right today will have a better chance of ensuring business continuity in the short-term - and retaining their talent once the crisis has passed.

Chapter 3

Engagement: from emergency response to greater resilience

The true test of any organisational culture or leader lies in how your people perform through challenging times.

In business-as-usual periods, employee engagement focuses on how empowered, motivated and positive employees feel about their work – whether they have the right systems and structures in place to be productive, and do their best work.

But now is not business-as-usual. At this moment in time, there are additional emotional and wellbeing factors at play. Organisations that can get employee engagement right today will have a better chance of ensuring business continuity in the short-term – and retaining their talent once the crisis has passed.

“It’s all about emergency response, initially,” advises Jingqi Li, Korn Ferry Employee Engagement expert in Shanghai. “This is the time your employees are going to have a lot of questions, so simple, clear communication is critical.”

She says organisations in China were quick to set up emergency response teams – typically involving senior leadership, HR, finance, Environment, Health, and Safety (EH&S), government affairs and communications. They looked outward, to customers, suppliers, government authorities and investors, gathering the insight required to enable better decision making. And they looked inward to check, monitor and record every single case of the illness – in staff and their families.

Chris Mayler, Senior Client Director based in Australia, says communicating this duty of care is paramount. “This will be a challenge for many organisations if they don’t have robust feedback channels in place. Make sure new company policies are clear and transparent around how to conduct meetings and limiting travel as much as possible. People want clear guidelines – they need to know the organisation is taking precautions to safeguard their wellbeing.”

Once the crisis has passed, this engagement effort is likely to pay off through faster recovery. Jingqi Li says this was certainly the case with SARS. Teams with higher employee engagement were able to get operations back to full capacity sooner. “Employee engagement makes the magic happen,” she says.

However, unlike SARS or even the Global Financial Crisis, most workers have never been isolated for long stretches of time – and the transition back to a ‘new normal’ may be more challenging. So what can organisations do now to help their people cope with so much unprecedented change, and feel empowered to go above and beyond their formal duties if required?

Focus on the future

Leaders need to be visible and convey confidence to employees, along with a positive outlook for the organisation’s future. Responding quickly to guarantee employment security, as much as possible, will go a long way in this.

Constantly push yourself to look ahead and reframe your understanding of the different scenarios. Anticipate opportunities that could arise, now or in the longer term. Demand can pick up quite swiftly and you need to be ready, so re-focus business priorities for when the time is right.

Act on feedback

Engagement is a two-way conversation. Make sure employees can voice their concerns and questions in a way that suits them, and recognise different people will have different needs. Have several lines of communication open, from pulse surveys to town halls, and

show you are acting quickly on employee feedback.

It’s important to respect the wishes of your employees – some may want to work from home or self-isolate. Putting their wellbeing first will in turn create a stronger community. You may also need to consider family support, or mental health programs to help people manage stress and anxiety.

Embrace new ways of working

Many organisations have had to quickly implement new flexible working arrangements and policies as part of their business continuity plans.

For millions of employees globally, this will be the first time they are expected to work from home – and potentially for extended periods of time. Make sure they’re equipped with the right tools to stay engaged and collaborate.

Re-think any resistance to tools like video conferencing as this may be the only way to ‘see’ clients or staff in the short term. Use social media, like WeChat or Whatsapp, to maintain contact with all employees and keep teams connected.

If these new ways of working – more flexibly or virtually – are proving positive for employees and business outcomes, you may also need to re-think structures and policies for the long term.

Use this time wisely

If operational needs have slowed down productivity, this could be the ideal opportunity to strengthen capabilities through training. Korn Ferry research indicates lack of career development is one of the main reasons talent will leave an organisation.

Jingqi Li says many organisations in China are now running virtual learning programs to build technical and social skills.

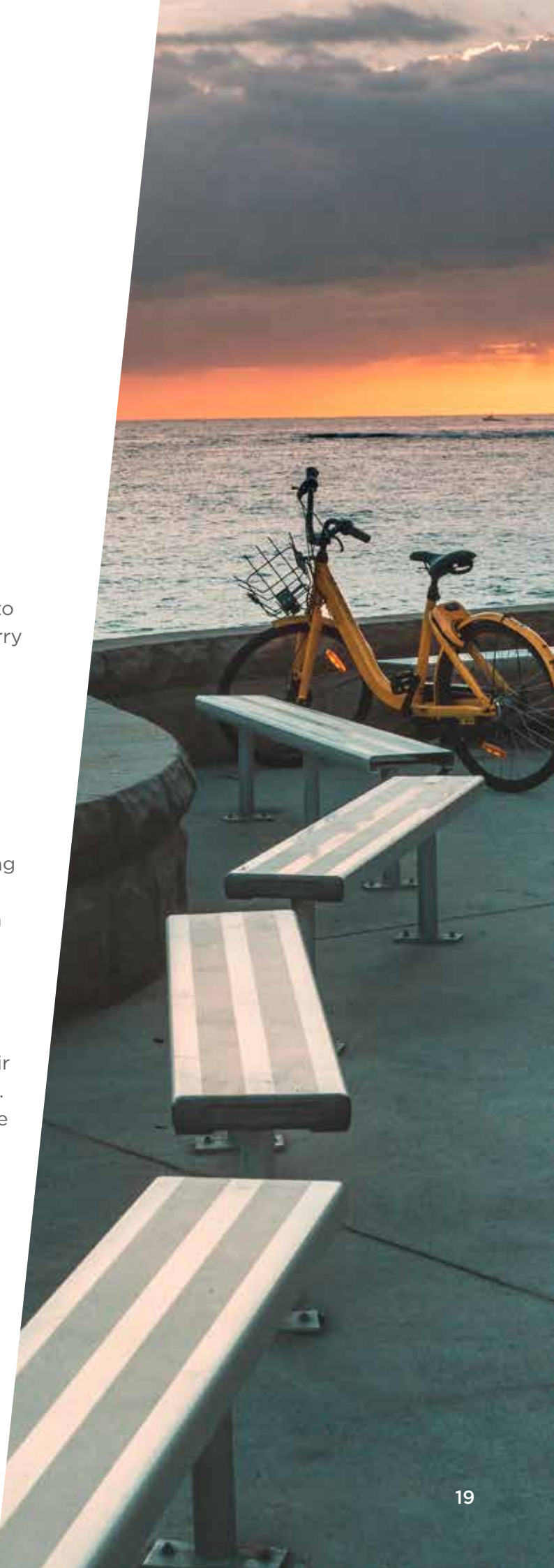
Leaders are also using this time to identify 'shining stars' amongst its talent, and give them new opportunities in positions where they can make a real difference.

Reflect on engagement during the recovery

As China now begins to enter its recovery phase, Li is seeing organisations looking to measure their engagement effort and communication response. Engagement surveys pre- and post-crisis can give you a valuable benchmark and help you prepare for the next crisis.

"I believe this will be a watershed moment for many organisations, in how they engage with employees," says Chris Mayler.

And if they do get this critical task right, they'll have a better chance of coming through the year stronger and more resilient, with motivated employees who have risen to the challenge.



Chapter 4

Performance and rewards: re-thinking plans through times of crisis

Employee rewards and performance management plans keep your talent motivated, engaged, and aligned with business objectives. In uncertain times, this is more important than ever – and organisations need to avoid making rash, short-term decisions that could lead to future retention challenges.

At this point in time, organisations should provide as much clarity and assurance as possible. However, this involves first making a number of significant decisions. How should you reward performance when the market is down? What KPI thresholds are now realistic and meaningful? And how do you balance this with unexpected cash flow shortfalls?

“Target setting and performance management are key focus areas during our discussions at the moment,” explains Kartikey Singh, an Associate Client Partner based in Singapore. “Organisations want to know how to manage performance for FY20 when the two halves of the year may be very different.”

Rather than relying on last year’s performance, this means thinking about performance planning more holistically – and how external environments might influence the future.

Some organisations will face significant disruption to demand, while for others revenue may only be postponed. If you don’t go to a restaurant today to eat, or take a flight tomorrow, that demand will never be replaced. But other organisations will just see major decisions delayed – with a big uptick in demand once the crisis has passed. And they need to be ready for that.

Part of this preparation is ensuring continuity in the way they manage and compensate employees during a down cycle. Failing to do so fairly can result in discouraged and unmotivated employees, decreased productivity and loss of top talent. This can become very costly once the market bounces back – and the competition for top talent becomes fierce.

“As much as economically possible, I would suggest riding out the storm,” suggests Trevor Warden, Korn Ferry’s Co-Lead APAC

Rewards & Benefits. “Be flexible in rewarding those who rely on performance such as sales commissions. Supporting staff now will win hearts and minds for a long time.”

Here are five things you can do in the coming months to retain and reward your best performers, and prepare for business-as-usual after COVID-19.


2020: a two-cycle year

With limited visibility over the year ahead, consider 2020 as a two-cycle year – focusing on different objectives in each half.

In the first period, leaders should set collective corporate targets, rather than individual goals. In the second half of the year or once nations enter a recovery phase, leaders can implement a more traditional scorecard approach.

For example, you might have 80% weighting to business performance in the first half of the year, because you want everyone to work together as a team. In the second half, when the momentum builds again, weight more evenly towards individual performance.

Performance reviews will need to take place at least twice this year, to reflect the likelihood of vastly different business environments and ensure your employees stay engaged.



It's more important than ever to differentiate between your top and average performers – because if you treat everyone the same across the board, you'll risk losing your best people.



Weigh up internal performance vs external impact

It's also important to differentiate between a lack of performance caused by the virus' impact on the market, and specific issues with individuals. If everyone is now performing at 60%, look at where they were in the period before the virus hit. Were they performing at 60% then as well, or has there been a decline since the outbreak?

You need to ensure you don't group your usually high performing people with average or low performers. Those who were doing a tremendous job in the nine months before the crisis should be recognised and managed differently, otherwise you are likely to lose them when the market starts to pick up again. It's more important than ever to differentiate between your top and average performers – because if you treat everyone the same across the board, you'll risk losing your best people.

Review your targets

During a time of crisis, you will need to review target setting. What you measure in the first six months will fundamentally impact the direction your business will take. It's important to assess what can realistically be achieved during the first six months of the year.

Irrational targets can make employees feel like you're setting them up to fail. If they are discouraged, you'll risk losing them.

Think hostically about rewards

With recruitment freezes now in place across many organisations, employees may seem unlikely to leave during the crisis. However, ignore the urge to cut bonuses, freeze salary increments, or shed talent. When demand picks up again – and it will – your best performers will be the first ones to go.

Trevor Warden suggests a more considered approach to show commitment to your people. “Instead of redundancies, look at options like reduced hours, reduced pay for those above a certain salary bracket, or taking paid or unpaid leave. Ask for volunteers for these initiatives first – leaders will be surprised to find just how supportive and accommodating staff can be.”

Non-monetary recognition can have just as much impact – especially in the short term. It could be as simple as recognising brand champions – those who display the behaviours and values you want to encourage across the organisation now, and during the second phase of the year.

For example, openly acknowledge those employees who are leading by example during the crisis, and those that find opportunity in adversity and that inspire others. These people can come from every level within your organisation.

Start planning now for long-term programs

Forward-thinking organisations realise the current disruption offers them a unique opportunity to implement major change projects – things that had been ‘too hard’ before. These may take longer than the typical six-month reward cycle to deliver outcomes.

Long-term rewards programs focus on a three-to-four-year cycle rather than a six-month or one-year period. This can keep your team focused on the future over the coming months. Of course, short-term recognition plans are still important as they help leaders motivate and coach staff through uncertain times.

“We are working with many clients in the region to steer objective setting and performance planning process through this period,” notes Warden. This could include differentiating reward performance between this financial year and the next, or establishing a new approach that will reward the capabilities, behaviours, and performance your organisation will need in the future.

Many organisations will come out of the current crisis unscathed and perhaps even stronger – these will be the ones that communicate openly with their teams and build trust.

If there’s ever been a time to be transparent with your employees about rewards and performance, this is it.



Recruitment is essentially a way to build new capabilities and enable strategic changes to business models and culture.

Chapter 5

Recruitment: building resilience into your talent pipeline

Over the past decade, the war for talent has been ever-present. This is no different when times are challenging – every organisation needs the right people to adapt to unanticipated change and ensure business continuity.

Although it may seem sensible to focus on the payroll burden if revenue takes a hit, this short-term reaction may leave your organisation vulnerable. When the market comes back, having talent in the pipeline will be a strategic advantage.

Gladdy He, a Senior Client Partner based in Shanghai, believes recruitment is a ‘survival imperative’ at this time. “Companies have always been looking out for the best talent,” she says. “People who can drive innovation, who are adaptive leaders and can communicate effectively - those are the people you need if your organisation is to survive and thrive in a time of crisis.”

This could also be an opportunity to make changes that may not have been possible before. As long as your company has the cash flow to keep operating, this is a unique window of opportunity to upgrade your talent pool.

It also sends a positive signal to the market. In times of uncertainty, confidence in your brand and its financial strength and strategy could be more attractive than the salary package for new hires. It’s human nature, a flight to safety.

In Korn Ferry’s recent flash survey, conducted across China-based organisations in February 2020, 56% of HR managers said they plan to postpone their recruitment plans as a result of the COVID19 epidemic.

If fewer opportunities are around, a proactive recruitment plan has more chance of success. Here are five ways to make that happen.

Get the basics right

Word of mouth matters with recruitment, and in times of crisis people ask for recommendations to make the right decision. People are looking for employers they can trust, and there is a reputational risk if you fail to act with compassion during this time, so make sure your people know they are your first priority.

Freeing time in the operational rhythm may also give you a chance to onboard people in a more structured way. The role of HR may become increasingly important as the linchpin during the crisis response period, and afterwards. By co-ordinating all parts of the business, HR managers can think about how resources can best be allocated to make things happen more effectively.

Differentiate between short-term setback and long-term change

Some industries are experiencing severe disruption to demand – such as travel, hospitality and logistics. Others are seeing new opportunities emerge as people change consumption habits – think eCommerce, food delivery and virtual working applications.

Specific opportunities in your sector will shape the talent you need now, and in the longer term. “For example, if you want to develop virtual banking capabilities, you need to get that in place now – before the market comes back. If you leave it too late, everyone will be chasing that talent,” suggests Jimmy Ho, Korn Ferry’s Office Managing Director based in Hong Kong.

For organisations that need to make hard decisions about staff numbers due to cash flow challenges, Gladdy He suggests doing whatever you can to retain your top talent.

“Give them leave of absence, paid or unpaid. We’re seeing some companies offer to co-share the risk by paying 60% of salaries for the first month, even though there is no work, and then tapering that down until they can bring those people back on board and get operations back up and running again.”

Size up your people

Use a scientific data approach to analyse every profile in the organisation to work out where your high potential talent is, and what new opportunities you could give them.

“We work closely with clients to assess their bench strength and succession programs, and help them make more objective hiring and firing decisions,” notes Gladdy He. “If you have that data in place now, you’ll be ready to act when it becomes necessary.”

She says her team is also busy sharing broader perspectives and benchmarking data from across the APAC region – helping clients develop competitive yet cost-effective compensation packages in the current climate, for example.

Consider new alternatives

Some organisations are now willing to take a risk on putting younger talent into their pipeline. Look for those with high learning agility who can also adapt easily to the virtual working styles which have now

become necessary. This might be a 'leap of faith' for organisations that have relied on a top heavy, experienced senior management layer in the past.

You can also consider different recruitment processes and structures. Do you really need to meet a candidate face to face, or can you carry out virtual assessments?

Recruit for resilience

The types of capabilities you are looking for may also be different to a year ago. People need to be able to communicate effectively and authentically across digital channels, and manage their productivity remotely. Organisations are looking for people who can create new opportunities, rather than stay stuck in old ways of thinking. A positive mentality could become more important than experience. "People who know how to deal with crisis, who don't panic, who show care and can see their way to the future - these are the people you need when the next wave of disruption happens," says Gladdy He.

Recruitment is essentially a way to build new capabilities and enable strategic changes to business models and culture. Whether the recovery is U-shaped or V-shaped, you will need good people in place.



This year it's the coronavirus. Next time, and there will certainly be a next time, it could be an earthquake, recession, or something else unforeseen. Our advice on preparation.

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Talent/Leadership Development

| SHORT-TERM ACTIONS | INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS |
|---|--|
| Provide coaching to managers on crisis communications | Develop structure and processes for virtual meetings |
| Pause group orientations and onboarding | Assess for fit, potential, and agility aligned to evolving operating and strategy models |
| Organise training (virtual or in-person) on digital tools for remote work | |
| | LONG-TERM ACTIONS |
| | Identify managers/leaders for specific crisis management roles |
| | Enhance training programs for hard and soft skills |
| | Ramp up recruiting as needed for critical roles |

2

Employee Safety

1

| SHORT-TERM ACTIONS | INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS | LONG-TERM ACTIONS |
|---|---|---|
| Adhere to local government and health officials' notices and directions | Leverage surveys/polling to gauge employees' views of management's response to their health and safety concerns | Evaluate the flexibility of sick-leave policies and align them with public health guidance |
| Implement necessary restrictions on meetings, travel, etc. | Contribute to medical/health efforts outside your organization | Create policies to empower local leaders to respond to crises based on health/safety guidelines in their area |
| Identify remote-work options for individuals/teams | Provide options for healthy employees to stay home to care for sick family members | Involve employees in developing/updating crises response plans, and then test them intermittently |
| Provide forums for Q&As with employees around safety measures | | |

Performance Management

3

| SHORT-TERM ACTIONS | INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS | LONG-TERM ACTIONS |
|--|---|---|
| Focus on purpose to keep employees engaged and motivated | Assess whether and how to adjust goals/targets for the year | Train managers to focus on outcomes instead of face/desk time |
| Consider hiring freezes, especially for nonessential positions, until there is more clarity around the business impact | Solicit feedback more frequently to help address emerging issues/barriers | Evaluate the impact of grade/title inflation on performance |
| Ensure employees are clear on whether previous or new goals are in place | Consider implementing off-cycle reviews aligned to short-term incentives | Determine if workforce needs to be right-sized |
| | | Consider changes to recognition programs that employees don't value |

Compensation and Rewards

5

| SHORT-TERM ACTIONS | INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS | LONG-TERM ACTIONS |
|--|--|--|
| Create short-term, team-based incentive rewards | Develop retention plans for key talent | Maintain awards for high performers |
| Evaluate existing nonfinancial rewards that can be expanded to keep up engagement/morale | Adjust individual performance incentives as conditions normalise | Enhance incentive designs based on learnings |
| | Consider crisis-related spot awards | Align reward investments with employee preferences |

Corporate Affairs

4

| SHORT-TERM ACTIONS | INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS |
|--|---|
| Align messaging to avoid confusion/contradictions | Reassess and adapt messaging based on the latest data |
| Plan for potential outcomes, from best- to worst-case scenarios | Communicate moves to preserve profitability unrelated to head count |
| Update digital communications tools | Develop messaging around a post-crisis path forward plan |
| Establish a regular and reliable cadence of communication from the CEO and senior team | Consider implementing reward measures for customers |
| Ensure employees are aware of their rights as related to sick pay and performance expectations during the crisis | |
| | LONG-TERM ACTIONS |
| | Compare data on engagement levels before, during, and after the crisis, and create strategies to address times of decline |
| | Assess areas for improvements |

6

Financial Modeling

| IMMEDIATE ACTIONS |
|---|
| Cut travel and entertainment costs in the short term |
| Consider ways to cut spending on materials if necessary |
| INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS |
| Consider diverting money from bonus pools to offset revenue losses |
| Adjust pay terms for outside vendors |
| Evaluate delaying product launches and office openings |
| LONG-TERM ACTIONS |
| Fine-tune cost structure |
| Cut unused employee benefit programs |
| Refocus investment strategy on main business goals and growth opportunities |

7

Business Continuity

| SHORT-TERM ACTIONS |
|---|
| Communicate with customers on impact and expectations |
| Create C-suite-sponsored cross-functional teams for key areas (e.g., sales/marketing, supply chain) |
| Preserve operating capacity in the event demand returns to normal sooner than expected |
| Develop short-term performance benchmarks for operating teams and update them at least biweekly |
| INTERMEDIATE ACTIONS |
| Evaluate inventory for potential shortages |
| Identify supply chain alternatives; consider changes to distribution strategy |
| Increase digital initiatives and channel presence |
| LONG-TERM ACTIONS |
| Consider changes to demand-forecasting processes |
| Create and secure contingency suppliers |
| Evaluate the need for more sources of contingency workers to secure on-duty crisis coverage |

Preparing for the 'new normal'

With every organisation effectively operating in uncharted waters, this year of two halves will push leaders and employees to adapt to a 'new normal'.

More open and authentic leadership styles can go a long way to reassure employees and avoid panic. So too can a renewed focus on employee engagement, and shifting organisational culture to ensure both people and systems are prepared for future risks and opportunities.

Organisations may also need to look at performance management and rewards holistically to retain their top employees. While the urge to react quickly might be strong, short-term decisions could lead to negative outcomes once the market recovers.

Instead, we advise leaders to adopt a 'growth mindset', especially if this time of slower productivity gives you space to really consider opportunities you might have otherwise missed. That could include new ways of working or going to market, or upskilling your people.

Organisations that are likely to have an advantage post-outbreak are focusing on clear and transparent communications. Providing tools and ways to collaborate when people are working remotely will help them feel connected, supported and keep them engaged.

While leaders and organisations face ongoing uncertainty amidst the pressure to deal with the ongoing crisis, they also have an opportunity to plan ahead and, and put the structures in place now that will see them through whatever the next phase will bring.



**Join our webinar on 2 April
where we discuss the crisis
response with the Korn Ferry
experts [REGISTER HERE](#)**

If you have any questions or need help navigating your response to COVID-19, please get in touch:
www.kornferry.com/contact

Additional resources can be found here:
<https://www.kornferry.com/challenges/coronavirus>

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About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is a global organisational consulting firm. We work with organisations to design their organisational structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward, develop, and motivate their workforce. And, we help professionals navigate and advance their careers.