



Talent is Everything

# Life After Lockdown

A Practical Guide to Workforce Planning  
& Talent Management



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# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown have impacted people and economies across the globe. In April 2020, full or partial lockdown measures affected almost 2.7 billion workers, representing around 81% of the world's workforce according to The International Labour Organization (ILO).

Recent research conducted by the Resolution Foundation predicted that the UK alone could see up to 11 million people unemployed over the next three months, with low-paid workers set to be hit the hardest.

While the UK government has arranged unprecedented economic support measures for companies and workers alike, businesses across a range of sectors face significant financial uncertainty.

Despite the stark outlook in some sectors, recruitment has continued in others during the lockdown. The NHS and private care sector, along with food retail and the grocery supply chain has seen unprecedented demand for permanent and contingent labour. In addition, those forward thinking businesses with greater financial resilience are taking advantage of this time to engage the best talent and get ahead of the competition.

The only certainty we have right now is that normality for talent management is going to look different for every business. Some will be inundated with applications from people looking to return to work. For them, it will be imperative to have processes in place that can handle this activity and ensure the best talent doesn't slip through the net. Others, however, will face a more uncertain future of budget cuts, redeployment and redundancies, requiring in-depth planning to ensure employee wellbeing and, critically, business survival.

Effective workforce planning will be vital moving forward, as many organisations look to strike a balance between the short-term bottom line and a return to growth. The ability to optimise talent, both internally and externally, will go some way in determining the success of this endeavour. As such, the role of HR and Talent Acquisition will likely shift to meet changing business needs. In turn, this may impact on the resourcing supply chains in place and the scope of support required from resourcing partners.

In this practical guide, Omni's team of resourcing transformation specialists take recent learnings and explore the critical areas that require immediate attention, including:

- A need for improved workforce planning
- The importance of internal mobility
- Focus of talent acquisition teams

1. <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-calls-measures-cushion-covid-19-shocks-labour-market>  
2. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/launching-an-economic-lifeboat/>

# A Need for Improved Workforce Planning

## Flexibility is Key

The economy, technology, shifting demographics and the demand for flexibility in the workplace is making it increasingly difficult for organisations to ensure that they have the right talent to deliver their business strategy.

Pre-COVID-19, the world was already changing at an accelerating rate, and, if it is here to stay (or for a while at least), lessons need to be learned quickly from the early stages of the pandemic. Business continuity has to be bolstered through effective workforce planning, enabling organisations to protect themselves by being flexible and agile long after lockdown.

## What Do You Need?

Inevitably, the pandemic has brought a heightened sense of immediacy across most organisations and it can feel difficult to plan for anything outside of the short term. As such, your Operational Workforce Plan will be an immediate priority, providing a short-term view of what resources are required within the business, and the actions needed to address any immediate skills gaps.

The challenge for organisations recovering post-lockdown will be how to fill these gaps and return to growth as efficiently as possible, without necessarily adding to permanent headcount. Internal mobility of employees will determine the extent to which these gaps can be covered and the feasibility of redeployment to offset any risks of layoff and redundancy. If needs cannot be met internally and external hiring is necessary, then on what basis should you hire? Fixed-term or temporary may be attractive from a business perspective but could limit your access to skills at a time when job security means more to people than ever.

On the other hand, organisations in less impacted sectors may benefit from both a surge in available skills during the extended period of the government's job retention scheme and if unemployment levels soar once the scheme tapers off in October. The challenge will be how to manage increased recruitment activity effectively, bringing the candidate experience and, consequently, your employer brand into sharp focus.

While the level of economic uncertainty makes planning for the medium- to long-term difficult, the pandemic has taught us the importance of business continuity. Though this needs to be fluid and subject to change, it's essential to build a Strategic Workforce Plan that takes a broader, longer term view of the organisation's needs and aligns the business strategy with a well thought out, proactive approach to planning and resourcing. Clearly, external environmental factors and a changing labour market will affect this plan, not least the measures you will need to have in place to account for social distancing and any future lockdowns as a result of new peaks in COVID-19 infections.

For those organisations likely to be negatively impacted by future outbreaks, an increase in contingent workers may be advisable given the flexibility this affords. However, postponed changes to IR35 legislation will return leading up to April 2021, placing pressure on organisations to create workforce flexibility while maintaining compliance.

For businesses likely to experience hiring spurts, speed to mobilise will be paramount. In the early stages of the pandemic, one high street food retailer had to process 170,000 applications to make 4,000 offers of employment - more than its Christmas peak. This included partnering with other high street retailers to create 'fast-track' opportunities for employees likely to be leaving roles.

This concept of a 'Talent Exchange' has grown in recent weeks as companies consider the longer term impact of the pandemic and the role that talent pooling will play to stay on the front foot.



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## How To Get There

The diagram below shows a simple five-stage process to help organisations develop a Strategic Workforce Plan.



### Organisation Review



### Analyse Current Workforce



### Determine Future Workforce Needs



### Identify Workforce Gaps



### Create and Deliver Workforce Strategy



## Organisation Review

What is the organisation's current trading position and outlook? If you are a B2B contract-led company, how quickly will customer needs increase as the shackles of lockdown are removed? What is the likelihood of projects in the sales pipeline coming to fruition or being postponed? If you're a B2C business, lockdown release is only the start, and there may be a substantial lag between this and any sizable increase in consumer confidence. Either way, it has never been more important for HR and Talent Acquisition teams to align closely with business leaders to understand the starting point for any revised workforce planning.

## Analysis of Current Workforce

This step may be straightforward if your company has well-established systems in place relating to HR data; however, many organisations need help establishing what data should be recorded and for what purposes.

Firstly, categorising your workers by job function, family, role and competency enable you to assess hiring trends and help to standardise salaries. Secondly, considering the value of each of the roles and their criticality to the company will allow you to see where the priorities lie and ensure that there are succession and contingency plans in place.

## Determine Future Workforce Needs

Having the right skills in the right place at the right time to meet business objectives sounds simple. However, there are added layers of complexity when you consider the cost of resources, whether you have the right blend of skills (management, technical vs. other), and whether you have the flexibility that you need in the workforce, e.g. hiring too many permanent employees with an unstable pipeline of work could prove to be costly.

To predict what resources you need both in the short- and long-term, organisations must combine manager insight (what does the business think it needs?) with budgetary considerations and market trend analysis, including benchmarking data from other organisations. The more informed your planning is, the easier it is to maintain flexibility and mitigate associated risks.

## Identify Workforce Gaps

Once you have identified the shape of your current workforce, and you have an idea of what your future workforce needs to look like, you can focus on how to bridge that gap. Inevitably with many businesses, workforce reductions will be necessary, in which case is there potential for upskilling or cross-training these individuals to fill other skills gaps through redeployment? If this isn't possible, is it likely that these skills will be required again at a later date as business recovers and jobs come back online? If so, how can these 'alumni' be nurtured and become part of any future talent pool and re-engaged quickly, especially if we experience a second wave of infections with staffing levels already lean?

New skills required by the organisation should be looked at closely to understand whether they can be grown internally, brought back into the business from this 'alumni' pool or whether they need to be hired externally. It's essential to identify how many people you need to recruit to replace any that you lose or new skills you can't develop in-house. Attrition levels can be calculated across departments or skillsets, or if only basic data is available, across the organisation as a whole. Skills that are likely to present a challenge need to be looked at closely, and a plan put in place to hire in enough time for a given project or initiative.

## Create & Deliver Your Strategy

As lockdown continues to ease, applying this process will help organisations build on their Operational Workforce Plans to:

- Develop robust Strategic Workforce Plans that identify current and future needs
- Identify where your workforce gaps lie that you're likely able to fill via internal resources (and which you will need to hire externally)
- Offer protection against future outbreaks of COVID-19 while underpinning the road to recovery for those organisations hit hardest by the pandemic.



# The Importance of Internal Mobility

While internal mobility has been at the heart of talent management strategies, we have seen its focus alter for many organisations during the pandemic. Still a function of talent retention and career progression, the mobility of skills across different business units have been tested heavily. Increased requirements in one part of a business combined with sizable dips in other parts, has seen skills redeployment of epic proportions, with workplaces all over the world asking employees to take on new or enhanced responsibilities.

## Managing Redeployment

Until a vaccine is available, the omnipresence of COVID-19 will make skills redeployment a constant factor within our workforce planning. The question is, how can the process of redeployment be effectively managed to ensure the business benefits and the worker feels supported and enabled as opposed to put-upon?

- **Up-skilling** – “A skilled workforce, key workers and communities matter now more than ever. We should be protecting and expanding apprenticeship, skills and education budgets to offer furloughed and unemployed workers new training and skills opportunities.”

We believe organisations (supported in part by the government) need to do the same for their current employees if they are to create the workforce flexibility required to transition quickly and maintain productivity should the pandemic spike again. From a talent acquisition perspective, ‘flexibility’ as a required behaviour (alongside personal resilience) will have increased importance when assessing the suitability of new hires.

- **Communication** – Redeployment requires careful management, which is a challenge when time isn’t on your side. While there are many practical aspects to consider (including skills audits, remote training and coaching), one of the most important is maintaining clear communication from the outset. It’s not about merely telling employees what’s going to happen, but taking the time to explain why it’s happening and providing an open forum where they can ask questions, express any concerns, seek additional support and even be part of the solution by offering further ideas and insight. Being open and honest about why redeployment is necessary will help put employees’ minds at ease during times of uncertainty.

3. <https://www.newstatesman.com/spotlight/coronavirus/2020/04/why-skills-are-vital-post-covid-19-recovery>



## Succession Planning

The pandemic has presented organisations with the most significant single leadership challenge in generations. The Prime Minister's week in intensive care at St Thomas' hospital, followed by a fortnights recuperation at Chequers is testimony to the fact that no matter what level you operate at, managers and leadership teams aren't immune to COVID-19. The carousel of deputies standing in for the Prime Minister under the interim leadership of Dominic Raab demonstrates the need for all organisations to develop succession plans that cover critical role scenarios.

Effective succession and contingency plans should include the identification of critical roles and their internal successors, interim options and consideration of shared duties and responsibilities among existing employees to ensure continuity in the daily operations of the company.

Investors in People offers some top tips for successful succession planning, including:

- **Harnessing senior workers' expertise** – In other words, don't let the skills and expertise leave the organisation when they do. Any employees you've identified as a potential successor should work alongside senior leaders who can share knowledge and invite them to help make key decisions. Look at how managers and leaders can be incorporated into the induction and training processes for new employees so they can share their insights, processes and general approach from day one.
- **Develop your future leaders** – Now is the time to invest in the learning, development and leadership training of anyone you've identified as a future leader. They must be allowed to start making important decisions, albeit while being coached and guided by mentors.
- **Dedicate the time that it deserves** – While there currently might be more pressing business needs, it's crucial to make time for planning an effective succession strategy. Leaders and managers must be prepared to set aside time to share knowledge, contacts and business techniques. Hopefully, the pandemic has highlighted the need for succession planning to be placed at the forefront of a company's talent strategy to ensure future resilience.
- **Be flexible** – A succession plan will constantly evolve and need to be updated as circumstances change. Both the business and its employees need to be able to adapt to the unexpected, and having a clear strategy in place is always more effective.

## The Dreaded 'R' Word

While the extension to the government's job retention scheme has been welcomed with open arms, it remains inevitable that (large scale) redundancy programmes will be enacted across multiple sectors adding a further toll to the health and wellbeing of the nation.

Unlike the recession in 2008, when the collapse of the housing market was blamed squarely on the banks and a government bailout saved the day, the roadmap to economic recovery from coronavirus is more challenging. With people's health threatened not only by COVID-19 but the impact of job losses, the public will look to both the government and employers to do the right thing.

- **Employer branding** – How businesses handle themselves in a crisis has a lasting impact on employer branding and is an area of focus when making redundancies. The recent positive press coverage from AirBnB illustrates how quickly news can spread, and treating employees with respect impacts directly on how your brand is perceived.

<https://news.airbnb.com/a-message-from-co-founder-and-ceo-brian-chesky/>.

This is a time where mass 'zoom' communication of individual redundancies has no place.

- **Making support available** – While for some, it may feel counterintuitive given the need to generate cost savings, consider the business case for outplacement support carefully, regardless of the employee's pay grade. People released from organisations in the coming months may be re-hired further down the line, hence it is essential to keep doors open. How people are supported as they exit a business will determine whether or not they become part of any future talent pool and ambassadors or detractors of your business.



# Focus of Talent Acquisition Teams

As organisations fundamentally alter the way they conduct business, many will rely on their Talent Acquisition and HR teams for guidance. What this support looks like will differ considerably depending on the impact of COVID-19 on the industry and sector.

## High Impact

Many companies will contract as a bi-product of redundancy and remain in survival mode after the government furlough scheme comes to an end later this year. As such, there will be a loss of skills that businesses have spent time developing over the years.

While re-hiring at a later date could be an option, there's a high chance the talent will have already moved on to another organisation. What risk does this present to the business? What contingencies are in place to support the business when it stabilises/moves into a growth phase? With recruitment on hold, talent acquisition teams need to shift their focus to other business-critical activities, whether that's redeploying their skills to another part of the business or developing collaborative relationships with other companies to create 'Talent Exchanges' where resources are shared and costs reduced.

Another focus for these teams is building a talent pipeline of candidates who are engaged with the business and can be earmarked for future roles when the organisation is ready to hire. Some key actions for building a solid talent pipeline during this time include:

- **Employer Branding** – While building your employer brand is an ongoing process and requires a dedicated strategy, there are some quick wins to help you bolster it. For example, focus on your website's careers page and take steps to improve it. You can be honest about the fact hiring is on-hold but still take the time to talk about the values and culture of the business, as well as any benefits offered. If it's appropriate, ask your employees to share their experiences online too, whether that's through social media, penning a blog post or completing a company review.
- **Passive Candidates** – Now's a good time to identify potential future employees, even if they're working elsewhere. Social media is still a great tool to connect, so follow any related industry hashtags and join groups and forums where discussions are taking place. Of course, if you have an Applicant Tracking System (ATS) or CRM (Candidate Relationship Management system), you'll be able to look back at any referred candidates, former employees and interns who might be suitable, as well as those who may have reached the final stages of a previous hiring process.
- **Engagement** – Although you're not currently hiring, you can still make contact with your talent pipeline. Be honest about it and tell them you're looking to connect with talented people for when recruitment resumes at a later date. Remember to be respectful to their current situation both professionally and personally and allow them to determine the next steps.

## Low Impact

Businesses still in hiring mode, face a different set of challenges. The market may soon be flooded with job seekers who have been made redundant or furloughed. Talent acquisition teams need to be in a position to handle an increase in job applications while still maintaining a positive candidate experience. It will require businesses to embed the right technology to cut through high volumes of applications at the pre-selection stage, as well as conducting interviews remotely in line with new workplace social distancing protocols.

Additionally, with internal talent teams in these businesses set to become more stretched than ever and less able to focus on higher value activities, there's an increased risk of burnout. Companies need to ensure there are steps in place to address this, whether that's bolstering the team with contractors, investing in technology to automate screening or increasing reliance on their recruitment supply chain.

## Ensuring Scalability

Whether the business impact of COVID-19 is high or low, there will likely be a need for greater scalability across internal talent acquisition functions. For some organisations, talent acquisition teams may downsize for a period until business recovers, and hiring levels increase. Workforce flexibility applies equally to talent acquisition, and consideration will need to be given to how quickly teams are rebuilt and on what basis (i.e. permanent, fixed-term) aligned to business outlook and confidence.

Increased scalability applies equally to organisations currently experiencing higher than normal recruitment volumes. Selecting the best available candidates from larger talent pools creates internal challenges around recruitment process management. Additionally, this increased activity may only be short- to medium-term, meaning that the talent acquisition function in place to support it may look a lot different in 6-12 months.



Resourcing needs will likely be dynamic and fluid for some time to come. Whether rebuilding skills now missing from a depleted workforce, handling an influx in candidate applications or engaging contingent workers to fill interim positions, talent acquisition teams will increasingly look to suppliers to provide the required scalability. Given an increased reliance on this recruitment supply chain until some semblance of normality is resumed, businesses must take the following steps to ensure its resilience:

- Identify where your resourcing risks lie and align with your business-critical recruitment providers.
- Establish partnerships which maximise added value during a difficult period. Don't be afraid to ask providers if they can offer additional support to alleviate the burden on your internal teams, e.g. support with redeployment activities, sourcing hard to fill roles, screening high volumes of candidates or time-consuming recruitment administration.
- Check how their business is being impacted by the disruptions, including any impacts they're feeling from their suppliers.
- Review your SLAs – are they fit for purpose given the current situation? If not, reset as required to ensure the service is effectively delivered to the business and that value for money is achieved.
- Confirm their Business Continuity Plans. Be crystal clear on how they're going to maintain their service to you, should the pandemic peak again.

Make sure that over the coming months, you collate learnings from your providers and factor them into any future workforce planning activities.

# A Helping Hand From Omni RMS



Omni RMS is a Resourcing Transformation Specialist and the UK's leading independent provider of Recruitment Process Outsourcing services. By applying our 20+ years' experience and specialist knowledge, we work with organisations to help them understand their resourcing effectiveness, benchmark this against industry best practice and build solutions that create competitive advantage.

We work collaboratively with organisations to help them stand out in the talent market, enabling them to attract the best-fit talent in the shortest possible time and at the most cost effective price – whether for permanent hires or contingent workers.

## Tailored Support for the 'new' normal

Our specialist teams work alongside your business to assess your resourcing effectiveness and help you to improve the way you resource for the better. Some of our core services include:

- Recruitment process management to remove the heavy lifting from internal TA teams.
- Managed Service delivery for contingent workers including Statements of Work
- Support with Workforce Demand Planning and Internal Mobility programmes
- Design and management of candidate onboarding programmes
- Outplacement support for people affected by redundancy and redeployment of internal skills
- Restructure selection design
- Training of your internal talent acquisition teams.





# Get in Touch

If you have any questions with regards to the content in this guide or would like to find out more about what Omni RMS can do for your business, our team would love to hear from you.

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