The Complete Playbook for HR Technology

During Times of Crisis

Deliberate, Strategic, and Sustainable Ways to Manage Through Crisis.

HR teams everywhere have put in massive efforts to keep their employees protected and their organizations running. Now it's time to think about the sustainability of these crisis responses.

Why? Because we need more than temporary fixes created in the moment to keep pace with the changes happening all around us. We need to transform our current approaches into effective, repeatable, and safe strategies for the future by taking advantage of tools we and our employees rely on every day — our HR technology.

Protect Your People and Your Business

Managing a crisis for HR relies heavily on the ability to implement repeatable, technology-based processes that prevent the same issues from being addressed all over again when the next crisis hits.

A sustainable solution built on unified human capital management (HCM) software will help you operationalize business continuity processes and automate manual administrative tasks. This will let you more quickly and strategically respond to what's important — the safety and well-being of your employees.

Use this eBook to learn the steps you can take in your HCM system to keep frontline employees safe on site, help remote employees stay connected and productive, and support both your business processes and the entire HR team.

A NEW VOCABULARY

Social distancing, contact tracing, PPE ... these are just a few of the terms we never would've thought about before COVID-19, and they require more than just definitions. They require clear processes embedded in our HCM systems so we can easily set policies and direct activities around them.

Measuring Unprecedented Disruption

Recent data from Gallup demonstrates the rapid acceleration of the number of employees deeply affected by COVID-19. Here's what happened between the middle and the end of March 2020:[1]

- **40% of U.S. employees** said their organization froze hiring, up from 33%

- **33% of U.S. employees** said their organization reduced hours or shifts available, up from 27%

- **The number of remote employees increased** from 33% to 61% of the workforce

- **The number of parents working full time** and keeping children home from school went from 44% to 100%

FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES WHO SAID ...

Their lives were disrupted either "a great deal" or "a fair amount" increased from **58% to 81%**.

Keeping Frontline Employees Safe On Site

On-site positions — such as grocery store clerks, production line workers, nurses, cashiers, and many others — now face much greater risks just doing everyday work tasks. That pressure is immense, and organizations must do all they can to mentally and physically protect these frontline employees and give them motivation to push through the current crisis. HR technology can help us get creative about meeting these important employee needs.

In this section we will discuss:

- **Workplace Safety**
- **Productivity and Engagement**
- **Psychological Safety**

Section 1: Workplace Safety

HR technology can help your on-site teams by providing them with clear standards for workplace safety and options that minimize their physical risk during the course of their shifts. Whether it's in the form of scheduling processes, alternative options for punching in and out, or health and safety reminders, your HCM software has the power to make a positive impact across all your physical locations.

Scheduling Practices

Transparent methods for scheduling essential employees that maximize safety and offer mobile options are fundamental. You need scheduling processes that can help you track teams, mitigate exposure risks, and give employees visibility into when and where they're needed. With the right scheduling tools, you can:

- **Identify your essential employees** by tracking the job requirements, skills, and certifications needed for different roles or shift types. This way, you can automate who should be assigned to what schedule areas and communicate with them efficiently and effectively.

- **Implement shift cohorts or work teams** so the same employees consistently work together. In the event of exposure, this ensures that contact has been minimized to a small, easily identifiable group that can be put on leave to protect the rest of your teams.

- **Utilize mobile shift fill options** so employees can claim shifts right from their mobile devices via text. Shift options can be restricted to reflect the specific groups of employees you want teamed together. This provides schedule transparency while maintaining social distancing protocols. It also gives employees flexible options for claiming or swapping shifts so they can maintain work-life balance even when resources are stretched thin.

> "**The main objective** is to make the tough decision about the minimum team you require to keep functioning, then set up multiple communication strategies to accommodate that essential group."

Chas Fields,
HCM Strategic Consultant, Kronos
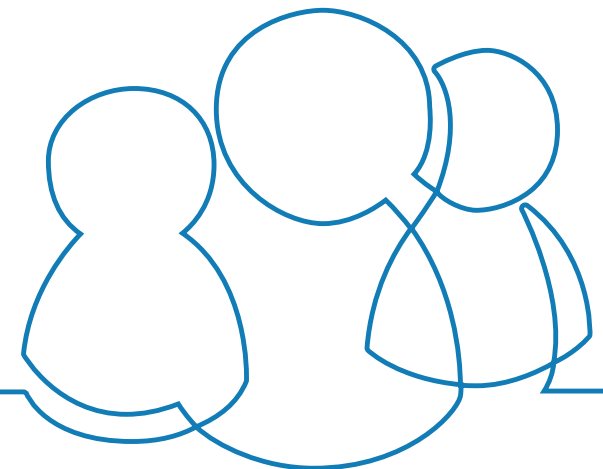
Alternative Time Tracking, Health, and Safety Options

Time tracking should prioritize employee safety by providing low-risk options for clocking in and out and delivering key workplace safety reminders in places employees access every day.

Here are some steps you can take to boost risk prevention and identification:

- **Leverage mobile devices to collect time**
  Mobile punching gives employees the ability to clock in or out directly from their own mobile device, allowing them to maintain social distancing and minimize the exposure to others that can be associated with lining up at a timeclock. With geofencing, you can also limit where employees punch in or out, minimizing errors and time-fraud risk.

- **Consider alternative forms of clocking in**
  Facial recognition is embedded in some of the newer timeclock devices, removing the need for physical interaction and limiting risk of exposure, even if employees still need to punch in and out from a central clock location.

- **Communicate at the timeclock**
  Important communications can be delivered directly to a timeclock to remind employees of safety standards.

- **Creatively use time data to protect employees**
  If an employee contracts an illness like COVID-19, contact trace processes and reports can use time data to quickly help track employees who may have had exposure. This will allow you to take decisive action and notify those who may have had contact, institute quarantine protocols as needed, and protect your non-contacted employees.
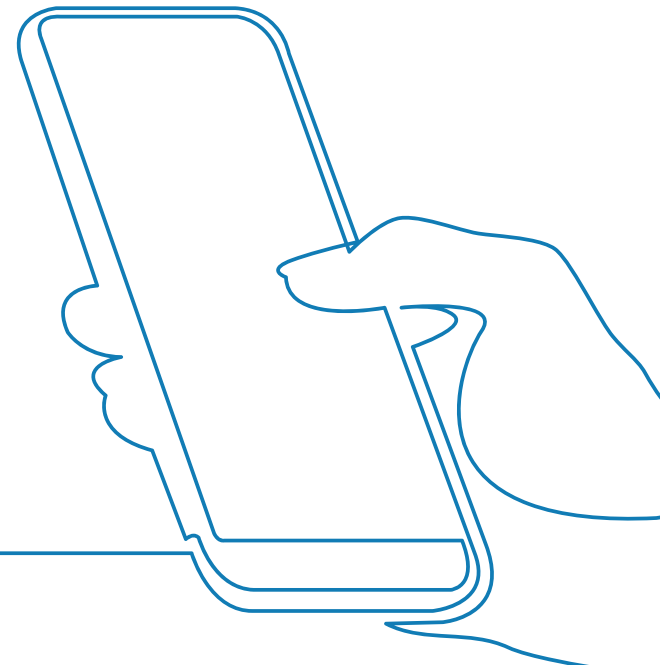
Section 2: Productivity and Engagement

Beyond the logistical issues that come with social distancing, PPE, and minimizing physical risks for employees, you also have to think about how to keep employees on task and engaged in their work, even through heightened worry and stress. Many of us now have to do more with fewer resources to maintain business continuity. This means we need clarity on which tasks are most important, how we can maximize employee productivity and, above all, how we must continue building an employee experience that recognizes the contributions being made and motivates employees to persevere and succeed.

The right HR technology will offer you a host of tools that take away stress and administrative hassle for your employees so they can do meaningful work that positively impacts your company's business goals. For example:

- **Activity tracking leads to informed decision making**
  In a time of crisis, it's imperative that businesses have a pulse on what costs, resources, and supply chain elements go into delivering their products or services. By using activity tracking data for specific tasks, you can make objective decisions that place your top performers in roles where they can make the biggest impact.

- **Communications and notifications build trust and transparency**
  Communications and notifications via text, email, or mobile alert disseminate information in the channels employees use most. They can be used to confirm schedules, approve time off or hours worked, broadcast the latest safety information/government recommendations, and deliver culture-based communications to create a sense of community or lighten the mood.

- **Automated workflows for management lead to greater efficiency**
  Flexibility and streamlined task delegation are crucial when you have to adjust to a rapidly changing work environment. HCM systems can help by automating common managerial processes in workflows. This keeps frontline employees on track and supports managers by ensuring they won't return to a mountain of administrative tasks if current circumstances force them to be away from the workplace for some time.

How workflows help managers. If someone in the chain of command needs to take required or requested time off, or teams need to be reshuffled, any necessary approvals, visibility into employee tasks, performance information, new employee onboarding checklists, or other items critical to effective manager oversight can be routed to an appropriate contact further up the chain of command or an alternate person at the same level.

Section 3: Psychological Safety

Ensuring mental well-being during a time of crisis is just as important as ensuring physical safety, and your HR technology can help you make a substantial impact here. Particularly in on-site working situations, it's easy for stress and anxiety to quickly build to unhealthy levels for your employees. Finding methods for sharing mental health resources, providing access to your organization's support structures, and fostering a strong sense of financial security are all crucial to reducing the traumatic impacts of a crisis and keeping teams healthy.

Understand inconsistencies from day to day.

The amount of data we collect is overwhelming. But when looked at through the right lens, it can shed light on the workplace in an entirely new way. For example, people analytics in your HR technology can give you a jump on employee behavior trends that might be out of the ordinary. This gives you and your managers the opportunity to have proactive conversations with your employees, understand what's going on, and reassure them that their well-being is your top priority.

Key predictors of employee well-being

Use your people data to help you proactively uncover:

- The risk of burnout for different team members

- Who's most likely getting fatigued or overtaxed

- Whose levels of engagement are trending up or down

- Where incidents may occur

- When anomalies or marked changes occur in employee behavior

Use Mobile Devices to Your Advantage

Beyond the options for clocking in and out already discussed, provide frontline employees with mobile access to the support structures you've put in place and the resources they need to feel secure.

With mobile access to an HCM solution, employees can:

- ☐ Locate HR resources for company benefits and government support

- ☐ Submit forms for leave cases and other critical life events

- ☐ Access employee assistance programs or links to public mental health resources

- ☐ Monitor their hours worked

- ☐ View their options for time off

"**The newer generations of employees,** especially those who had smartphones and tablets throughout their childhood, come to work with the expectation of finding consumer-grade tools."

Michael Puck,
Senior HCM Strategy Consultant, Kronos

Keep Financial Stress to a Minimum

Financial stress adds a whole other layer of pressure for employees. With uncertainty swirling all around them, having a reliable paycheck is paramount. Giving them as much confidence as possible that they'll be paid on time and correctly will go a long way toward improving mental health and general well-being.

Your HR technology has diverse options you can use to make sure this happens:

- **Make direct deposit easily accessible** to employees so they can set up electronic transfer of their paychecks to one or more accounts and access funds more quickly. Building awareness around direct deposit options and helping as many employees adopt them as possible also has a twofold business benefit: It removes the chance for errors and loss that comes with paper checks and reduces check-printing costs.

- **Provide same-day pay options** so employees can have earlier access to the money they make, if needed. Same-day pay solutions should be able to integrate seamlessly into your core HCM platform, link up with any pay rules, deductions, etc., that you maintain there, and provide a safer option for employees to quickly access their earnings. Having a service like this in place can make a big difference for employees, especially when there's a heightened risk of unexpected medical costs.

- **Make pay cards available** as an alternative to paychecks for hourly frontline employees, especially in businesses where many don't have access to traditional bank accounts or electronic pay options. These cards can provide your employees with flexibility and increase their feelings of financial security.

- **Put employee financial fears to rest with electronic pay statement access** that's viewable on any device. With this information, your employees can be sure they've received what they've earned and that all their money is ending up in the correct places.

Helping Newly Remote Employees Stay Connected and Productive

With remote employees — where everyone is separated in their own homes — it's essential to communicate effectively at all levels and keep employees feeling connected through development and recognition. It's also important to help them maintain work-life balance while adapting to situations like caring for family members in the home environment. These are all priorities that HR technology excels at facilitating.

In this section we will discuss:

- **Communication**
- **Development**
- **Flexibility**

Section 1: Communication

Regular communication for those working remotely is just as important. In fact, it's often the only link remote employees have to what's going on in your organization and how it relates to them and the tasks they're performing. Providing high levels of communication and access can help remote employees feel in control and make them more likely to communicate back to you about their ongoing needs.

Here are some easily adapted communication strategies:

Think of your HCM solution as your communication hub. In-app communications, push notifications, text alerts, email, and other forms of communication can all flow from a central HCM system to reach remote employees through the most effective channels.

Communicate as frequently as possible. Upping your communication frequency will help employees, even if they're miles away from where they usually work. And remember, you don't need to wait for large events — such as changes in the shelter-in-place protocols in your state — to reach out to your remote teams. Foster a sense of connection by communicating about smaller things, such as checking in on how people are doing or sending a lighthearted message if that reflects your company culture.

Provide updates that convey the continued efforts of your HR team. These might include the latest points to come out of leadership meetings or business continuity planning sessions, and the latest health and safety alerts and best practices.

Just like your frontline employees, your remote employees need a robust network of employee self-service resources to help them track what matters to them. These should include:

- Access to benefits information, pay information, and HR forms
- Access to personal information — and the ability to make changes to it
- Checklists for new hires
- Links to any health or employee assistance-related tools and materials

> "**Communication above all** needs to be truthful and transparent, and this should be a guiding principle HR reinforces with organizational leaders."
>
> Chris Mullen, PhD, Director,
> HCM Strategic Advisory, Kronos

Section 2: Development

In a work-from-home setting, it can become easy for employees to get detached from their career path and their contributions to broader business goals. This can lead to lower levels of productivity, less engagement, and higher risk of burnout or dissatisfaction. To counteract this, highlight development opportunities for your remote employees, prioritize conversations about their performance and career goals and, with the help of your HR technology, recognize all they do for the organization.

Ensure goals and objectives are still relevant.

Use your HCM system to look at performance trends and measure the progress of your remote employees against the goals they've been assigned. This can help you better understand how effective their adjustment to remote work has been. It will also give you and your managers the opportunity to proactively revise employee goals to fit their new circumstances or adjust aspects of remote work that might be holding them back.

Recognize remote employees for their hard work and adaptability.

Recognition is crucial for remote employees, as many may begin to feel invisible if they're not used to working in isolation or collaborating with teammates electronically. Your HR technology can facilitate various forms of recognition, including:

- Bonuses or compensation adjustments related to performance or critical tasks completed

- Sharing positive peer feedback after a big project is successfully completed

- General communications of thanks and acknowledgment in public settings via team announcements, alerts, or group emails
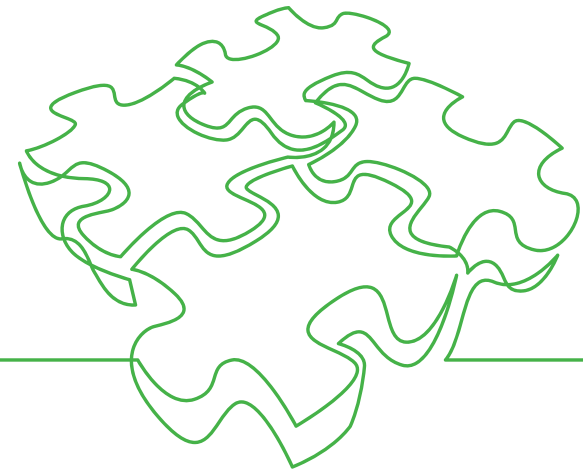
Section 3: Flexibility

In a remote work environment, especially when employees are dealing with competing personal and professional priorities such as caring for children who currently can't attend school or daycare, you'll want to make sure your people have options for dividing their time. Allowing them flexibility during the remote workday will prevent burnout, help maintain work-life balance, and provide opportunities to contribute to your organization in new ways.

Train managers to lead their teams with empathy.

Flexibility often starts with managers. Assign them the proper trainings in your HCM system to ensure they know how best to respond to employee needs. This will prepare managers to effectively coordinate their now-dispersed team members and give them a better sense of the options they can give employees who may need to shift their work hours or take personal time when they'd normally be completing tasks.

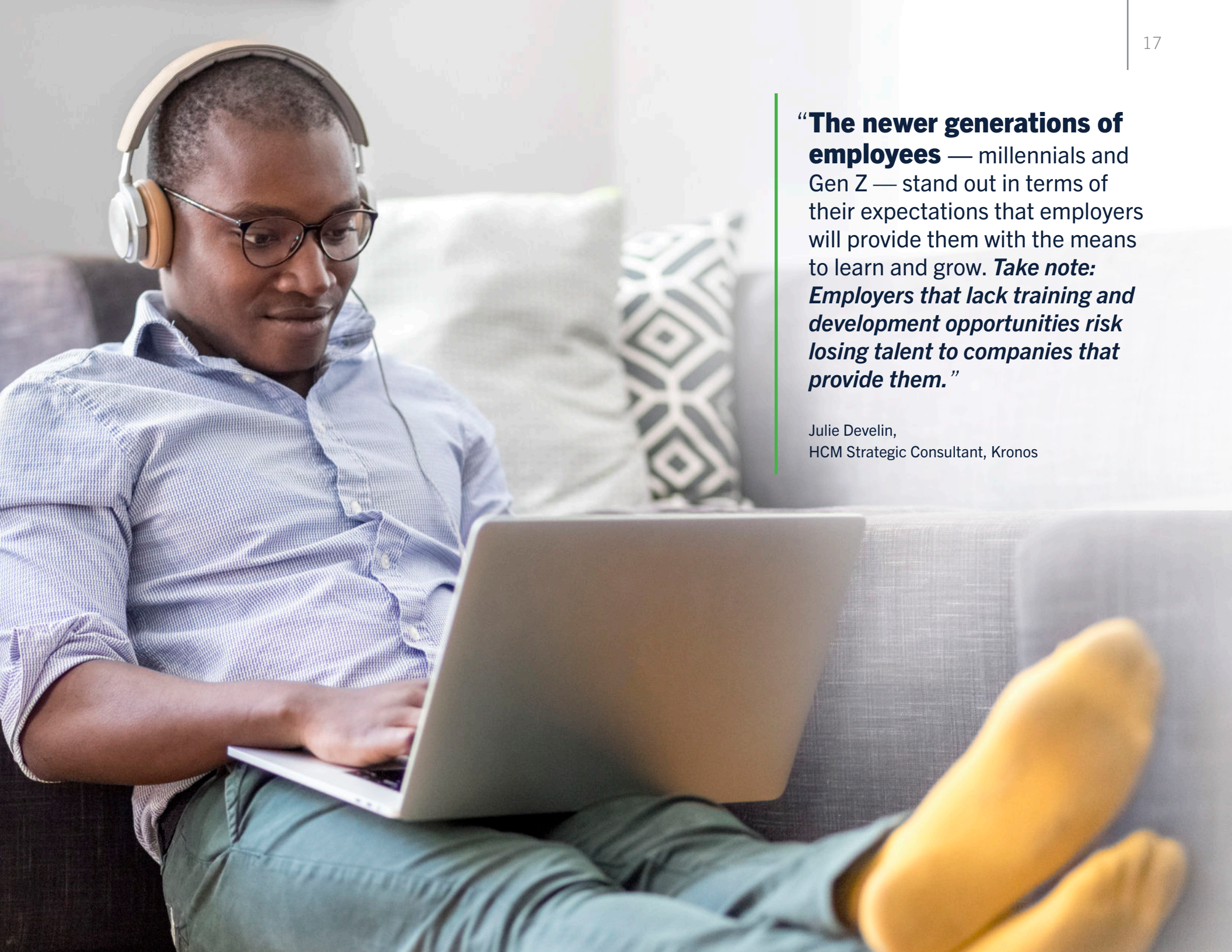## Direct employee skills in new ways to fill gaps.

Reskilling, upskilling, and talent sharing can play a big role with your remote employees too. Evaluate overlapping skills in this talent pool and crowdsource to fill gaps and get necessary tasks accomplished. Since remote employees can be more flexible about the work they're assigned or can take on diverse tasks in small chunks, it's possible you'll be able to assign them activities that may be outside of their normal job descriptions.

Use technology to enable a flexible workday.

Perhaps what's most important for remote employees is tracking their time in a way that allows them to effectively balance their days. This can be done through the timesheets you have them fill out in your system — which can be adjusted to reflect a wider array of time blocks — or through the HR policies you set up. Find a way for employees to meet expectations without necessarily having to follow the 9-to-5 framework they did when they were in the office.

Helpful Tip:

Use the skills and certifications tracking in your HR technology to identify the managers who are best prepared for dealing with remote employees — and enlist their help in guiding other managers.

"**The newer generations of employees** — millennials and Gen Z — stand out in terms of their expectations that employers will provide them with the means to learn and grow. *Take note: Employers that lack training and development opportunities risk losing talent to companies that provide them.*"

Julie Develin,
HCM Strategic Consultant, Kronos

Supporting Business Processes, Yourself, and the HR Team

Of course, in the flurry to accommodate the needs and protect the physical and mental well-being of your on-site and remote employees, you shouldn't lose sight of your own needs and those of your HR team or stop focusing on broader business strategies.

HR technology can help you keep your eyes on the ever-shifting regulations and compliance standards that affect your organization, build on and refine processes that work in this new normal, and put structures in place that ensure employee well-being on a policy level.

In this section we will discuss:

- **Compliance**
- **Process Improvement**
- **Employee Well-Being**

Section 1: Compliance

Let's face it: Even before the current crisis, keeping up with the local, state, federal, and industry regulations that constantly shift the rules HR has to follow was an endless battle. That has only accelerated now with the introduction of things such as the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES). A strong HCM system should be able to follow relevant rules without any input from you on a day-to-day basis, receiving regular updates across several key areas to reflect new changes and reduce your risk of compliance penalties.

Here's a checklist to track the ways an HCM system should help you maintain compliance in a crisis:

☐ **Attestation**
Use attestation processes in new ways to automatically track whether employees are following proper safety standards such as washing hands or wearing PPE to protect themselves and lower your risk of liability.

☐ **Compensation rules**
Adjust compensation models to reflect payroll protection regulations, stimulus packages, and loans that businesses now have access to through programs such as FFCRA and the CARES Act. Your HCM system should be flexible enough to implement compensation rules that address these if they apply.

☐ **Accrual rules**
Adjust accruals to account for unique forms of time off, including mandatory quarantine, required sick time, and time to care for sick family members.

☐ **Leave rules**
Stay in the loop on who's taking advantage of new crisis-related leave types, track leave cases as they are happening, and report on them so you know how your organization is being affected.

☐ **Crisis impacts**
Prove the impact of COVID-19 on your business by tracking incidents around infection. If you need another level of data privacy, add notes in the records of employees who have had exposure, which are visible only to administrators. This protects employee rights and reduces the risk of violating other compliance laws as you try to meet new requirements.

☐ **OSHA reporting**
Reflect new OSHA workplace safety measures by using frameworks built into your HCM system. Automate the tracking of compliance with these new standards so you can keep your processes up to date.

☐ **Disaster relief**
Track and report what qualifies you for disaster relief when you apply through organizations such as FEMA or a state equivalent. If you take advantage of grants to cover reimbursable emergency costs, track how you spend that money by logging assets such as PPE in your HCM system to reduce the risk of misspent funds.

Section 2: Process Improvement

Crisis management is just as much about learning from an experience as it is about getting through it. You can take the new processes you implement to deal with the current situation and expand those out to be more broadly applicable for the future. HR technology helps you do this in a streamlined and efficient manner as detailed below.

Know where your assets are.

Asset management is critical for tracking all the workplace safety tools you provide to your on-site workers, such as PPE, and any work devices and home office setup components you deliver to your remote teams.

> **Your HR technology can categorize different kinds of assets and put a system in place that specifies how they should be assigned to employees. This way, the technology can give you an at-a-glance view of who has what company-provided tools. Knowing where your equipment is gives you a better understanding of who may still need assets.**

Easily track employee milestones.

You want to make sure the kinds of disaster preparedness, crisis management, and crisis communication training efforts you institute in the thick of this current situation are repeatable. That means you'll need to understand which employees have met any readiness requirements you've established and who may still need further education.

> **Use your HR technology to make this a reality by defining and tracking specific certifications, training completions, to-do items, and checklists in one location. This will give you easy visibility into how aware your organization is of safety standards, let you assign proper next steps for team members, and even incorporate these new development tracks into your onboarding process to prepare new and future employees up front.**

More Strategic Process Improvement Options

Automate tasks to free up your focus.

An HCM system is like a connecting thread across your entire employee lifecycle — it makes it simple to automatically flow from task to task in order to meet the needs of employees, whether on site or remotely, during impactful moments like a large-scale crisis. And that means you as an HR professional can adapt to changing situations, including crises, and strategically shift your focus. For example, wouldn't it be much easier if your processes were already connected and digital so that you could adapt your recruiting and onboarding strategies to remote recruiting/onboarding? Reduce or accelerate recruiting volume? Make onboarding policies that align with new compliance standards such as receiving I-9s and doing employment verifications remotely for new hires? HR technology makes all this possible.

Use schedule forecasting for strategic staffing.

HR prefers to focus on people, not budgets. But in this current crisis situation, the reality is we have to make some hard choices around things like when we can staff — and which employees we can use — thanks to the supply chain restrictions and other reduced resources many organizations are facing.

Like the broader people analytics capabilities embedded in a unified HCM system, the schedule forecasting options that support on-site employees can be a major benefit. These processes can adapt to the changing volumes of work and help you see who you'll need when and the maximum capacity you can currently handle. This will help you be strategic with the resources you have available, keep as many people employed as you can, and anticipate when to ramp back up to full volume quickly.

Take advantage of embedded reporting and charting.

In a crisis, we get so caught up in the moment that we don't have a chance to stop, breathe, and learn from what we're experiencing. HCM systems can make a huge difference here. They offer:

- **Embedded reporting and charting** capabilities for day-to-day tracking of your organization in real time

- **Predictive options** that give you clear, relevant areas in which to take proactive steps

- **Fully automated, AI-driven analytics** that look at your people data and predict things such as flight risk or fraudulent behaviors

The best thing is both the day-to-day reports and advanced AI insights are preconfigured to regularly deliver the latest information to you. This way, you can focus on your people's needs in the high-stress environments we're all navigating while also managing the key events taking place across your areas of responsibility.

Section 3: Employee Well-Being

Finally, let's take some time to focus on the area that matters most to HR professionals both on an individual and an organizational level — caring for and supporting the people who power their organizations. There are some broader, policy-level strategies that your HR technology can facilitate here.

Use analytics to create greater awareness.

Identifying things such as burnout, fatigue, flight risk, and other key issues using people analytics trends can have a broader strategic use than just arming managers with the tools they need for proactive conversations with employees. By comparing these trends against the general state of your organization, you can identify which areas present ongoing systemic issues or, conversely, which areas are moving in the right direction. Use your HR technology to build a case for organizationwide standards, policies, and initiatives that will really make a positive impact.

## Consider whether your current absence policies need to change.

Logistical gymnastics come with the territory during COVID-19, especially in the area of absence management. Are there different types of time off you hadn't considered before that may be worth formalizing, such as mental health days, days off to support sick family members, or additional bereavement time should it become necessary? If you've uncovered some new areas of employee need, your HCM system can help reflect those more permanently and automate the accruals and balancing needed to keep things accurate for your organization.

For example, ask yourself:

- Are there certain teams or roles showing consistently higher burnout or flight risk levels?

- Are there certain locations or managers who are doing an especially good job of supporting employees through the crisis and keeping them motivated?

- Have you seen any measurable effects on engagement or productivity levels of roles you've upskilled or reskilled?

- Can you see any consistent gaps in training or preparedness that need to be addressed in particular departments or locations? Are those gaps affecting employee well-being?

"**Today more than ever, employees expect their employer to provide them with financial stability** and want their earnings to be immediately accessible. An employee's ability to access money early, get paid correctly, and have visibility into pay information has been proven to strengthen the bond between the employer and employee."

Teresa Smith,
Senior HCM Strategy Consultant,
Kronos
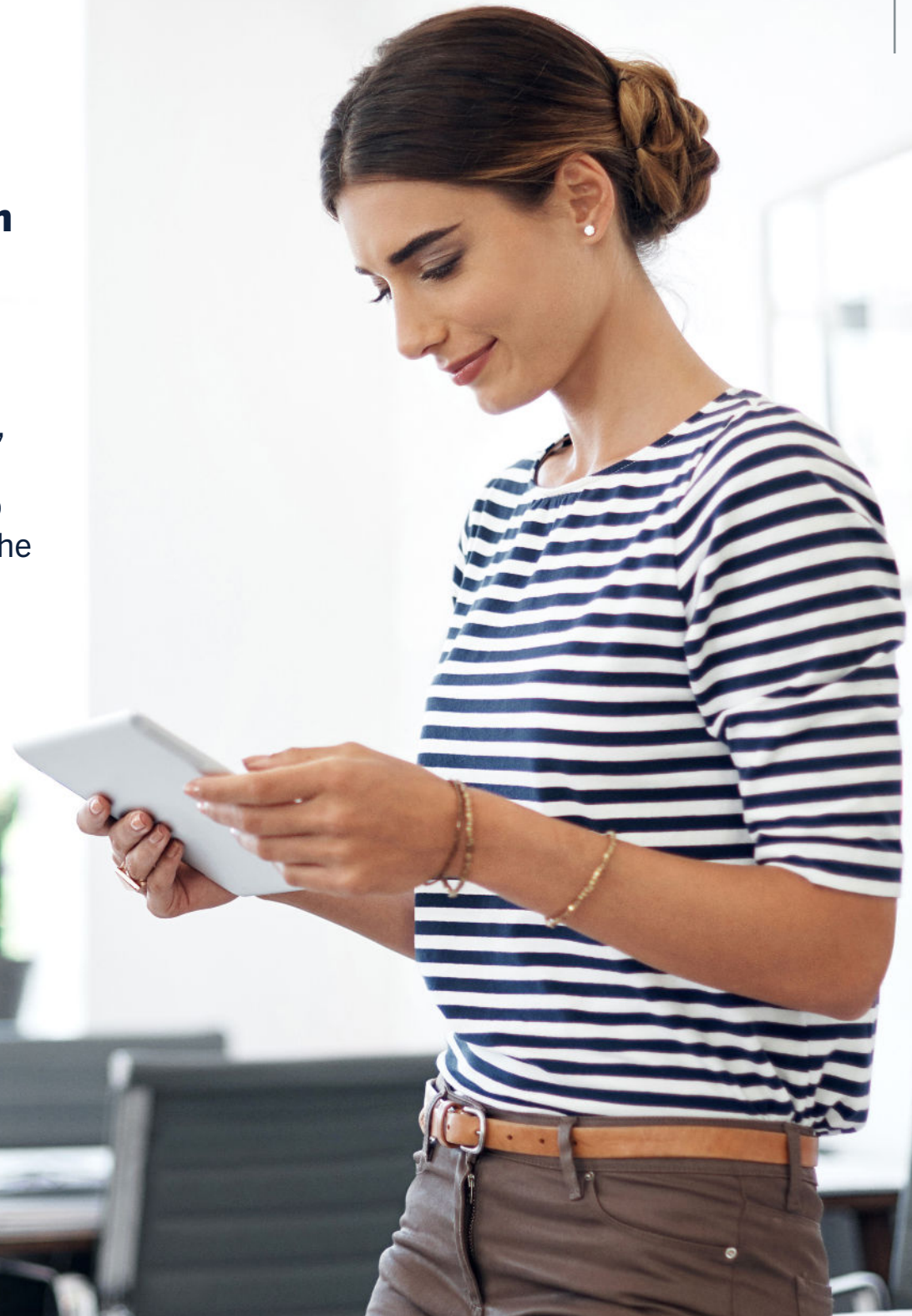
Further Employee Support Strategies

Take a deeper look at your payroll practices.

You already know how important it is to keep payroll on track during a crisis, especially in terms of quickly delivering pay to employees. But are there some broader policies you can implement based on the changes you've made in the moment? How can your compensation models be updated to more broadly reflect the kinds of recognition and assistance you're giving? Does it make sense to add some same-day pay or direct deposit options permanently?

✓ If your payroll crisis management has revealed gaps in house, you may want to consider enlisting payroll services options attached to your HCM system to lighten the load and make improvements. Payroll services can also take some of the worry about keeping up with the latest compliance standards off your shoulders.

Put employee resources front and center.

This crisis has highlighted a major area to reflect on at a wider HR level: how your organization approaches mental health and employee assistance. Here are some questions you want to make sure you can answer:

- Do you have the right mix of benefits in place to address your employees' needs?

- Have you connected them with low-cost or free resources that may help, even if you don't have a formal employee assistance program?

- Do you have clear protocols for automatically communicating around these resources?

If you want to make some of the employee support resources you've put in place during this crisis stick, an HCM system can be a big help. It can connect with third-party services for things such as mental health support and automatically make any deductions that might be needed for employees to opt in. If your resources are more informational, your system can also add links and alerts into communications or displays for easy employee access.

Even During Hard Times, We Learn Lessons We Can Take to the Future

At its very essence, HR is a role defined by hopefulness. It's about seeing the best in the people we work with, helping to get them through hardship, and putting the right policies in place to protect them. We must provide the structure for them to thrive in our workplaces and accomplish the organizational goals we've set for them.

This is why HR is so well positioned not only to excel in leading through a crisis, but also to take important learnings away from these situations. In this way, when we all start to pick up the pieces, we build something stronger based on what we've been through.

We sincerely thank the HR teams that are giving their all to help both on-site and remote employees navigate their way through and out of these uncertain times. We and the HR technology we provide are here to help in the ways we've discussed in this eBook and beyond.

If you'd like to discover more about what makes our HCM technology experience special, we invite you to get in touch with our team.

Contact us to learn more.

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