CLOUD-BASED HR FOR BUSINESS CONTINUITY

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What sort of role does tech play in supporting a business during a crisis? **Stephen Moore**, Head of Asia Pacific and Japan at Ceridian, outlines the case for cloud-based solutions to ensure continuity

**AT BOTH** an individual and operational level, business resilience and continuity have never been more important. Despite the many challenges faced by companies of all sizes and across many industries, there is still real cause for optimism. The trying circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic present an opportunity to embrace the power of technology-based solutions that can lead to quantifiable value. Our response to COVID-19 has highlighted the interconnected nature of the world and, more importantly, the need to protect and leverage that interconnectedness. Accordingly, businesses have been looking at increasingly innovative ways to deploy technologies that create experiences to keep staff engaged, while protecting external relationships.

**Moving beyond the premises**
Many of the discussions that have emerged as the pandemic moves on are not necessarily new but have taken on an increased urgency. Particularly crucial is the possibility of alternatives to traditional on-premises solutions. Business-critical functions such as HR and payroll are too important to be left to chance, and today cloud-based tech can simplify extremely complex HR and operational processes while also providing a broader base of data, analytical insights and machine learning to allow leaders to make smarter decisions.

The ability to centralise workforce data is the most obvious advantage of adopting contemporary data-driven human capital
management technology. Increased ease and decreased risk of refresh, and the ability to enable (or restrict) usage rights as necessary are increasingly critical. Data is a valuable weapon, but it’s also a vulnerability if not well protected. With cloud-based architecture in place it’s much easier to enable a variety of other solutions, such as real-time scheduling, training and reskilling, for example – all of which can be leveraged to better support business continuity.

In addition to the business benefits associated with these technologies is the unquestioned impact they have on the employee experience. This is increasingly important given the challenging times that remote employees are facing. While traditionally the focus of technological advancements was on customers, the importance of providing a positive employee experience has been overlooked. However, the ability to now provide a consumer-grade user experience via new HCM systems has the potential to reap significant benefits in areas such as job satisfaction, employee engagement and staff retention.

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Stephen Moore, Head of Asia Pacific and Japan, Ceridian

Access
Given the current need for a broadly distributed and remote workforce, employees need to be able to access essential information in an easy and efficient fashion. A cloud-based solution presents an obvious advantage, with employees being able to view and update consistently displayed relevant information across a range of mobile and fixed devices. Cloud-based software can enable global accessibility and real-time processing with no functional degradation across the entire user population.

Payroll
As an HR leader, your payroll solution is a crucial consideration when designing the overall employee experience. While it is undoubtedly an important part of a company’s financial and risk profile, it has most importantly the single biggest impact on employee engagement. If employees aren’t paid accurately or on time, there’s a definite knock-on effect for morale; you’re going to see a decrease in productivity and likely overall business performance.

Workplace leaders are already looking at payroll as an integral component of the overall employee value proposition; for evidence, we cite the 2019 EY Global Payroll Survey Report. One of the survey’s findings was that having a single employee record across payroll, rostering, performance, and beyond builds a better employee experience.
Scheduling and demand
Smaller (somewhat behind-the-scenes) payroll processes are not the only workplace benefit of new tech – nor should they be. In a time of pandemic, protecting the health and safety of the entire workforce at a more individual level must be at the top of every leader’s priority list. The ‘new normal’ is still very much in flux, but it’s clear that there’s a need for both a holistic view of workforce reform and more personalised approaches to determining and driving imperatives behind sustainable decision-making.

Centralised data paired with appropriate workforce management technology facilitates smarter decisions around rostering, leave, absence coverage, scheduling and overall employee availability. As companies contemplate the possibility of phasing back into the office or shop floor, they will need the right tools to be able to forecast staff demand and supply, and to roll out a staged return-to-work plan.

Digital learning
The opportunities that arise from continuous digital learning will also have a critical role to play in workplaces of the future, both in protecting business continuity and optimising day-to-day operations. Those companies that thrive will be ones that take a more considered and holistic approach to the process.

Learning experience platforms (LXPs) are a prime example of encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing, as they allow employees to publish, share and discuss learning content they find useful in a wider setting. They also enable employees to learn more quickly and efficiently, to retain knowledge better and value the experience.

Additionally, broader connections can be built across the business via collaborative technologies by employees who may not otherwise work with one another. For example, an employee might have a question – such as a nurse asking for an updated protocol or procedure. They can post it in an approved and credentialled forum and quickly get relevant answers to their questions.

Of course, technology isn’t the sole solution. HR must work to create an environment in which learning and aiding one another is the common mode rather than the exception, embedding it into the wider workplace culture. The business environment is constantly evolving, so your employees need to have a variety of core competencies in place, as well as the tools to acquire new skills. When you can clearly demonstrate how programs benefit employees as well as the business itself, HR leaders should promote this notion in anticipation of seeing an increased eagerness and uptake among staff.

Cloud solutions into the future
Looking ahead, it’s already evident that the full effects of the COVID-19 pandemic haven’t yet been felt. Economic and social costs will continue to be tallied for many years. Future, possibly unforeseen, implications are still likely as the situation continues to change. In this evolving business and economic climate, organisations need to focus on finding opportunities that drive value creation from the bottom up, that is via the workforce. Cloud-based solutions have already proven their operational value in the business space, but it’s increasingly evident that they are now essential to maintaining value through the provision and facilitation of enriched employee experiences. New benchmarks around organisational resiliency have emerged. With the right tools, tech, staff and attitude, there is plenty of potential for businesses to not just survive but thrive both now and into the future.

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