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The WCO would particularly like to acknowledge the insights and inputs from its Members and technical and development partners.\(^1\)

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Labels such as advanced, transition and developing are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgement about the state reached by a particular country or area in the development process. References to company names or commercial products do not imply endorsement by the WCO.

The final version of this guide\(^2\) is available on the WCO website. Excerpts from the report are allowed if all due references are provided. All intellectual and industrial property rights for the report belong to the WCO.

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1. Customs Administrations and Revenue Authorities: Abu Dhabi Customs, Canada Border Services Agency, Australia Department of Home Affairs, Federal Revenue of Brazil, Iceland Revenue and Customs, Qatar General Authority of Customs, Lesotho Revenue Authority, Liberia Revenue Authority, Peru – SUNAT, Philippines Bureau of Customs, Seychelles Revenue Commission, South African Revenue Service and State Customs Service of Ukraine.


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Foreword

Customs administrations have to constantly modernize with regular updates and upgrades to their operating models and working methods on account of their mandate and because their operating environment is full of complex interactions. Although strategies, systems, processes and tools are key, the driving force behind their performance is human capital.

The WCO spearheads a broad coalition of Customs administrations with specific knowledge, competencies and skills that are fully committed to meeting the productivity, efficiency and service quality needs of governments and trade operators. Their key characteristic is that they are people-centric – they take care of their employees and they value their happiness and well-being.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us, an adaptive workforce is a Customs administration's greatest asset. Officers in operational and support functions are the main contributors to business continuity and organizational resilience.

In an effort to build up the resilience of employees, human resource management and development (HRMD) professionals must shift away from inflexible and standardised approaches and adopt a personalised approach in which each employee is considered unique. To increase their organization’s resilience, HRMD priorities should now include: shaping staff behaviours through culture; redesigning processes with a focus on digitalization so that they are agile and relevant; building a humanistic-based leadership culture within the organization; upskilling and reskilling staff; and improving employee experiences.

Before the COVID-19 crisis, the WCO was prioritizing people management and development, convinced that only people can drive change, Customs reform and modernization programmes to build organizational resilience.

HRMD therefore constitutes a fundamental pillar of the WCO’s Organizational Development Package and the WCO’s Capacity Building Strategy embeds a people-centric approach, in which the human element is at the heart of activities. This thinking is reflected in the WCO theme for 2021, ‘Customs Bolstering Recovery, Renewal and Resilience for a Sustainable Supply Chain’. By putting people at the centre of change we can prepare for recovery by reinforcing collaboration, and for renewal by embracing advanced technologies.

This guide is part of the support provided by the WCO to its Members in the field of people management and development. It is especially aimed at executive and professional Customs human resource (HR) personnel, so that – with Customs executives – they can effectively lead the response to both current and future crises.

We invited administrations and organizations to discuss HR-related experiences, tools and practices that will inspire readers to create a work environment that enables people to grow professionally and to learn new skills – for the benefit of their organization, their nation and the global community.

I would like to encourage Directors General of Customs and HRMD professionals to use this guide as a reference in their human resource management (HRM) system to support their organization’s recovery and effectiveness.
# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation or Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADCA</td>
<td>Abu Dhabi Customs Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOC</td>
<td>Bureau of Customs, Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBSA</td>
<td>Canada Border Services Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRMD</td>
<td>human resource management and development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>information and communications technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>International Organization for Standardization</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISO/CS</td>
<td>ISO Central Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITC</td>
<td>International Trade Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITDD</td>
<td>Interim Training and Development Division, Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRA</td>
<td>Lesotho Revenue Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHS</td>
<td>occupational health and safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPE</td>
<td>personal protective equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>Seychelles Revenue Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VUCA</td>
<td>volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCO</td>
<td>World Customs Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that organizational resilience can be achieved through: robust emergency management programmes; sound business continuity plans; and increased use of modern and digital technologies. It has also highlighted that organizational resilience cannot be achieved without a well-managed, engaged and safe workforce.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, the World Customs Organization (WCO) had put the modernization of human resource management and development (HRMD) at the top of its agenda, to support its Members in optimizing their performance through their human capital.

HRMD is a key support function within Customs administrations that can add value to the organization through fulfilment of its main tasks. Now, more than ever, HRMD professionals are being called upon to provide innovative and practical responses to emerging trade, security and health challenges. They can actively influence the adaptive capabilities of their workforce by repositioning their contribution and ensuring that their recommendations are aligned with corporate strategic priorities. HRMD professionals can act as strategic positioners, credible activists and paradox navigators in their administrations and should make use of the available tools and assistance programmes to that end.

In recognition of the critical importance of human capital and HRMD to Customs performance and organizational resilience, the WCO has produced this practical guidance on key factors that will help administrations to effectively manage human resources in times of crisis in a Customs environment.

This guide has been developed through rigorous research, a literature review, structured interviews, expert focus groups and survey data analytics. While the research focused on Customs administrations from across the WCO membership, recognised leaders in HR and emergency management from international organizations, the private sector and academia were also interviewed. This captured a broad range of perspectives and innovative and meaningful solutions and practices that can be replicated in a Customs environment.

Based on the analysis, the WCO identified guiding principles and recommended practices organised under seven HR focus areas:

1. Leading and communicating in times of crisis
2. HR business continuity in times of crisis
3. Work design in times of crisis
4. Staff safety, well-being and resilience
5. Learning and development in times of crisis
6. Managing individuals, teams and performance in times of crisis
7. Preparing for the post-COVID 19 world, embracing HR 4.0.

An overview of the guiding principles is presented in Table 1.

The Guide has been divided into five main sections:

- **Section I – ‘Introduction’**, presents the importance of organizational and staff resilience, the purpose of the Guide and the methodology used to develop it
- **Section II – ‘Main Findings’**, focuses on the activities undertaken and principle outcomes that informed the formulation of the guiding principles, the recommended practices and the case stories as presented in Section III
- **Section III – ‘Seven Focus Areas for HR Effectiveness in Times of Crisis’**, identifies and describes the guiding principles for effective HRM in times of crisis; supplemented by recommended practices and case stories
- **Section IV – ‘Conclusion’**, highlights the key messages
- **Section V – ‘Annexes’**, contains a summary of the focus areas, guiding principles and key recommendations, and a bibliography.

While the Guide has been developed primarily for the benefit of WCO Members, it is hoped that the content will also prove useful to non-WCO members, private sector operators, academic organizations and development partners in organisational resilience and HRM modernisation, wherever they operate.

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1. The case stories are based on documents available in the public domain and on documents provided by country or organization representatives. Where possible, interviews were also undertaken with country representatives and the case stories vetted by that country or organization.
### Guiding principles

**HR: Acting as a leader in times of crisis (leading and communicating)**

1.1 Ensure that a humanistic-based, people-centred, leadership culture is established within the organization.

1.2 Ensure that HR embraces its strategic partner role by providing timely and effective solutions to complex problems/crisis.

1.3 Ensure that HR is communicating effectively with staff and relevant stakeholders during a crisis.

**HR: Business continuity in times of crisis**

2.1 Ensure that HR is a key actor/influencer within the organizational structure in charge of emergency management and business continuity, to guarantee that disaster recovery and business continuity plans also include the human aspect of crises.

2.2 Ensure that the HR service also manages its own continuity and has a business continuity plan.

**HR: Work design in times of crisis**

3.1 Ensure the optimization of the organizational structure in times of crisis to facilitate the delivery of operations/services, including the establishment of core competencies teams/structures benefiting from more autonomy and decision-making authority.

3.2 Ensure an effective transition to remote working modalities and facilities.

3.3 Ensure that the workplace adapts to the ‘new normal’ and that the workforce transitions to the new nature of work.

**HR: Keeping staff and clients safe and healthy in times of crisis and building staff resilience**

4.1 Ensure that the workplace has been adapted to respond effectively to the crisis at hand and to protect the safety of staff, clients and partners.

4.2 Ensure that support, including psychological support, is provided to staff in times of crisis.

4.3 Protect the safety of employees and clients at all times through the development and implementation of occupational health and safety standards.

4.4 Ensure that staff well-being is a core principle of the organization and that a staff well-being culture is effectively embedded to support employees in their performance at all times.

**HR: Learning and development in times of crisis**

5.1 Ensure the continuity of learning and development services.

5.2 Prioritize reskilling and upskilling activities to equip staff with the necessary skills to ensure the organization’s service continuity.

**HR: Managing teams, individuals and performance in times of crisis**

6.1 Ensure that teams and individuals are managed effectively during a crisis.

6.2 Ensure that managers are equipped to manage teams and individuals during a crisis.

**HR: Preparing for the post-crisis environment and embracing HR 4.0**

7.1 Ensure that the full impact of the crisis on the organization’s operations is assessed and that future work trends are considered.

7.2 Ensure that the HR strategy is agile and adapts seamlessly to the post-crisis environment.

7.3 Ensure that HR policies, processes and systems meet the (new) demands of the post-crisis environment.

Table 1: The guiding principles under the seven HR focus areas
Section I

INTRODUCTION
If one word could sum up the period that spanned the beginning of the devastating COVID-19 pandemic and ended with the widespread distribution of vaccines to resist its deadly mutations, that word might be resilience. Governments the world over – with the exception of those few island states that maintained zero COVID cases throughout – rushed to procure personal protective equipment (PPE), oxygen and other medical supplies to improve the resilience of frontline workers and vulnerable citizens alike. Customs administrations simultaneously endeavoured to bolster the resilience of their operations amid widespread disruption and fear, while also fulfilling their mission to facilitate the movement of goods and maintaining adequate enforcement to safeguard consumer health and safety. Amid the panic and ignorance that surrounded the origins and prognosis of the virus, there was one certainty: organizations would need to amplify their resilience.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, human resource (HR) professionals were facing a tidal wave of change; many chose to embrace it and were in the vanguard of those changes, while others looked on from the sidelines, eager to assess the potential risks and implications first. The pace of change is often dictated by crises, and COVID-19 presented equal parts threat and opportunity for those organizations that proved adept enough to foster resilience within their operations and among their employees. After more than a year of global disruption, change in the HR arena is now a foregone conclusion; the ways in which organizations respond to these changes will set them apart.

The WCO houses a broad coalition of Members representing widely different levels of development, but every Member has faced both singular and shared challenges during the pandemic and in its aftermath. The WCO Secretariat has tracked the path of the pandemic and accompanied Members in their quest to build resilience and to respond to the unprecedented challenges. By monitoring best practices espoused by large private sector organizations, the Secretariat endeavoured to disseminate these and other useful tools among its Members, responding to – and preempting requests from – Members keen to understand and implement contemporary HRM principles.

COVID-19 provided a canvas and a genesis for this Guide, although, given the pace of change in the field of international HRM, it was inevitable that a similar resource to assist Customs administrations would have been produced. This Guide is an overview of changes witnessed thus far and changes that are predicted. Seven focus areas were identified as key components of best HRM practice. Many, such as the seventh, ‘Preparing for the post-crisis environment’, are directly related to the pandemic, while others are less specific, such as the fifth, ‘Learning and development in times of crisis’, and offer guidance for those administrations keen to attract, and retain, the best talent. Each focus area is explored in depth, with analyses from contemporary HR experts and Member testimonies, to ground the theory in the reality of Customs administrations.

A. BACKGROUND

i. The critical role of Customs in times of crisis


As a key player in business and trade, Customs administrations are tasked with collecting revenue on behalf of their governments, with facilitating and expediting the movement of relief and essential goods and with ensuring the stability and continuity of global supply chains, thus minimizing disruption to economies and societies. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the need for Customs to become agile and resilient organizations to ensure that they meet their mandates and objectives, even in times of crisis.

Building on existing instruments (such as Annex J5 of the Revised Kyoto Convention) and cooperation with key international organizations and stakeholders involved in emergency and relief management, the World Customs Organization (WCO) reacted promptly to the challenges faced by its Members and began compiling key tools and instruments, which can be consulted on the WCO webpage dedicated to the COVID-19 response.

This Guide supplements the existing suite of WCO tools and instruments by focusing on arguably the most critical asset of any Customs administration, its human resources.
ii. Organizational resilience and agility are key to crisis response

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted how important it is for public and private organizations to be resilient by relying on robust emergency and business continuity management systems and procedures. For Customs administrations, the need for business continuity was particularly important to ensure the smooth flow of emergency and relief goods, as well as basic goods.

Many Customs administrations had already fast-tracked their digitalization processes but they now had to re-imagine and re-invent their working procedures and workspaces. This work (re)design was necessary not only to facilitate the delivery of Customs services but also to ensure the safety of both Customs staff and stakeholders. If new working modalities are to be effective, they need to be supplemented by targeted actions to (i) ensure staff well-being and (ii) build staff resilience.

Consequently, and to enhance their preparedness to manage crises, it is critical for Customs administrations not only to build their organizational agility and resilience through robust and sound emergency management and business continuity systems/plans, but also to invest resources (including time) to ensure staff well-being and resilience; 'strong people, strong organizations'.

iii. People-centric solutions are key to effective crises and post-crises environment management

Customs administrations have to constantly modernize with regular updates and upgrades to their operating models and working methods on account of their missions, and because their operating environment is full of complex interactions. Although strategies, systems, processes and tools are key, the driving force behind their performance is human capital.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us, an adaptive workforce is a Customs administration’s greatest asset. Officers in operational and support functions are the main contributors to business continuity and organizational resilience.

The WCO has been promoting a vision of Customs as a coherent and highly professional body with unique operating models, and which consists of committed individuals who share specific and graduated knowledge, skills and attitudes, and who are competent to respond to today’s economic and social challenges. A key characteristic of such an organization is that it is people-centric, it takes care of its employees and values their happiness and well-being.

The challenge is to ensure that Customs administrations have the right person in the right job at the right time. Just some of the strategic issues that must be addressed by HR) departments are: attracting talented people; enabling employees to gain new skills and to advance their careers; ensuring that there is a free flow of information between staff at all levels of the organization; aligning their performance and behaviour with the administration’s missions and values; proactively shaping the future workforce; and retaining top performers. As the current health crisis reminds us, HR departments play a critical strategic role in coping with disruption to services. HRMD professionals are well placed to understand the impact that challenging times are likely to have on Customs human capital personnel and professional lives and how they might influence their engagement and performance at work.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many HRMD professionals operating in Customs administrations have had to act within a very short timeframe, often relying on scarce data and having to make decisions without the benefit of lessons learned and best practice examples from a pandemic response. However, this has been an opportunity for Customs HRMD professionals to shift away from inflexible and standardized approaches and to adopt a personalized approach in which each employee is considered unique. Therefore, HRMD department priorities should now include the redesigning of HRM processes, with a focus on digitalization, to ensure that they are agile and relevant. They should particularly enhance:

1. work design and organization
2. staff resilience and development
3. staff engagement and performance
4. and building a human-centred leadership culture within the organization.

The WCO’s own Capacity Building Strategy embeds a people-centric approach, in which the human element is at the heart of all actions. The principle of its capacity building programmes is that people development and investment in Customs professionalism are the foundations for successful Customs reform and modernization, including implementation of measures contained in the World Trade Organization
Trade Facilitation Agreement. Without investment in people and Customs professionalism, reform and modernization efforts cannot succeed.

From the outset, it should be noted that the role of HRMD professionals in modern-day Customs administrations has changed profoundly to accommodate developments and needs in the workplace. Figure 1 illustrates the WCO Capacity Building HRM Value Chain. The WCO promotes the adoption of a systematic multi-layered approach to organizational development and people management. It articulates horizontal stakes (such as integrity, performance management and measurement), lifelong learning and a wide range of HR technical challenges (including succession planning, delegation and empowerment of people, reward-based systems, recruitment policies, identification of talents and rotation policies).

Figure 1: WCO Capacity Building HRM Value Chain

B. PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

i. Rationale

As the resumption of business operations continues alongside the deployment of vaccines, a narrative is emerging about the role that many chief HR officers assumed during the crisis. What was fundamentally a human crisis demanded a human and humane response, which ushered in a new era for employees and HR professionals, one in which their importance was recognized and elevated. The pandemic has unveiled the importance of a well-functioning HR unit, with employee engagement a critical linchpin of organizational success. Most Customs administrations experienced challenges during the initial 18 months of the pandemic, and many sought guidance from the WCO on international HR best practice to address employee disengagement. This guide aims to equip Members with an overview of best practice in times of crisis and provides a blueprint for administrations to foster resilience in a post-crisis environment.

Please note that this Guide can only encourage its readers to apply its guiding principles and key recommendations. Indeed, there is no golden rule or one-size-fits-all approach to HR solutions, there are only recognized factors that can contribute to Customs’ success in managing crises. Therefore, the content of this Guide must be used, tailored and adapted to the realities and context of each country for maximum impact.

ii. Guide objectives

• The overall objective is to contribute to strengthening the organizational resilience and agility of WCO Members to better respond and manage emergencies/crisis
• The specific objective is to provide WCO Members and relevant partners with innovative HR guidance and solutions to effectively respond to crises and ease into the post-crisis environment.

This guide also complements efforts to increase awareness on ‘HR in times of crisis’ and existing
literature on Customs’ organizational resilience and HR reform, including the WCO guide to implementing competency-based human resource management in a Customs environment. The solutions and guidance are presented in terms of guiding principles and key recommendations and are structured according to seven key HR effectiveness areas.

iii. Target audience

This guide has been developed primarily for WCO Members and specifically for top management, HR executives and practitioners, but it will also be useful for a wider audience, including:

- other governmental agencies/officials (e.g. civil service, ministries of finance, agriculture, transport and bureau of standards);
- private-sector operators (e.g. traders, trade associations, and trade-related service providers such as carriers, transporters, Customs brokers, freight forwarders, HR and management consultancies);
- academic and research institutions and think-tanks;
- regional economic communities and Customs unions;
- international organizations, relevant development partners (e.g. African Tax Administrations Forum, International Chamber of Commerce, International Monetary Fund, International Trade Centre, UNCTAD, World Bank Group and World Trade Organization); and
- other voluntary initiatives that assist WCO Members’ efforts to build organizational resilience and agility and to modernize HR management.

C. METHODOLOGY

For this to serve as a practical guide for the design and operationalization of HR solutions, rather than being a static compilation of practices, the following key activities were undertaken:

i. Desk research

This activity identified the key challenges faced by HR services in public and private organizations in times of crisis and recognized common success factors. The literature review focused on the following key WCO documents:

- WCO Capacity-Building Compendium;
- WCO Capacity-Building Committee (CBC) papers and documents (CBC 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021);
- WCO Customs Diagnostic Framework and People Development Assessment Tool;
- WCO Framework of Principles and Practices on Customs Professionalism;
- WCO Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool;
- WCO Resolution on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs;
- Outcomes and documents from WCO Global HRM Conference and two regional HRM Conferences (2021);
- WCO Guide to Implementing Competency-Based HRM in a Customs Administration Environment;
- WCO Revised Kyoto Convention, Annex J, Chapter 5 on Guidelines on Relief Consignments;
- WCO Resolution on the Role of Customs in Natural Disaster Relief;
- WCO Resolution on the Role of Customs in facilitating the cross-border movement of situationally critical medicines and vaccines;
- WCO Guidance on how to communicate in times of crisis; and
- WCO resource page on COVID-19, including guidance and Member practices.

ii. Survey and interviews

To collect further data and information on good practices, a survey was designed around seven focus areas for HR effectiveness (see Section III). It also incorporated the main priorities for HR modernization efforts in the wake of COVID-19. The survey was accessible online in English and French via a well-known survey platform.

The survey was shared with WCO Members during the WCO Global Webinar on HR in Times of Crisis, in
January 2021. The survey had 200 respondents across all WCO regional groupings.

To consolidate and refine the survey findings, structured and focused interviews were undertaken with selected WCO Members across the six regional groups and also with various representatives from the private sector and international organizations.

iii. Design and development

The guide aims to provide practical guidance to WCO Members on the design and operation of effective and innovative HR solutions and practices to help them navigate through a crisis and to prepare for the post-crisis environment. The findings are set out in Section II as:

- **Guiding principles**: to be considered as strongly recommended measures that are recognised as critical (must have/do).
- **Key actions and recommendations**: recognised good practice, the widest possible application of which is considered as desirable, especially to implement the proposed guiding principles.

iv. Seven focus areas for HR effectiveness

The HR department of a Customs administration is critical to ensuring its optimal functioning, and never more so than during a crisis, when administrations are expected to deliver on strategic goals to fulfil their mission of facilitating the movement of goods and ensuring compliance with regulatory and safety norms.

The overarching framework of this Guide is service effectiveness and the performance of Customs administrations’ HR departments in times of crisis, which is critical for long-term value and performance sustainability. The main questions answered by the Guide are:

- What is the role of HR in supporting the organization’s performance during times of crisis?
- What are the critical factors and ingredients for HR effectiveness during times of crisis?

During the development of this Guide, seven focus areas for HR effectiveness (Figure 2) in times of crisis were identified. They are outlined below and presented in greater detail in Section III.

**Focus area 1: HR acting as a leader in times of crisis (leading and communicating)**

In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, the presence (virtual or otherwise) and visibility of leadership is crucial, as is their ability to communicate succinctly and reassuringly with employees and stakeholders. This area explores the role of leaders and HR departments during crises and charts the evolution of the modern HR function – from a largely administrative entity to the strategic heart of any organization.

**Focus area 2: HR business continuity in times of crisis**

Business continuity in the Customs context is vital for all governments concerned with the safety of citizens and the rapid distribution of relief goods, PPE and vaccines, among other things. Customs, as the frontline agency charged with the facilitation of this distribution and the enforcement of safety protocols, must maintain a viable business continuity plan during non-crisis times and deploy it during crises to ensure the organization is able to function at a minimum level at all times.

**Focus area 3: work design in times of crisis**

Certain features of the working environment will inevitably be impacted by a crisis, resulting in changes to the work design that could threaten day-to-day operations. The most salient change that has resulted from COVID-19 was the sudden shift to remote working, seemingly a more permanent feature of ‘new’ work design as employees demand increased flexibility.

**Focus area 4: keeping staff and clients safe and healthy in times of crisis and building staff resilience**

Following the pandemic, the health and safety of employees was foremost in the minds of all organizations, and their protection trumped most other concerns. Even if HR departments were not involved in developing health and safety protocols, they were almost certainly involved in their implementation, ensuring that employees were adequately protected and that measures aligned with national (governmental) and international (WHO) guidelines.

**Focus area 5: learning and development in times of crisis**

The learning and development function of an organization could so easily be overlooked during times of crisis; however, as research has shown and best practice reveals, employees require training for personal fulfilment (an important component of the employee value proposition), and, more importantly,
to ensure that organizational needs are met. HR teams explored novel ways to ensure the sustainability of training curricula and to match in-house talent with job profiles by examining skill adjacencies.

Focus area 6: HR managing teams, individuals and performance

HR departments are required to focus on employee engagement strategies for a broad span of employees, including managers, whose roles in periods of crisis cannot be overlooked. This area explores ways to support managers during times of crisis, ensuring that they are not overburdened and understand the importance of maintaining employee morale. HR teams must also capitalize on new technologies to better manage individuals and to ensure optimal performance.

Focus area 7: preparing for the post-crisis environment and embracing HR 4.0

Embracing the ‘new normal’ could prove a difficult task for those organizations committed to old ways of working, but organizations must prepare for a post-COVID working environment in which employees are take centre stage.

Figure 2: Seven focus areas for HR effectiveness

HR Focus Areas

1. Leading and communicating
2. HR business continuity in times of crisis
3. Work design
4. Health, safety and staff resilience
5. Learning and development
6. Managing individuals, teams and performance
7. Preparing for the post-crisis environment and embracing HR 4.0
Section II

RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS
A. METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in Section I, the Guide was developed from:

- **a literature review** to identify challenges faced by Customs administrations and solutions to HR management in times of crisis. The review focused on the WCO’s existing literature and tools for HR and emergency management. It also examined literature and tools from other organizations and researchers, including the Boston Consulting Group, David Ulrich, Deloitte, EI Design, the European Union, Gartner, Harvard Business Review, the International Labour Organization, International Standards Organization, The Learning Guild, LinkedIn, McKinsey & Company, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and the World Economic Forum;

- **an online survey** conducted at the WCO Global Conference on ‘Managing HR in times of crisis and beyond’, from 19 to 21 January 2021, which enabled the WCO to identify Members’ priorities and interests related to HR in times of crisis. The 23-question survey was presented to WCO Members in English and French.

The survey recorded inputs from 200 respondents across 183 WCO Members, with a diverse spectrum of opinion. The profile of the respondents was:

- **Regional distribution**
  - Almost half of respondents (about 43%) came from Customs administrations in the Americas and the Caribbean region (21.88%) and the East and Southern Africa region (21.25%)
  - 18.75% came from the Asia/Pacific region
  - 17.50% from the West and Central Africa region
  - 17.50% from the Europe region
  - 5% from the North of Africa, Near and Middle East Region

- **Managerial profile**,
  - 71% of respondents indicated that they held a managerial position within their Customs administrations:
    - 5% from top management – commissioners or Directors General
    - 19% from senior management
  - 47% from middle management;

- **Gender distribution**
  - 51.88% of the respondents identified as men and 48.12% as women.

- **Structured and focused interviews** were undertaken with selected WCO Members across the six WCO regions and also with various representatives from the private sector and international organizations to refine and consolidate the findings acquired through the survey. The interviews tackled particular issues or best practices from a 'lessons learned' perspective (e.g. work design and remote team management challenges) and from an 'inspirational' perspective (e.g. digitalization of working procedures and leading in times of crisis). The target WCO Members were selected from the six WCO regions (Americas, Asia/Pacific, East and Southern Africa, Europe, North of Africa, Near and Middle East, and West and Central Africa) and from different levels of economic development (advanced economies, transition economies and developing economies) to ensure the broadest diversity of perspective and an overview of the challenges faced and practices applied by WCO Members.

- **Consultations and interviews** were also held with WCO-accredited experts in the area of HRM and with recognised leaders in the area of HRM and emergency management from international organizations and the private sector. This ensured that a wide range of innovative and meaningful solutions and practices were captured and outlined so that Members could attempt to replicate such practices in a Customs environment.

This combination of desk research, feedback from Members on the ground in the form of case stories and other testimonies, and best practice from top private-sector firms and international organizations has resulted in the compilation of a practical tool for Members seeking to better manage their HR in times of crisis.

B. MAIN FINDINGS

The survey revealed that 53% of respondents considered that COVID-19 severely impacted their Customs administration’s ability to deliver its mission and operations. More than 40% of respondents also reported dissatisfaction with their organization’s overall response to the crisis. The picture got bleaker when respondents were asked to assess the performance of their HR services/units during the crisis. More than half considered this was poor
or very poor. This requires urgent attention on the part of leadership and HR teams across Customs administrations. This guide has been developed as a resource for WCO Member HR departments and management looking to improve their services and keep pace with the accelerated rate of change in the field of human resource and emergency management.

Communication is also an aspect that requires improvement, according to the survey results. More than three-quarters of respondents either disagreed or were neutral about the statement ‘I felt well informed, supported and managed by my organization during the COVID-19 crisis’. A myriad problems underpin this negative response, but more transparent, regular and detailed communication would offset much of the isolation felt by these employees during periods of crisis.

A striking feature of the responses received was the belief among over half of respondents that Customs HR departments were unable to develop and implement a business continuity plan. Customs administrations must demonstrate their commitment to business continuity by articulating their needs in a plan and the implementation procedures must be clearly understood by staff at all levels. This also applies to HR, whose services/units should have their own business continuity plans. HR departments should also build their capacity to contribute meaningfully to their organization’s emergency management programme and to the development of other services’ business continuity plans.

An important feature of the WCO survey was the level to which respondents appeared to be satisfied with the new working modalities adopted during the COVID crisis. Over 80% reported feeling slightly to completely satisfied with the new arrangements, which could inform Customs administrations’ HR policies in a post-COVID world. Will employees demand a hybrid work schedule? Will Customs administrations require as much office space as in the past? Will allowing employees to work from home enable HR departments to embrace a more diverse pool of employees, for example, those unable to commit to commuting to an office?

On another positive note, almost 85% of respondents were slightly, moderately or very satisfied with the measures adopted by their administration to ensure their safety during the crisis. This is an important statistic as it shows that, despite the numerous challenges Customs administrations faced, they prioritized the safety aspects of their contract with their employees, thus helping to maintain staff satisfaction and enabling them to harness that goodwill during the post-crisis period. More than half of respondents (57%) were also looking for more infrastructure investment to be made to ensure their well-being at work.

The majority of respondents (56%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that their administration was able to effectively build staff resilience during the COVID-19 crisis. This demonstrates that Customs administrations need to devote more attention and resources to building up staff resilience.

Staff reskilling and upskilling in times of crisis is critical and many Customs administrations and HR departments faced challenges during the COVID crisis with respect to planning and managing learning and development activities. The survey asked whether the respondent’s organization was able to effectively plan and deliver human capital/competencies development services during the COVID-19 crisis. While 31% strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, 44% strongly disagreed or disagreed with it. Now more than ever, HR management and development departments should review their learning and development operating models. They should also embrace hybrid approaches that combine e-learning, virtual training environments and face-to-face/classroom training.

Customs administration crisis planning should focus on future-proofing the learning and development area to ensure that prolonged crises do not also adversely impact employee engagement and staff retention.

The COVID-19 crisis required many organizations and managers to manage the performance of their departments, units and teams remotely, which was not necessarily a smooth shift. Indeed, 61% of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement that their organization was able to effectively manage teams and staff performance remotely during the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, 60% were either slightly satisfied or not satisfied at all with the management and performance measures taken by their direct line manager.

This research corresponded largely with recent modernization trends observed in international, public and private-sector organizations. Asked which main HR modernization areas their administration should focus on to better address current and future crises, most interviewees and WCO Member respondents identified four top priority areas mid-or post-pandemic: (i) leadership and organizational culture, (ii) competency and talent development (including upskilling and reskilling), (iii) staff resilience and well-
being at work, and (iv) organizational/work design and change management.

Finally, an interesting supplementary result from the survey and further interviews was the desire among many WCO Members to embrace a new HR operating model. Indeed, when asked to select the most relevant HR roles (as defined by David Ulrich, 2016) in the COVID-19 and post-COVID 19 environment, most survey respondents and interviewees identified strategic positioner, culture and change champion, and human capital curator among the top roles, thereby acknowledging the broadened remit of the HR function in any Customs administration that goes beyond its traditional functions.
C. DETAILED ANALYSIS

Q1: Please specify the regional location of your organization

Respondents were asked to indicate the geographic location of their daily workplace by selecting one of the six WCO regions. The distribution is as follows: Almost half of the respondents (about 44%) are from both the Americas and Caribbean as well as the East and Southern Africa regions, 18.75% indicated Asia/Pacific. Respondents from West and Central Africa represent 17.50%, followed by Europe with 15.62% and finally North Africa, Near and Middle East with 5%.

Q2: Please specify your position within your organization

Survey respondents were typically senior or top management officials. Accordingly, 71% of respondents hold a managerial position within their Customs administration (5% from top management - Commissioners or Directors General, 19% are senior managers and 47% are middle managers). 29% of respondents did not hold a managerial position.
Q3: Please specify your gender

There is gender equity in the profile of respondents, as 51.88% of the respondents are men and 48.12% are women.

Q4: Please assess the level of impact of COVID-19 on your organization’s ability to deliver its mandate and operations (i.e.: clearance of goods and passengers)

It is clear from the responses that the COVID-19 crisis has had a considerable impact on Customs operations and service delivery. Consequently, 78% of respondents considered that COVID-19 has severely or moderately impacted Customs’ activities and operations. On the other hand, only 20% of respondents indicated that the impact was mild or very mild.
Q5: Please assess the overall response of your organization to the COVID-19 situation

**Figure 7: Organization’s responses to the COVID-19 situation**

40% of respondents believe that the management of the response to the crisis has been poor or very poor. Conversely, only 25% considered the management of the crisis to be fair, while 35% felt that their organization has managed the response to the crisis well or very well.

Q6: Please assess the overall response of your organization’s HR services to the COVID-19 situation

**Figure 8: Staff feelings about on the level of support provided by their organization**

As can be seen from the response of the participants, the COVID-19 crisis has had a considerable impact on Customs HR services. Respondents indicated that 38% considered HR services’ response to the crisis to be poor and 15% very poor.
Q7: As an employee, I felt well informed, supported and managed by my organization during the COVID-19 crisis

![Pie chart showing responses to Q7]

15% of respondents agreed and 12% strongly agreed that they have been well informed, managed and supported by their organization during the COVID-19 crisis. However, more than half of participants, i.e. 52% of the respondents (35% disagree and 17% strongly disagree) felt that they have not received any support from the organization, which suggests that the human side of the Customs administrations has been neglected. In addition, these numbers demonstrate how the absence of a communication plan to effectively communicate with staff can be detrimental.

Q8: My organization prepares and equips its top management and senior managers lead the organization during emergencies and crisis situations

![Pie chart showing responses to Q8]

As can be seen from the responses, the COVID-19 crisis has had a considerable impact on Customs top management and senior managers. The chart above illustrates that 29% of respondents agree and strongly agree that their organization prepares and equips its top management and senior managers to lead the organization during emergencies and crisis situations. On the other hand, 36% disagree and 15% strongly disagree while 20% neither agree nor disagree.

This confirms that there is an urgent need for Customs administrations and governments to consider enabling staff of all categories with relevant competencies to effectively lead their administrations through crises and beyond.
Q9: Please assess your level of satisfaction with the leadership provided by your top management and senior managers during the COVID-19 situation

Figure 11: Level of satisfaction with the leadership provided by top management and senior managers

As is illustrated in the above bar chart, 25% of respondents have been very satisfied or completely satisfied with the leadership provided by top management during the COVID-19 crisis. However, 58% of respondents are slightly and moderately satisfied, while 17% were not satisfied at all. This low satisfaction rate demonstrates an urgent need to develop leadership competencies within Customs administrations.

Q10: My organization’s HR service is able to develop and implement a people continuity plan.

Figure 12: HR people continuity plan

The above chart illustrates a need for Customs’ HRM professionals to be proactive in developing and implementing a business continuity plan. Almost half of respondents (49%) disagree or strongly disagree that a business continuity plan exists, while only 31% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organization’s HR service was able to develop and implement a business continuity plan.
Q11: The HRM department was able to effectively (re)organize work during the COVID-19 crisis

Figure 13: Work organization

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the HRM department was able to effectively reorganize work during the COVID-19 crisis to which they responded as follows: 19% agreed and 14% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 35% of respondents disagreed and 20% neither agreed nor disagreed, while 12% strongly disagreed. These results reveal a need for Customs administrations to be more agile and to review their structures to become more agility and flexible.

Q12: Please assess your level of satisfaction with the (re)organization of your work during the COVID-19 crisis (teleworking, hybrid model...)

Figure 14: Level of satisfaction with the work organization and design

The chart shows the level of staff satisfaction with measures taken by the HRM department to (re)organize work modalities during the Covid-19 crisis by implementing teleworking, in-person or hybrid models. 28% of respondents felt satisfied or very satisfied, while 52% of respondents were slightly or not satisfied with the way the HRM department managed the organization of work.
Q13: My organization was able to effectively ensure staff and clients'/users' safety (social distancing, work rotation, provision of self-protection equipment, sanitizing gel...) and well-being during the COVID-19 crisis?

![Pie chart showing responses]

The above pie chart shows the extent to which the organization was able to effectively ensure staff and clients'/users' safety. 20% of respondents agreed and 12% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 36% of respondents disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed, while 17% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Up to 50% of respondents felt that their Customs administration did not take appropriate measures to keep staff and clients safe by securing the workplace. This would have resulted in an impact on service continuity and Customs' operations.

Q14: Please assess your level of satisfaction with the measures taken by your HR services to ensure your safety and well-being during the COVID-19 crisis

![Bar chart showing responses]

10% of respondents were very satisfied and 8% completely satisfied with the measures undertaken by HR to ensure their safety and well-being during the COVID-19 crisis. On the other hand, 40% were slightly satisfied, 17% not satisfied at all and 25% moderately satisfied. More than the half of respondents (57%) are looking for more investments to be made by senior management to ensure their well-being at work.
Q15: My organization was able to effectively build staff resilience during the COVID-19 situation

![Pie chart showing responses to Q15]

Figure 17: Staff resilience

Almost half (41%) of respondents disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed with the above statement, and 15% of the respondents agreed and 9% strongly agreed. On the other hand, 20% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. More than 56% of respondents felt that staff resilience was not a priority in their administration.

Q16: Please assess your level of satisfaction with the measures taken by your HR services to build your resilience during the COVID-19 crisis

![Bar chart showing responses to Q16]

Figure 18: Level of satisfaction with the staff resilience measures

The graph shows the level of satisfaction with the measures taken by HR services to build staff resilience during the COVID-19 crisis, to which 12% of respondents reported being very satisfied and 6% completely satisfied. However, 54% of respondents were slightly or unsatisfied, while 28% were moderately satisfied.
Q17: My organization was able to effectively manage teams and staff performance remotely - being during the COVID-19 crisis

![Pie chart showing responses to Q17.]

**Figure 19: Remote staff performance management**

42% of respondents disagreed and 19% strongly disagreed with the above. On the other hand, only 19% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed while 20% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Q18: Please assess your level of satisfaction with the measures taken by your department/line manager to manage you and your performance during the COVID-19 crisis

![Bar chart showing responses to Q18.]

**Figure 20: Level of satisfaction with the staff performance measures**

The chart showed a high level of dissatisfaction regarding the staff performance management policy. As is clear from the above bar chart, that 60% of respondents were slightly or not satisfied at all with the measures taken by their department for managing their performance during the COVID-19 crisis. However, only 21% of the respondents felt very or completely satisfied, while 19% reported being moderately satisfied.
Q19: My organization was able to effectively plan and deliver human capital development/competencies development services during the COVID-19 crisis

![Pie chart showing responses to Q19](chart.png)

**Figure 21: Staff competencies development services**

Respondents were asked whether their organization was able to effectively plan and deliver human capital/competencies development services during the COVID-19 crisis to which they replied as follows: 19% agreed and 12% strongly agreed, 30% disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed, while 25% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Q20: Please assess your level of satisfaction with the measures taken by your HR services to ensure your development (training...) during the COVID-19 crisis

![Bar chart showing responses to Q20](chart.png)

**Figure 22: level of satisfaction with the staff competencies development measures**

The above chart shows the data for the level of satisfaction and measures taken by HR to ensure their development (training) during the COVID-19 crisis, to which 35% of the respondents were slightly satisfied, and 13% not satisfied at all, while 20% reported being satisfied and 10% completely satisfied. On the other hand, 22% reported being moderately satisfied.

As staff reskilling and upskilling in times of crises is key, Customs’ HRMD units are now more than ever called upon to review their operating model and move to virtual training.
Q21: My organization was able to effectively plan and manage recruitment during the COVID-19 situation:

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses to Q21.]

- **Strongly disagree**: 10.00%
- **Disagree**: 20.00%
- **Neither agree or disagree**: 10.00%
- **Agree**: 25.00%
- **Strongly agree**: 35.00%

**Figure 23: staffing and recruitment**

55% of respondents considered that their organizations were not able to execute their staffing plan. In contrast, only 20% felt that their organizations were able to effectively plan and manage recruitment during the COVID-19 crisis, while 25% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Q22: According to you, which of these areas (up to three) from the list below should be prioritized by your organization for HR reform and modernization efforts?

![Pie chart showing the distribution of responses to Q22.]

- **Leadership & organizational culture**: 60.25%
- **Enhanced data-driven HRM**: 58.00%
- **Staffing and recruitment**: 5.26%
- **Staff resilience and well-being at work**: 57.25%
- **Performance management**: 44.75%
- **Other**: 2.48%
- **Competency development and talent**: 58.00%
- **Employee experience**: 18.42%
- **Organizational design and change management**: 56.75%
- **Leadership & organizational culture**: 60.25%

**Figure 24: HR modernization area**

Respondents were asked to select three areas from the list above that should be prioritized by their organizations for HR reform and modernization efforts.

- **60.25%** of respondents considered leadership and organization culture as a top priority, followed by competency development and talent with 58%. Staff resilience and well-being at work came in third place with 57.25%. Organizational design and change management was in fourth place with 56.75% of respondents. Performance management came in fifth position with 44.75% of respondents. Finally, sixth, seventh and eighth places were enhanced data-driven HRM with 22%, staffing and recruitment with 5.26%, employee experience with 18.42%, and other with 2.48%.

We can see from the above diagram that leadership and organization culture is highest with 60.25% followed by competency and development 58% for HR reform and modernization.
Q23: According to you, which of the following HR roles (Dave Ulrich, 2016) are and will be the most critical ones in the near future? Please score them in order of importance from 1 to 9 (9 being the most important)

- Strategic positioner: 7
- Credible activist: 5
- Paradox navigator: 3
- Culture & change champion: 2
- Human capital curator: 1
- Total rewards steward: 9
- Technology & media integrator: 6
- Analytics designer & interpreter: 4
- Compliance manager: 8

Figure 25: Most relevant HR roles. Source David Ulrich

Respondents were asked which of the HR roles (Dave Ulrich, 2016) are and will be the most critical ones in the near future, to which they responded: strategic positioner, culture and change champion, human capital curator, and technology and media integrator.

The outcome of the research activities can be summarised as:

- There is a clear need to strengthen HRMD units across the WCO membership and to intensify HRM modernization;
- Survey and interview responses indicated that WCO Members performed rather well in keeping their staff safe during the pandemic;
- HRMD units need to pay particular attention to the following to enhance the organizational level of readiness to face emergencies and crises:
  - leadership and communication
  - HR business continuity
  - staff well-being and resilience
  - work design in a post-COVID world
  - learning and development
  - managing teams, individuals and performance
  - embracing new HR roles to create more value for the organization and a better employee experience.
Section III

SEVEN FOCUS AREAS FOR HR EFFECTIVENESS IN TIMES OF CRISIS
a. Focus area 1:

Leading and communicating
i. Introduction

HRM practices were undergoing fundamental changes prior to the advent of COVID-19. These changes have accelerated inexorably and will radically and permanently alter HR and the global work environment. In times of crisis, leaders are needed to map the way forward and to be the change makers – C-suite executives, directors, presidents and those who have the power to embrace change, to inspire resilience and to offer a strategic vision to a beleaguered workforce. To communicate the chosen course of action clearly and succinctly these leaders need the support of a skilled HR department.

In a world where stakeholder capitalism has become the new reality, leaders recognize the importance of increased accountability to a powerful cohort of people beyond traditional shareholders, to their customers, suppliers, communities and, above-all, to their workers. Even before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations were realizing that their workforce was their greatest asset, and the best companies understood that ignoring the demands, health and welfare of these important constituents would be to their detriment. Like other tangible and intangible assets, human capital requires maintenance in the form of leadership and HR management, and neglecting that element during times of crises can mean the difference between the life and death of an organization.

David Ulrich has been a strong influence on best practice in contemporary HRM by advocating a shift in the HR paradigm from administration to strategy. Professor Ulrich imagined an organizational space where the HR department was no longer relegated to the administrative fringes, but had assumed a strategic function, encompassing nine key roles as identified in the HR Competency Study – a comprehensive assessment of HR competencies undertaken by the University of Michigan, the RBL Group and 22 regional partners in 2016. Based on the findings observed across 123 categories of HR competencies, three roles are considered core drivers: strategic positioner, with the ability to position an organization to succeed in its environment; credible activist, with the ability to build relationships of trust and viewed as a valuable partner; and paradox navigator, with the ability to manage tensions inherent in organizations. In this new organizational space leadership is paramount, but it is ably bolstered by the organization’s strategic think-tank, the HR department, and a further three organizational enablers: culture and change champion, with the ability to make change happen and manage organizational culture; human capital curator, who focuses on the management of talent, be it curating technical or leadership skills, or individuals; and total rewards steward, who has the ability to manage employee well-being through financial and non-financial rewards.

Beyond the focus on strategy and organization, the HR Competency Study identified three delivery enablers centred on the tactical and foundational elements of HR: technology and media integrator, with the ability to leverage technology and media to drive high-performing organizations; analytics designer and interpreter, with the ability to harness analytics to improve decision-making; and compliance manager, who can manage the processes related to compliance by following regulatory guidelines.

Organizations that embrace change and contemporary HR best practice, such as the nine competencies outlined above, place their HR departments front and centre, charged with formulating a people-centred strategy. When a crisis strikes, these organizations prove more resilient and more responsive to their core constituents – their employees. HR teams are able to switch gears immediately and to ally with leaders to communicate effectively and proactively. Company town hall meetings become a weekly occurrence, accompanied by pulse surveys that enable HR teams to design strategies for leadership to engage meaningfully with employees. Other companies form taskforces to manage and communicate decisions about their crisis response to employees and other stakeholders.

ii. Guiding principles 1.1–1.3

This Guide has been informed and inspired by a multitude of resources, including consultations with WCO Members and stakeholders, outcomes of WCO global and regional conferences on HRM, a WCO survey and a literature review that provided the theoretical underpinnings. To distil and streamline the information, three guiding principles specific to leading and communicating in the Customs environment have been identified.

Guiding principle 1.1 – Ensure that a humanistic-based, people-centred, leadership culture is established within the organization

COVID-19 may have put a halt to many aspects of daily life – air travel, leisure activities, office work – but it also accelerated change in the work environment, the most important of which was the widespread acknowledgement that employees are the backbone of any organization, without whom it would cease to exist, and that therefore organizations need to prioritize their sense of fulfilment and job satisfaction.

Employees are transforming into a new generation of workforce that is becoming a more demanding, critical and engaged stakeholder to whom leaders are accountable. Organizations are competing to deploy value propositions that demonstrate a commitment to their employees and an empathetic and people-centred approach to management. Formerly, if a management philosophy existed, it focused on didactic, even autocratic, forms of communication and leadership. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, and with it a democratization of technology, inaugurated a new era in which the command-and-control mindset was replaced with people-centric thinking and an acknowledgement that an individual’s happiness and success at work can have a significant business impact across an organization. As empirical research has demonstrated, organizations that are people-centred outperform those that have yet to embrace this new reality.

Organizational prosperity depends on human ingenuity. If the pandemic is truly a ‘people-based crisis’, then logically only those organizations that embrace people-centred solutions will be able to withstand the largely devastating impact the pandemic and future crises are likely to have. One of the roles of a leader during a crisis is to create and sustain the organization’s credibility and trust among stakeholders and, as stakeholder capitalism has demonstrated, employees are among the most important stakeholders. Harvard Business School professor Daniel Goleman’s research found that leaders with emotional intelligence competencies, such as empathy, self-awareness, teamwork skills and the ability to manage relationships, are more effective leaders. Organizations need such leaders at the helm, championing a people-centred leadership culture that focuses on people when connecting with workers, both during and in the aftermath of any crisis.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 1.1

• Support the development and delivery of a people-centred and value-focused leadership and management development programme;
• Multiply and empower local leaders;
• Design and deliver a training module on ‘Leading and communicating in times of crisis’ for top and senior management;
• Design and deliver a training module focused on the organization’s values and on the importance of a human-centric culture and leadership in the organization (and ensure this module is taken by officers on an annual basis as a refresher course).

Guiding principle 1.2 – Ensure that HR embraces its strategic partner role by providing timely and effective solutions to complex problems/crises

The need for a new HR paradigm was clearly highlighted by the pandemic. Never before have HR professionals been expected to perform cross-functionally under such pressurised circumstances and with a virtual

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The question is no longer whether HR should be invited to discussions on strategy but rather how to ensure that the department becomes the engine for strategic change given the strategic role they assumed throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

HR departments were a key component of crisis command centres formed in the wake of the crisis (see Section III, focus area 2, business continuity) and were thus at the forefront of crisis management preparations. They were expected to propose and oversee people-centred solutions, such as new streamlined reporting mechanisms and staff planning rituals. A crisis often presents an opportunity and, for HR departments, COVID-19 was a real opportunity to move away from prescriptive and standardised approaches to become more relevant to each employee. HR departments will need technology proponents, as described by Professor Ulrich, and risk management capacities in order to collect, collate and leverage data to tailor HR solutions such as dashboards and other software – readily available on the marketplace – to better prepare organizations to react to crises. Fresh perspectives will give rise to design thinking as a way not only to preserve and protect their employees by ensuring that their skills and talent can be matched and applied to the new streamlined working environment, but also to provide actionable insights into ways to attract, retain and develop the organization’s talent pool.

**Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 1.2**

- Identify key HR metrics and develop a strategic HR dashboard;
- Develop the staff planning and risk management capacities of HR services to boost their ability to design and provide tailored solutions to complex problems/crises;
- Lead and apply a ‘design thinking’ methodology/process in the organization to ensure that the solutions developed to manage the crisis and the post-crisis environment are human-centred.

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**Guiding principle 1.3 – Ensure that HR is communicating effectively with staff and relevant stakeholders during a crisis**

It would be difficult to overemphasize the point that proactive and timely communication during a crisis is crucial. Communication needs to be transparent, frequent and repeated across multiple channels. HR teams should seek information from reputable sources (in the case of COVID-19, from the WHO and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) among others), and then share it in easily digestible and navigable ways.

Communication should not be a one-way street. Channels should be kept open and employees given multiple opportunities to provide feedback through pulse surveys and other mechanisms. One of the greatest challenges posed by a remote working environment is the lack of opportunity for informal communication. HR departments should seek to create touchpoints so that remote employees can engage and feel empowered to work effectively.

They should explore multifaceted communication strategies, such as messaging apps, videoconferencing and texting, in addition to standard intranet portals and email. Managers and HR teams should provide frequent and meaningful feedback, and one-on-one engagement opportunities should be increased, if at all possible, to limit feelings of isolation and disengagement.

**Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 1.3**

- Develop an effective communication plan and protocol for HR-related notices during a crisis;
- Ensure that employees can reach out to their line managers and HR throughout the crisis to enhance employee-listening/human connection (support system).

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iii. Case stories and key takeaways 1.1–1.4

Case story 1.1 Philippines Bureau of Customs

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When I was appointed to the top position in the Philippines Bureau of Customs (BOC) in October 2018, I was confronted with challenges aplenty, from administrative to operational concerns and systemic deficiencies that made the Bureau vulnerable to corrupt practices. For more than two years now, my team and I have been working tirelessly to reform the negatives, transform the organization, and perform our mandate.

Rey Leonardo B. Guerrero, Commissioner, Philippines BOC

People

The first priority was to boost the organization’s manpower component to ensure efficiency and professionalism in the delivery of services. Believing firmly that an organization is not an organization without its people, we reviewed the recruitment process to ensure strict adherence to the hiring and promotion procedures established by the Civil Service Commission Rules and Regulations. Our aim was to revive the principle of meritocracy and professionalism, starting with a fair assessment of all applicants. One of our primary focuses was filling vacant positions, a task which the BOC’s Human Resource Management Division (HRMD) delivered efficiently.

Enabling employees to develop their skills was identified as another essential area calling for improvement, and as one of our priority programmes in 2020. The actions implemented included updating training policies and guidelines, improving the management and technical skills training curricula, initiating the transition to a competency-based human resource approach, and preparing for the establishment of the Customs Training Institute within the Philippine Tax Academy.

To date, we have completed the policies and guidelines for participation in the learning and development programmes, and in the Scholarship Programme which enables employees to undertake graduate and postgraduate studies and to benefit from other educational opportunities. The Interim Training and Development Division (ITDD) coordinates with the inviting/sponsoring organizations to agree on the details of the programme curriculum and enrolment requirements. Once endorsed, these details are disseminated to all employees who can then send their application to the ITDD if they fit the scholarship candidate profile. The ITDD then evaluates the applications and sends the Commissioner the list of pre-selected applicants for potential nomination. Upon approval of the list of nominees by the Commissioner, the inviting/sponsoring organizations proceed with their own screening process. All the nominees selected must fulfil the requirement to serve with the Bureau of Customs for a period equivalent to twice the length of the scholarship.

We have also put a great deal of work into the completion of the database and the pool of BOC trainers, speakers and experts, and into carrying out 180 activities as part of our learning and development programmes in 2020, in which a total of 5,570 employees participated.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not prevented employees from developing new competencies and strengthening their skills, thanks to one of the flagship initiatives of the BOC’s modernization programme, the Online Learning Portal (https://training.customs.gov.ph), which was launched in June 2020.

In January 2021, the BOC deployed tools that enabled the administration to use a competency-based approach. These include:

- A competency catalogue listing 89 identified competencies relevant to the BOC;
- A competency framework in the form of a diagram that brings together the competencies in three groups: core, functional and leadership;
- A competency dictionary that defines each competency and gives the behavioural indicators associated with it, making it possible to monitor competency levels and proficiencies, and individual progression;
• Job profiles for the 125 existing positions within the BOC, identifying the competencies required for each job and their respective behavioural indicators;

• Revised qualification standards that establish minimum requirements and competency levels for each of the 125 positions.

By integrating these tools with the HRM systems, employees have a clear view of their role and performance criteria, and the administration will be able to properly manage recruitment, succession planning, expectations and evaluations.

The BOC also asked the WCO Secretariat for support, and benefited from a People Development Diagnostic Virtual Mission in March 2021. This addressed such topics as strategic orientation, competency and job profiling, planning and performance management, training, career path development, remuneration and benefits.

COVID-19

Our reform agenda was gaining momentum when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020. This brought about an urgent need for businesses and organizations to protect their employees and guarantee their well-being, while also pursuing efficient and profitable operations.

As one of the agencies providing frontline services, and the government’s arm in an essential commodity supply chain, any disruption in BOC operations would have been detrimental to the government effort to handle the health crisis. To protect the health of the men and women in the BOC who were working to prevent a total economic downturn, all mandated health protocols, such as social distancing, were strictly adhered to, and regular swabs and rapid tests on all our employees were conducted.

In accordance with national health and safety measures, weekly disinfection of facilities has been carried out consistently since March 2020 in the Customs Central Office and the Customs offices located in the country’s biggest ports: the Port of Manila, Manila International Container Port and Ninoy Aquino International Airport. PPE and medical supplies, such as facemasks, gloves, alcohol-based cleaners and wipes, footbaths and thermal scanners, have been distributed at BOC Central Office and in the major ports.

It was also decided to implement alternative work arrangements: work-from-home; four-day or compressed working weeks; and the maintenance of a skeleton workforce with a minimum number of employees on site to guarantee essential services. Such arrangements required staff to submit reports on their work to their respective manager for monitoring purposes. The ultimate objective was to limit the movement of critical workers and thus minimize physical contact. Because of the limited public transportation in operation, a shuttle van service was made available to employees who were on duty as part of the skeleton workforce, for their convenience and safety.

Systems

Thankfully, the BOC had finalised several computerised systems before the COVID-19 outbreak. The priority programmes implemented in 2019 and 2020 included the review of policies and processes, and heavy investment in information and communications technology (ICT) to automate Customs operations, so as to promote trade facilitation and minimal human interaction. Like many other administrations, the BOC’s ability to ensure the continuity of its operations during the peak of the COVID pandemic, while placing a premium on the safety of its workforce, was mainly thanks to the Bureau’s IT system upgrades in 2019 and its drive to fully automate frontline transactions by 2020.

The BOC also launched a Customer Care Portal System (CCPS) in February 2020, as a one-stop-shop information centre. This ticketing system allows trade operators to submit their concerns, complaints or questions electronically, and to upload documents. It also features a knowledge base with information on requirements and regulations attached to the international movement of goods. The CCPS is part of the implementation of the no-contact policy, which promotes a corruption-free regime by minimizing face-to-face transactions. During the quarantine period, it enabled the BOC to keep serving stakeholders while lowering the chances of BOC personnel entering into contact with the virus.

Another technology-related initiative is the Internal Administration Management Support system (IAMS), which aims to end the largely manual and paper-based organization of the Bureau. It covers the main HRM processes of recruitment, training and development, records management, processing of leave applications, payroll management and supplies management.
Infrastructure

Among the various challenges confronting the BOC are poor office accommodation and inadequate equipment and infrastructure. To improve offices and facilities and to create a workspace that is conducive to professional and productive output, a plan was drafted to prioritize the most urgent actions to be taken, given the limited financial resources.

One of the first achievements was the construction of a new prefabricated workspace for the Port of Manila’s operations and administrative personnel, district collector and deputy collectors. Inaugurated in October 2020, the 1,004.8 square metre office was designed to enhance efficiency and coordination among its occupants.

A new Customs Operations Centre also opened in December 2020, to house the Bureau’s intelligence, enforcement, risk management and scanning systems. The Centre’s officers will enhance the operations of the country’s 17 collection districts, and aid their peers from the Customs Intelligence and Investigation Service (CIIS) and Enforcement and Security Service (ESS) in the efficient discharge of their functions.

The BOC also purchased the equipment needed for employees to carry out their duties effectively, including 65 rifles for Customs enforcement officers in charge of securing the national borders.

Values

The BOC’s core values are professionalism, integrity and accountability. The BOC recognises the importance of a shared vision and values among its personnel to enhance not only performance at organization level but also individual personal development. To promote these values among its employees, the BOC has developed several tools under a global performance governance system, including the Governance Culture Code as the handbook for BOC employees. This sets the standards for establishing and sustaining a culture of competence, accountability, professionalism, integrity, transparency, efficiency and ethical responsibility. The objective is to guide decision-makers, ensure that any action taken is in compliance with global standards and regulations and, ultimately, to build trust both with BOC external stakeholders and among its employees.

Motivation

In any organization, performance can also be measured by the level of joy and meaning employees get from their work. This automatically reflects on the quality of the service provided to trade operators, the nation and individual Filipinos. It is therefore a top priority – my first priority – to encourage the dedication and discipline of our team of professional men and women, and to keep them motivated, driven and safe. With this in mind, the BOC has reviewed its policy on awards and other forms of recognition in order to motivate all personnel to perform with professionalism, integrity and excellence. The BOC’s HRMD has developed a fair system for compensation, privileges and benefits, and performance-based incentives, and has communicated the details to all employees.

Key takeaways from case story 1.1

- People at the centre of Customs’ strategy;
- HRM unit to act as a strategic partner and change agent;
- Leading Customs administration through culture and values.
Case story 1.2 McKinsey & Company

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When faced with a crisis, a dynamic and collaborative network of teams can tackle an organization's most pressing problems quickly.

Andrea Alexander, Aaron De Smet, Sarah Kleinman, and Marino Mugayar-Baldocchi

In a rapidly changing crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations must respond with urgency. Waiting to make decisions, or even waiting for senior leadership approval, can waste precious time. However, coordination across teams and activities is crucial for an effective response. The solution to this challenge is to create a robust network of teams that are empowered to operate outside of the organization's hierarchy and bureaucratic structures.

Leaders can focus on the following four steps to create a cohesive and adaptable network of teams.

Step 1 – launch teams fast and build as you go

The first step is to create teams with a clear mandate to tackle strategic priorities and pressing challenges in the organization. Don’t worry about perfection; the key is to stand up teams and let them course correct quickly. To efficiently manage a network of teams, the senior leadership team can create a central hub that directs and coordinates the response, while a handful of related teams operate as the spokes.

Each team should have a team leader – a creative problem solver with critical-thinking skills and a track record of delivering under pressure. Ideally, the team will incorporate a cross-section of perspectives and expertise while remaining small enough to ensure meaningful progress. Teams will also benefit from considering input from those on the front lines of an organization, who are closest to the customer or constituent.

As soon as the teams are set up, leaders can empower them to make decisions quickly. Leaders will likely want to make it clear to the entire organization, including those operating as usual, that these teams will make the calls within the authority delegated to them, and that they do not need permission from others.

Step 2 – get out of the way, but stay connected

After creating the initial teams, a leader can then shift toward ensuring that multidirectional communication is taking place – not only across teams within the network, but also between these teams and the rest of the organization. It is important to maintain steady coordination with the central team hub, perhaps through daily stand-up meetings, to check in on progress and to find ways to support teams.

At this point, leaders can step into the roles of catalyst and coach. As catalysts, leaders can identify opportunities, make connections across teams, spark ideas for the teams to consider and provide resources to fuel those efforts. As coaches, leaders can regularly engage with team leaders and members, resolving roadblocks and helping them work through challenges.

Step 3 – champion radical transparency and authenticity

Building trust from the top down becomes even more important during times of crisis, when people are concerned about their own and others’ welfare. Psychological safety underpins successful networks of teams by enabling the rapid sharing of information to address changing goals, while creating a safe space in which individuals and teams can rapidly test ideas, iterate and learn from mistakes.

Strong communication from leaders helps foster an environment of collaboration, transparency and psychological safety that enables peak performance. Leaders may consider recognizing people who are taking smart risks, being authentic and empathetic in their communications, and acknowledging their mistakes. And they can avoid punishing people for failing when they’ve taken risks or excluding those with relevant information or expertise from the conversation.
Step 4 – turbocharge self-organization

Once the initial network of teams has been established, the network can become self-sustaining and self-managing. In a well-functioning network, the central hub stays connected to all the activities but avoids becoming a bottleneck that slows down the response. Over time, the centrality of the leadership hub that launched the teams will decline, and the importance of the respective teams will evolve, based on changes in the environment. As new problems emerge, new teams can be formed to address them. As some problems are solved, some teams may go away.

Key takeaways from case story 1.2

- Leaders can act quickly to stand up a network of teams, each with a clear mandate, a capable team lead, and a diverse set of skills and expertise;
- In a network of teams, the role of leadership is to foster cross-team collaboration and to serve as a catalyst and a coach;
- Transparent and authentic communication is necessary to build the trust and psychological safety that underpin successful team performance;
- Once the network of teams has become self-sustaining, it can evolve to meet the changing needs of the external environment.
**Case story 1.3 SUNAT, Peru**

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To build a resilient organization in the context of COVID-19, people-centred leadership is key. Communicating messages of calm and confidence at all levels of the organization through empowered and sensitive leaders, enables the strengthening of the feeling of being part of the team and commitment from workers. This ensures the sustainability of operations and that performance indicators are met and even innovative processes toward our digital transformation. This is reflected in the leadership of Customs in the international supply chain, as our stakeholders trust that in any complex situation, we will continue to provide quality services and protect our borders.

Marilú Llerena Aybar, Deputy National Superintendent of Customs, SUNAT Peru

SUNAT is a merged administration with a mission to collect tax and provide Customs services. It has more than 11,000 workers, of which 3,011 work in the Customs service. Its role is of vital importance as it provides 66.2% of the total annual public budget through tax collection, and it facilitates legitimate foreign trade and protects borders from illegal activities such as smuggling, Customs fraud and illicit drug trafficking.

In Peru, a state of emergency was declared on 15 March 2020, which posed big challenges for Customs, including ensuring operational continuity and guaranteeing minimal physical interaction to avoid contagion of workers and stakeholders. Some of the measures implemented during the crisis caused by COVID-19 include the following, in accordance with the model of the 7 Cs of leadership.[11]

### Calm

Workers and stakeholders needed to have peace of mind that Customs would guarantee their safety and operational continuity. For this reason, it was necessary to strengthen leadership at different levels and to implement quick and effective actions such as:

- implementing remote working (71% of staff) using virtual platforms and tools such as Teams, the use of which was intensive during the pandemic
- use of a virtual reception desk and electronic notifications to avoid stakeholders having to carry out face-to-face procedures
- implementation of 24/7 channels of guidance for users (e.g. telephone lines, WhatsApp).

### Confidence

Leaders must project both calm and confidence to workers and stakeholders that the situation will be controlled, accompanying them until adverse situations are overcome. For this reason, SUNAT established:

- a plan of surveillance, prevention and control of COVID-19, carrying out weekly detection tests
- ‘social alert’, 24/7 assistance by 26 SUNAT social workers for workers and their families to manage hospitalization procedures; and
- follow-up by SUNAT occupational doctors of workers with COVID-19, until their medical discharge.

### Communication

Having a communication strategy and well-defined messages is key in times of crisis. Taking advantage of digital media, meetings are held continuously between SUNAT’s top management and all staff to ensure that, despite the social distance: they feel ‘closer than ever’; they trust ‘they are not alone, their SUNAT family accompanies and supports them’; and they can freely express their concerns and queries.

Strengthening communication with stakeholders is essential. A simple but effective measure was to create a WhatsApp group called ‘We all are Customs’, with representatives of 16 main private-sector actors, to maintain direct and fluid communication. Periodic meetings are held in which suggestions to improve processes are received and management progress is reported. As a result, 31 Customs procedures have been modified, eliminating paper, achieving efficiency and 100% digital and contactless processes.

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11. Quelch J., Dean of Miami Herbert Business School (2020) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X5ay10L7tA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X5ay10L7tA)
Collaboration

Leaders must trust the capabilities of their team members and encourage them to contribute ideas. SUNAT’s top management conducts periodic coaching and follow-up sessions with team leaders to empower them to be disseminators of key messages, so that, in turn, they promote teamwork and horizontal and fluid communication with workers and stakeholders. This has benefited the implementation of new initiatives, such as remote physical examination, in which an experienced Customs officer, who cannot perform face-to-face work due to a health risk, carries out cargo inspections from their home, supported by digital media.

Community

In this crisis it is very important that leaders reinforce and promote solidarity and the feeling of being part of the team, leading by example.

Coordination and cooperation with the private sector and other government agencies to monitor from the departure point of goods to combat COVID-19 has been key to the goods rapid entry, for the benefit of millions of people.

Compassion

Compassion in times of crisis is a very important manifestation of leadership. In a country where more than 170 000 people have died from COVID-19, it is normal for many workers to experience feelings of anxiety, depression and extreme concern for their health or that of their family members. Therefore, leaders must show empathy and accompany their teams, in a humane and altruistic approach, understanding that this situation could affect their performance. For this reason, the leadership of SUNAT hired seven psychologists to provide the ‘Aló Clima’ service for psychological and emotional support to workers and their families.

Cash

Leaders take care of peace of mind, not only emotional but also financial. SUNAT provides its workers with private insurance, a career path and job stability, which is highly appreciated in a country where, by the end of 2020, 2.9 million people had lost their jobs. They also implemented:

- an ex gratia payment to meet expenses not covered by private insurance
- private insurance coverage of 100% of hospital expenses and transportation to other cities
- an internal contest to advance a career path, the first one to be carried out 100% digitally by a government agency
- loans with 0% interest delivered by the SUNAT Employees Fund to cover illness expenses.

Conclusion

Leadership centred on people, with a humane, altruistic approach, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, safeguards an organization’s main capital, its people. It also allows the organization to meet performance indicators and even to innovate. The SUNAT team managed to implement new services and processes through 100% digital platforms, the benefits of which are transferred to our stakeholders, reducing the time and cost of foreign trade, so much so that it has been possible to reduce import and export clearance times from 65.2 and 12.3 hours, respectively, in March 2020 when the health emergency was declared, to 38.4 and 1.5 hours, respectively, in April 2021.

SUNAT’s new initiative, the SMART Borders Programme, focused on strengthening Customs control, using artificial intelligence in risk management and incorporating advanced technologies. These measures improved the work environment at SUNAT, as measured by a survey carried out in August 2020, in which 89% of staff participated. Very high levels of satisfaction were found, especially regarding identity (90%), innovation/digitalization (86%), teamwork (84%), fairness and interpersonal relationships (83%) and working conditions (82%).

Key takeaways from case story 1.3

- In challenging times, Customs leaders are called on to build a human-centric leadership culture within their organization and to empower leaders at all levels; and
- This reinforces the feelings of identity and teamwork among workers, while meeting performance goals and innovating processes for the benefit of stakeholders and the country’s competitiveness.
How can you make an impact as a leader on the performance of your organization, especially in a time of crisis? Part of the answer lies in ensuring that your HR managers are taken seriously and have the tools to make the best decisions for your biggest resource, your people.

**Take HR seriously**

Everyone agrees that talent is what separates a good organization from a great organization. However, in many organizations, human resources – the team in charge of managing and developing talent – get less respect than other core business functions. Your HR manager should be the first person invited to boardroom meetings. Only by understanding the organization’s operating plan will they be able to align HR strategies to set objectives. HR also plays a key role in reinforcing corporate culture, transmitting the company’s concern for employees, and communicating in a more transparent, fluid and people-oriented way.

**The importance of soft skills**

A LinkedIn article about interpersonal skills highlighted that executives may not realize that soft skills, also known as people or interpersonal skills, are where the biggest imbalance is. It reported that Tesla CEO, Elon Musk, cut back on his production expectations after automation efforts failed, and said: ‘It turns out human beings are underrated.’

LinkedIn also ran a survey on the critical skills gap with over 2,000 business leaders, which identified these four skills as critical to a company’s performance:

- leadership
- collaboration
- time management
- people engagement/communication.

**Why are some people more successful than others?**

At Innermetrix UK Ltd, we conducted a seven-year study on what really drives individual performance and success. We looked at 75 PhDs and 900 consultants who are specialists in helping people develop and thrive – in total, 197,000 individuals across 23 countries.

Of course, defining success can differ, depending on background and culture, and it may not be all about money. However, two major qualities came up that can explain why some people are considered as being successful and others are not:

- **Self-awareness**, that is, your level of awareness for your natural ‘mental’ talents, in other words, the particular way you think and make decisions.
- **Authenticity**, that is, how ‘true’ you are to your greatest natural talents, how well you incorporate them into what you do and how you do it.

Being authentic to your self-awareness is the key to your individual excellence and to defining what your success could be. People who consider themselves as successful share the attribute of self-awareness. They are acutely aware of who they are and what drives them and, as a result, they are able to recognize those situations in which their intrinsic values can lead to success. They also understand their limitations. Because they know what does not inspire or motivate them, they can avoid those circumstances where they recognize that their inherent values will not be conducive to success. People who understand their natural motivators are far more likely to pursue the right opportunities, for the right reasons, and get the results they desire.
What, why, how

How can HR professionals help their employees to achieve better awareness? By developing their profiles using the what, why and how triad. The what corresponds to talents, in other words, how an individual thinks and makes decisions. The why corresponds to values, that is, what drives and motivates an individual in life. The how corresponds to behaviour, that is, how an individual does things and uses their talents.

Let’s stress that there are no ‘good’ or ‘bad’ profiles. The objective of the method proposed here is to identify how an individual can be their most authentic self, and to show that person where they are adapting their behaviours. We have developed three indexes to help individuals find their what, why and how, and to help them maximize performance and find what makes them successful.

The Attribute Index – the what

The Attribute Index is based upon the work of Robert S. Hartman, a philosopher, professor and business person who pioneered the science of values (axiology) as a field of study. It is used to measure the way in which a person thinks and makes decisions, to help them understand their soft skills. It identifies an individual’s dominant and secondary ways of thinking, and their potential blind spots. This understanding translates into the ability to quantify a person’s aptitude in the various capacities that are measured.

A few examples of some of the 77 competencies that are measured include the desire for self-improvement, role awareness, attitudes toward others, attention to detail, practical thinking, problem solving, results orientation, persistence, sense of mission and personal drive.

The results are critical to understanding why a person can engage with people, systems or tasks easily or not, and can identify why in certain situations there is cooperation, and in others there is not. The Attribute Index also identifies how best to manage that person.

The DISC Index – the how

The DISC Index is based upon the lifetime’s work of William Molten Marston, who mapped out four quadrants in a person’s behaviour. The DISC Index is used to measure a person’s observable behaviour in both natural and adapted environments. A person’s natural style is seen when they behave naturally, when that person is authentic and true to themselves. One is stress-free when operating under a natural style. This style brings out the maximum potential of a person. A person’s adaptive style is shown when they feel they are being watched. Prolonged exposure can lead to a person becoming stressed and less effective.

The Innermetrix DISC Index measures four dimensions of a person’s behaviour:
1. decisiveness – problem-solving ability and ability to get results
2. interactiveness – interaction with others and show of emotion
3. stability – pacing, persistence and steadiness
4. cautiousness – preference for procedures, standards and protocols.

In summary, it measures how a person will go about their work and personal areas. The tool makes it possible to understand how to communicate with this individual and how not to, what is his or her ideal environment ‘behaviourally’, and what is the best form of training style or methodology for that person. The DISC Index can be used when hiring a new employee to understand their compatibility, what motivates them, their communication skills, and whether they have the temperament for the job.

The Values Index – the why

The Values Index combines the seven dimensions of value discovered by Dr Eduard Spranger and Gordon Allport, and is used to measure what really drives an individual, what their values, beliefs and personal interests are. This knowledge enables a person to achieve improved performance and satisfaction through better alignment between what they passionately believe, and their daily actions and interactions.

Seven dimensions of motivation are assessed:
1. aesthetic – a drive for balance, harmony, beauty and form
2. economic – a drive for financial or practical return on effort
3. individualistic – a drive to stand out as independent and unique

4. political – a drive to possess power, control or influence
5. altruistic – a drive for humanitarian results and service to others
6. regulatory – a drive for order, structure and routine
7. theoretical – a drive for knowledge, learning and understanding.

Conclusion

A personal debrief session is organised at the end of every assessment, during which results are reviewed in detail with the participant. You must qualify as a Certified Innermetrix Consultant to use our assessment tools and to build your employees’ profiles. These profiles will help you identify their thought processes and give you an insight as to why they make the decisions they make. They help you to better understand employee behaviours and why this might impact how they interpret and engage with task(s), people and problems. Finally, they help you find values, beliefs and personal interests, and underline the factors that drive individuals to do what they do.

Key takeaways from case story 1.4

- Leading by people through humanistic-based leadership;
- Taking HR seriously;
- The notion of self-awareness (talents and non-talents) is important to help individuals find what makes them successful.
b. Focus area 2:

Business continuity
i. Introduction

When organizations are plunged into a crisis with no clear parameters, the existence of a coherent business continuity or crisis management plan can be the differentiator between thriving, surviving, struggling to remain afloat or failing.

In its most distilled form, business continuity focuses on the planning efforts that are needed to ensure an organization’s critical functions remain operational, even if somewhat reduced, during and following a crisis, in addition to safeguarding company stakeholders and protecting human capital. As organizations moved to invoke business continuity plans in the wake of large-scale, global shutdowns in March 2020, those that had practised, planned and preached the importance of business continuity within their ranks inevitably fared better than those that had allocated little or no resources to emergency preparedness, disaster management and business continuity.

It is important to distinguish between emergency response and business continuity plans. Typically, in the days and weeks that follow a crisis impacting an organization’s employees or fundamental business processes, leadership will invoke emergency response plans that are tactical and only to be implemented in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. They are primarily concerned with the safety and protection of life, assets and the environment. Business continuity plans, on the other hand, enable the organization to continue functioning at a minimal level beyond the immediate aftermath of a crisis, they are therefore strategic in nature and often include contingency plans outlining how the organization will operate at minimal capacity.

Business continuity management is defined as a holistic management process that identifies potential threats to an organization and the impacts to business operations that those threats, if realized, might cause, and which provides a framework for building organizational resilience with the capability for an effective response that safeguards the interests of its key stakeholders, reputation, brand and value-creating activities[13].

Guiding principle 2.1 – Ensure that HR is a key actor/influencer within the organizational structure in charge of emergency management and business continuity, to guarantee that disaster recovery and business continuity plans also include the human aspect of crises

Whether business continuity is the responsibility of a whole unit, a small team or a part-time/full-time individual depends on the size of the organization. Although senior management ought to be responsible and accountable for the elaboration and maintenance of that function, it is vital that the HR department be tasked with the operationalization of the plan, given that a large determinant of its success is people buy-in. The department, group or individual tasked with the business continuity or emergency management function should be sufficiently resourced to ensure the adequate protection of employees and the rapid deployment of emergency protocols in times of crisis. Key elements of the business continuity plan underpinning this function would include information on a pool of key staff who could keep operations functioning at a minimal level and a thorough overview of emergency protocols. The contribution of the HR department is paramount to the success of such a plan and, if not directly involved in its elaboration or implementation, at a minimum the HR department must be intimately familiar with the plan’s inner workings.

During a crisis it is critical to establish a command centre to organize, oversee and coordinate response efforts to help organizations recover by building on the advice and recommendations included in the business continuity plan.[14] Efforts will be focused primarily on restarting operations or on the maintenance of such operations within a specific time horizon. It is crucial to identify members of the HR and leadership team to form part of the command centre team. Information gathering and dissemination is vital at this stage to reassure employees and to mobilize the minimum

number needed to ensure the continuation of basic operations. Minimizing the impact of high levels of staff absenteeism may also be necessary when remote or hybrid work is impossible.

To strengthen the capacities of Customs HR professionals to act as strategic lynchpins in their organizations, the WCO developed the programme, ‘Executive and Professional Competency-based HRM Programme (EPCB-HRMP)’. In the 12 months since its establishment in 2020, it has delivered training to over 150 HR professionals in 13 Member countries. Upon completion of the Programme, the beneficiaries are expected to implement a redesign of their HR system. Many have already begun to implement change and to position themselves as valuable strategic partners.\(^{(15)}\)

**Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 2.1**

- Support the organization in developing and nurturing competences in emergency management and business continuity;
- Secure the position and influence of HR within the organization’s structure in charge of emergency management and business continuity;
- Help the organization anticipate impacts of a crisis on itself and its employees, and determine what means and resources should be made available to guarantee service continuity while keeping people safe, including the identification of safe alternate work areas.

**Guiding principle 2.2 – Ensure that the HR service also manages its own continuity and has a business continuity plan**

Succession planning is a core part of any business continuity plan and HR teams should also devise a succession strategy that incorporates crisis management principles and the nomination of replacements to ensure continuity of HR functions. HR teams should also elaborate a HR business continuity plan to ensure minimal employee service disruption in times of crisis.

Organizations were adopting cloud platforms long before the COVID-19 crisis and, due to the existence of this ICT architecture, when 93% of the world’s workers were subject to some form of workplace closure\(^{(16)}\), they were able to conceive of alternative work options, such as working from home. What was previously considered a convenient method of expediting work processes and facilitating multiple work flows quickly became a crucial factor in the survival strategy of organizations during the COVID-19 crisis. Henceforth, cloud platforms will be considered core components of any business continuity strategy.

**Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 2.2**

- Leverage technology to the greatest possible extent, to automate HR processes, with a particular focus on administrative processes;
- Develop a business continuity plan for the HR function in times of crisis;
- Establish HR services to the greatest possible extent to support staff during crises, such as helplines or dedicated apps that feed pertinent data to employees.


The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is responsible for providing integrated border services that support national security and public safety priorities. The Agency enforces more than 90 acts and regulations and maintains oversight on approximately 1,200 ports of entry, with over 14,000 employees. Our mission is to ensure the security and prosperity of Canada by managing the access of people and goods to and from Canada.

Our human resources branch is responsible for enabling services in people management and organizational design with over 20 programmes, including the recruitment, selection and training of our frontline officers. Our objective is to ensure that the CBSA is an organization of high performing and engaged professionals, working in a supportive and enabling workplace.

As leaders and innovators in border management, the CBSA values strong domestic and international partnerships and is dedicated to working together on critical safety, security and trade issues. We rise to the challenges we face each day and take pride in knowing that the work we do makes a difference in the lives of Canadians, while contributing to global security and commerce.

### Maintaining agency service and communication

One of the first actions the CBSA took at the outset of the pandemic was to maintain its services, given health and safety protocols and national security considerations. Decisions had to be made quickly in the rapidly evolving environment. With over 1,200 ports of entry across 13 different provincial and territorial boundaries, we faced diverse geopolitical challenges, while navigating local, provincial and territorial health regulations to ensure the health and safety of our employees. As part of these efforts, clear communication channels across the country were imperative to ensure timely information was provided to frontline personnel.

Given the important role unions play in the management of human resources at the CBSA, the human resources branch quickly mobilised to ensure timely, open and transparent communication with union executives and representatives. This collaborative approach to policy development enabled a quick response to operational issues that represented the needs and perspectives of all parties involved in people management.

In addition, the CBSA quickly established an executive emergency management committee and sub-committees of border task force and internal service partners (such as HR, IT, etc.). These structures were established to ensure that the CBSA was responsive to evolving people and border management needs (such as workplace health and safety, support for managers, changes to operational processes, and mobilization of resources across the Agency to priority initiatives/areas, etc.), and was able to course correct as required. These committees are supported by real-time data – such as traveller and commercial volumes, workforce demographics and employee pulse survey results – to support evidence-based decision-making and to ensure they are reflective of the evolving nature of the pandemic.

### Putting our people first

The onset of the pandemic presented significant operational implications for the CBSA. A full realignment of the workforce was required, in line with shifting volumes at the borders (e.g. shifting officers from port of entry traveller operations to postal operations). The CBSA’s primary priority remains the safety and security of Canadians, while balancing the health and safety of the workforce. To ensure focused attention on supporting the workforce, the CBSA established a workforce management framework, with...
the health, safety and well-being of employees at the forefront and paramount to organizational success. The framework is founded upon four key themes:

- Business – an agile and sustainable border service
- Workforce – a productive and supported workforce
- Workplace – a safe and secure workplace
- Culture – a resilient and thriving organization

In line with these themes, the CBSA continues to provide up-to-date, responsive information, guidance and tools for employees and management, ensuring that people management considerations are not an afterthought in the decision-making process.

While day-to-day operations continued throughout the pandemic, it was critical to maintain a pulse on the workforce to ensure that the organization was agile and responsive to the varying needs of employees and stakeholders. As part of this effort, various mechanisms were and continue to be implemented to ensure ongoing engagement of the workforce. Specifically, senior leaders participate at various forums, such as all-staff meetings and ‘ask me anything’ sessions, to ensure they are visible to staff. Regular pulse check surveys are sent to employees to take stock of how the Agency is supporting them and frequent and timely messaging is shared by the Deputy to all staff on the status of operations and efforts to ensure the health and safety of the workforce. Up-to-date information modules are posted to the CBSA intranet to ensure that employees are equipped with relevant information related to their workplace.

**Conclusion**

During 2020–21, the CBSA was able to effectively maintain business continuity, ensure the health and safety of the workforce and support the overall Government of Canada response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mobilizing structures around the core principle of ‘putting our employees first’, coupled with clear governance structures and internal communication channels, has enabled an engaged workforce that is supported by responsive protocols and measures that support their ongoing health and safety.

**Key takeaways from case story 2.1**

- The CBSA had to work quickly and efficiently, supported by clear communication and tangible data to make evidence-based decisions. This enabled senior management decision-making and identification and mitigation of risks to our operations.

- In establishing senior management committees and internal services working groups, CBSA was able to better integrate, communicate and tackle issues proactively.

- Putting our people first was paramount to the success of effective response to the pandemic, with their health, safety and well-being as the first priority.
The General Administration of Customs, Abu Dhabi, is a government entity that: implements the Customs policy prescribed by authorities; supervises goods at export, import and re-export; and collects assessed Customs duties in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations.

Abu Dhabi Customs Administration (ADCA) started a full transformation strategy at the end of 2018, to be executed over five years, to implement full innovative solutions that serve all stakeholders, internal and external.

Under the vision and the leadership of H.E. Rashed Lahej Al Mansoori, Director General, the transformation started with the HR functions, with an innovative strategy that impacted the entire organization. The plan required evaluation, assessment and effort by the entire HR team, leadership members of ADCA, and support from all other internal and external stakeholders. It culminated in a fully automated HR system as one of the major milestones.

Every day, Abu Dhabi Customs faces a balancing challenge: make trade as easy as possible and leave a positive first impression of the emirate, while always keeping tight control of security.

This requires the organization to develop and retain the best people through providing tools for continuous improvement of their knowledge, ensuring that they have the required systems at their disposal and that all is contained within a people management methodology supported by innovative and state of the art tools.

Prior to the implementation of a cloud-based human capital management (HCM) application, the previous system held back many employees due to HR-related challenges, such as an outdated, disconnected and on-site HR system that required extensive manual processes for routine activities to track all requests in an integrated manner, and a training methodology that was not aligned with best practice and was based on wish lists rather than on competences. The system did not reflect the international standards that Abu Dhabi Customs was striving to implement.

The new application proved satisfactory for all stakeholders. The employees needed mobile access and self-service tools for HR tasks, which made all HR requirements easy to access and easy to deliver, and the management needed more advanced analytics. The HCM implementation not only achieved said requirements, but exceeded them, resulting in substantial efficiency improvements, leading, engaging and enabling the workforce in new ways.

ADCA as a whole is pursuing a digital transformation strategy, the final outcome of which will be the full automation of every process. The transformation journey started with a full re-engineering of all processes, building on a foundation of best practice across all sectors and aligning them with top international standards, resulting in a deeper investment in innovative automations. The pioneering element of these efforts within ADCA was the implementation of a cloud-based HCM to meet the needs of a forward-thinking, innovative HR department that aims to exceed all expectations – not only within ADCA, but at national and international levels. In these unprecedented times, this initiative made Abu Dhabi Customs agile, efficient and more responsive to the pandemic, which helped to override disruptions to operations and business.

Why ADCA chose a cloud HCM

The Abu Dhabi government created a ministerial-level position to drive innovation using advanced technologies. In line with that mandate, Abu Dhabi Customs chose to implement Oracle’s state of the art, innovative, cloud HCM as its HR platform, determining that the platform’s data analytics capabilities, powered by machine learning and artificial intelligence, were unparalleled.\(17\)

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\(17\) https://www.oracle.com/human-capital-management/
Results

ADCA estimates that its HR team has increased productivity about 15% since adopting the cloud HCM, which successfully consolidated and replaced 14 HR systems. The new system was implemented in about three months, and employees adopted it quickly – more than 1,100 employees were using it within two weeks of the launch.

Employees can now use self-service features to handle routine tasks, and they access their HR tools via mobile devices, which helps inspectors who spend most of their time in the field. A digital assistant and automated voice access to the HCM functions are available.

ADCA is creating a central help desk to answer employees’ questions, using the case management capability of the HR Help Desk to route questions to the right person, for response within 48 hours. That means ADCA will need fewer HR staffers at remote locations.

The IT team no longer has to do an annual assessment of the HR system to consider which new features to add or whether to do a system upgrade. The cloud HCM automatically updates with new features every three months, staying aligned with best practice and emerging technology. As a result, the IT team can invest time previously spent on system evaluations on more strategic issues.

Full package of supportive solutions

The COVID-19 crisis slowed the flow of traffic and goods, which was the perfect opportunity to build up employee performance and optimize their skills. The smart platform, learning management system ‘TADREEB’ was ready to offer a wide variety of virtual technical and behavioural courses, removing the need for face-to-face training. The tool is compatible with mobile devices, tablets and laptops, and is therefore able to train and assess all employees on their level of achievement in the competencies assigned to them in accordance with their roles. It can also address any gaps.

ADCA also launched the Virtual Reality Training and Assessment Academy for Customs operations by creating a full virtual reality methodology to make the whole on-the-job experience enjoyable and realistic. It simulates the reality of Customs inspection procedures at all the three cargo borders in the UAE – land, sea and air – without the need for a physical, on-site presence.

Conclusion

Thanks to a full HR transformation strategy that was in place and ready to kick in, ADCA overcame the crisis. The hybrid model of remote work is likely to persist in the wake of the pandemic, and ADCA aims to take an active role in supporting its employees’ physical and emotional health and in fostering a culture of continuous learning in the skills they need to work in new ways.

Key takeaways from case story 2.2

- Fastest HCM deployment project with Oracle in the Middle East – duration of three months;
- Number one government entity in the Middle East to implement full Oracle HCM cloud suite;
- Number one entity worldwide to independently adopt the Oracle HCM digital assistant skills; and
- The only government entity in the region to use the Arabic language in the psychometric Chat Assess feature in their behavioural assessments;
- The only Customs entity that uses a virtual reality training programme to train for and assess its operations at all types of border.
Case story 2.3 International Organization for Standardization

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Our vision: Making lives easier, safer and better

Our mission: Through our members and their stakeholders, we bring people together to agree on International Standards that respond to global challenges. ISO standards support global trade, drive inclusive and equitable economic growth, advance innovation and promote health and safety to achieve a sustainable future.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is an independent, non-governmental, international organization with a membership of 165 national standards bodies. At ISO, we believe that international standards, although largely invisible in our daily lives, are a crucial component to making things safer and better in the world around us. By achieving this, we can contribute to improving people’s quality of life every day.

ISO provides a neutral platform for experts the world over to come together to develop and agree on standards. The building of consensus across multiple levels establishes trust and credibility in our organization, and the international standards we produce that make us a global leader in our field.

ISO’s Central Secretariat, comprising 165 staff, is based in Geneva, Switzerland. More about ISO’s structure and how it is governed can be found at iso.org.

Key Focus

Like many organizations, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic ISO was faced with a new reality for which it was not prepared and for which there was little to no reference.

On a human level, as people managers and as staff members, we had to learn to relate to each other without face-to-face contact and to work fully remotely, balancing our personal and professional lives in the same space.

International travel and meetings were traditionally a key element in the development of international standards, and our work has and will continue to be affected by COVID-19. However, ISO has not stopped working and delivering. If anything, our work has become more relevant in providing solutions for industry, in contributing to strengthening health systems and in ensuring that consumers can access safe products.

Every challenge presents new opportunities to adapt, change ways and demonstrate leadership. Although we were not fully prepared for a crisis of this magnitude, we were able to respond with timely and adequate measures. Physical meetings were quickly shifted to virtual ones, allowing technical committees to continue developing standards (ISO supplied Zoom licences to all leaders of committees and training to be effective in virtual meetings). We understood our members’ urgent need to provide stakeholders with the support to deal with the pandemic and a number of ISO standards and their national adoptions were made freely accessible online (e.g. standards for PPE and medical equipment, for business continuity and pandemic recovery). Throughout, the ISO Central Secretariat (ISO/CS) staff remained fully operational while working from home (additional equipment was provided to all staff and IT security was increased).

At the heart of all decisions taken at ISO is well-being of the ISO Community and the continuation of our business. We were clear from the beginning that our biggest asset is our people – officers, members’ staff, experts and ISO/CS staff – and we strive to provide as much predictability as possible through regular communications throughout these uncertain times.

At the onset of this crisis, the President’s Committee held an extraordinary meeting to agree on ISO’s approach to the crisis and endorsed a fast-track decision-making process regarding governance and technical meetings, keeping the Council, the Technical Management Board and all ISO members and stakeholders fully informed.

A business continuity management team was established to make recommendations and assist the ISO/CS Leadership Team in this context. Based on ISO 22301:2019 ‘Security and resilience – Business continuity management systems – Requirements’, ISO/CS implemented the minimum viable level of service to guarantee the continuation of ISO’s work throughout the crisis. Back-ups were identified for key roles and
precautionary financial measures were put in place, putting on hold expenditures for activities not meeting those minimum levels.

In the vein of anticipating potential issues and deploying actions to minimize adverse effects on the ISO system, the Council Standing Committee on Strategy and Policy, with input from other ISO governance bodies and the ISO/CS management, reviewed the Risk Register (ISO’s overall risk portfolio and its respective countermeasures) and supplied the Council (our board of directors) with an updated register. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the likelihood of some risks and these were reviewed regularly so decisions could be reversed, depending on how the crisis evolved.

Despite the difficulties encountered due to the COVID-19 crisis, we learned that, working virtually, we can move faster toward developing standards, potentially increasing the speed at which they are produced, and therefore be more responsive to our stakeholders’ needs, all the while enabling more participation, especially from developing countries.

With regard to staff, ISO focused on prioritizing staff health and safety, including well-being. A health protection plan was developed and implemented in compliance with local government regulations. It is reviewed and continuously adapted to ensure alignment with changing recommendations and guidelines.

ISO contracted the services of external professionals to provide staff with free and confidential access to a support hotline for mental health and well-being. A series of workshops for managers and staff gave them practical tools and tips for the prolonged situation. ISO invested in ergonomic support by supplying or helping staff buy equipment to improve the working from home experience.

To aid morale, virtual staff games and get-togethers were organized at quarterly intervals, which received great participation and feedback.

**Conclusion**

ISO’s efforts over the months of the pandemic ensured business continuity and paved the way for significant learning in a number of areas.

ISO is constantly looking at ways to learn and improve, maintaining contact with other organizations to share best practice and adjust and adapt accordingly. The business continuity management team also undertook further training on ISO/PAS 45005, ‘Occupational health and safety management – Safe working during the COVID-19 pandemic’, to check and challenge our own performance.

ISO seeks to continually improve the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of our business continuity strategy, based on qualitative and quantitative measures. This has happened throughout the crisis and will continue during recovery.
c. Focus area 3:

Work design
i. Introduction

Once the building blocks of a business continuity strategy are in place, they must be accompanied by an adapted form of work design that is crisis specific. The advent of the COVID-19 crisis saw the trend toward vertical restructuring accelerate; non-essential departments were reassigned, and decision-making streamlined.

Adaptation and flexibility in a crisis are predictors of survival, if not success, and those organizations that had already embraced flexible working arrangements and embedded them in their work design had a distinct advantage over those with more rigid structures. The benefits of flexible working arrangements have long been vaunted by HR theorists and practitioners alike, but their boundaries were severely tested during the COVID-19 crisis when an estimated 75% of organizations introduced some working from home or flexible working arrangements, seemingly overnight, in the largest remote working experiment ever to take place.

The importance of how work is designed, structures organized, and teams collaborate is never more apparent than during a crisis, but the necessity for HR departments to lead the way in the redesign of work processes has also been revealed during the course of the pandemic. In an ideal work environment, workflow structures and processes would originate from HR departments, which rely on employee and stakeholder data to fuel the creation of streamlined processes, thus making the task of redesigning processes in times of crisis somewhat easier. Adopting technology to assist with workforce planning and with, for instance, enterprise resource planning systems, may have been considered optional prior to the crisis, but they are now almost certainly an imperative. Work design post-crisis will further focus on ensuring that employees can be responsive, that is; in sync with customer needs; in a position to anticipate changes in those needs; and able to adapt their approach and activities accordingly. It is up to HR leaders to adapt work design strategies to unlock responsiveness at scale across the workforce and to build organizational resilience.

Furthermore, future-proofing work design efforts will mean that the most vulnerable among the workforce are not neglected during times of crises; HR departments must ensure that diverse stakeholders remain at the table and that their voices are not overlooked in the new work design. Women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, and other marginalised and at-risk groups shouldered much of the burden. It is crucial that HR departments not overlook these vulnerable constituents but reinforce policies that ensure their inclusion. The mainstreaming of these groups must not be paused during crises but rather accelerated so that the redesign of work encompasses their perspectives.

ii. Guiding principles 3.1–3.3

This Guide has been informed and inspired by a multitude of resources, including consultations with WCO Members and stakeholders, outcomes of WCO global and regional conferences on HRM, a WCO survey and a literature review that provided the theoretical underpinnings. To distil and streamline the information, three work design-related guiding principles specific to the Customs environment have been identified.

Guiding principle 3.1 – Ensure the optimization of the organizational structure in times of crisis to facilitate the delivery of operations/services, including the establishment of core competencies teams/structures benefiting from more autonomy and decision-making authority

Several mission-critical organizational pillars will need to be addressed in the immediate aftermath of a crisis to guarantee the sustainability of operations. Chief among these is the timely review of a variety of HR policies that will be directly impacted by a crisis, such as sick leave, employment contracts to verify whether employees can be moved to business-critical areas, and business continuity or emergency contingency plans. It is highly advisable to establish a command control centre to oversee emergency operations, and

important that this new, albeit temporary, department be endowed with the ability and responsibility to lead. As a supplementary measure, many organizations will opt to create core team structures, either as a predefined response to a crisis or in an emergency capacity. Regardless of the circumstances of their establishment, these core team structures must be capable of functioning autonomously and be endowed with decision-making authority to ensure a seamless transition from a multi-layered management structure to a more distilled format.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 3.1

- Shift to a simpler, more agile structure, moving away from a traditional, multi-layered organization;
- Design and implement competency-based HRM tools following the WCO approach and develop a specialised core competencies team with more decision-making authority.

Guiding principle 3.2 – Ensure an effective transition to remote working modalities and facilities

The newly-inaugurated network structure will complement the adoption of new remote or hybrid working strategies. Popular business collaboration tools that allow employees to share work and communicate in real-time include Slack, GitHub and Google Docs. Managers who use such tools must establish policies and guidelines around their use. The same holds true for video conferencing software, the most popular of which are Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Hangouts.

Employees quickly learned the downsides of remote working during the pandemic when the blurred lines of the personal and professional became clear, and longer working hours, more screen time and less social interaction created a less-than-ideal working environment and added to the pressures already felt by a beleaguered workforce. Many HR departments responded imaginatively and compassionately to the new circumstances and offered enhanced medical benefits, more paid time off, online quizzes and hobby chats. (21) Placing an emphasis on asynchronous virtual communication can also be beneficial for employees who wish or need to work according to their own schedule, outside official office hours.

To cope with virtual collaboration on a large scale, HR managers must develop and reward employees’ virtual collaboration skills, foster perceived proximity, and design ICT, work goals and the communication structure in a way that puts primacy on collaboration. (22) To give virtual working skills the attention they deserve, managers should also include employees’ efforts in virtual communication and teamwork as criteria for their performance evaluations.

From the outset, HR needs to set expectations for productivity and performance, clearly communicate guidelines, and establish standards for the accountability of remote workers. It is estimated that the proportion of the US workforce that will be working from home multiple days a week will increase from 3.6% pre-pandemic to 25–30% by the end of 2021. It is becoming increasingly clear that this ‘trend’ will not disappear with the end of the pandemic, and the most effective way to embrace this new reality is to simultaneously embrace digitization and pertinent technologies.

Prior to COVID-19, efficiency, and ways of improving it, were top of the to-do lists of most HR managers. Post-crisis, organizations are prioritizing resilience as much as efficiency, if not more. (23)

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 3.2

- Rebuild from designing for efficiency to designing for resilience;
- Accelerate the digitalization of critical work processes;
- Develop methodologies to assess employee morale, engagement and understanding of job tasks when in-person relationships are not possible.

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Guiding principle 3.3 – Ensure that the workplace adapts to the ‘new normal’ and that the workforce transitions to the new nature of work

From the onset of a crisis, organizations will move from a multilayered, complex matrix structure to a simplified network structure, that is, a ‘new normal’ with their HR departments at the helm. Three factors will determine the ability of an organization to adapt their work design accordingly.

Knowledge is power and data is a fundamental building block of most HR departments. In order to redeploy employees to where they are most needed, and to identify the departments that will prove mission critical to the survival of the organization, HR departments must analyse the data they have on their people. Un- or under-utilised skills and experience could prove vital in the creation of a new network structure.

Infrastructure will play a determinative role in the survival and success of an organization mid- and post-crisis, but infrastructure specific to the reassignment of staff and the redeployment of talent will prove crucial to the realignment of work design.

Culture will certainly play a role in the implementation of a network structure. It is important to mitigate any negative impact a network structure might have on employees (who are likely to have fewer hierarchical accountability lines in the immediate aftermath of a crisis) and on managers (who will wield less authority and face unprecedented challenges), by ensuring that the culture aligns with and embodies agile work design.

As always, communication and feedback mechanisms are key to ensuring employees can voice their concerns and feel included in the elaboration of the network strategy.

The deployment of such a network structure assumes a minimal level of technological knowhow and adaptation in an organization. Nowadays, technology is so crucial that the disposition of an organization in terms of exploiting digital technologies is a fundamental source of competitive advantage. Those organizations that have not yet embraced the technology that can automate and expedite certain HR processes will have to pivot rapidly to technology platforms that make this new working style practical, efficient, resilient and scalable. To truly optimize the organizational structure, legacy systems – those processes and methodologies that have become redundant – will need to be abandoned or they risk jeopardizing the resilience of the organization during times of crises.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 3.3

• Structure the workforce in terms of organizational charts, reporting structures and more when managing employees remotely – a participative, engaged approach;
• Manage remote and in-person teams after the recovery – consider the different ways people will go back to work (all remote, mixed remote/in-person, all in-person);
• Coordinate the workforce to come back to in-person environments – contact tracing, cleaning, vaccines, masks, other processes.
iii. Case stories and key takeaways 3.1–3.2

Case story 3.1 Seychelles Revenue Commission

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<tr>
<td>Work design</td>
<td>Seychelles Revenue Commission</td>
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The COVID-19 pandemic presented and continues to present significant challenges for the Seychelles’ small economy, businesses, workforce and for the Seychelles Revenue Commission. The resilience, agility and innovation of its staff enabled SRC to meet the challenges that unfolded from the beginning of 2020 when the pandemic first emerged. Embracing the current situation, widely known as the ‘new normal’, requires confronting uncertainty and incorporating countermeasures into our decision-making.

The Seychelles Revenue Commission (SRC) is a semi-autonomous agency established through the enactment of the Seychelles Revenue Commission Act 2009, as the body responsible for the administration of revenue and Customs laws. SRC has 355 employees (81 men, 274 women) across tax, Customs, support services, the Commissioner General’s Office and the Deputy Commissioner General’s Office.

SRC plays a pivotal role in the delivery of critical Government services to businesses and the public in general, and its financial performance contributes to mitigating fiscal risks to the national economy. SRC developed and delivered key business support schemes at significant speed by re-engineering its processes, often within days of Government announcements. Furthermore, SRC had to ensure the health and safety of both taxpayers and its workers when delivering the critical services the organization is mandated to provide.

Health and safety measures

- All employees and clients are requested to wear a mask, and to practice social distancing at all SRC premises;
- All visitors undergo a health screening process prior to entering any SRC office; comprising temperature checks, hand sanitization and registration in a visitor’s book to facilitate contact tracing in case of the occurrence of COVID cases;
- Reduced cash and document handling on the frontline by introducing drop boxes and online payment platforms to limit contact;
- Work surfaces, especially in public areas (counters and verification tables), are sanitised throughout the day by housekeeping or other officers as an additional protective measure; and
- Wearing protective gear is the norm for staff and at no time should an SRC employee be seen without a mask. Staff on the frontline, meeting taxpayers and the public, often also wear face shields and gloves – especially cashiers and at the airport terminal. All PPE is provided by SRC.

Working from home

One of the strategies used by SRC is remote working. Sections are split into teams to alternate coming into the office and staff attend the office on specific days, as dictated by a work schedule, to ensure that SRC can continue to deliver a service, even if a team member tests COVID positive. Staff are provided with the necessary tools to continue working from home, and these include laptops, mobile phones, SIM cards and an internet connection. Some staff were given special projects to complete, which did not require access to tax or Customs systems or to the internet.

The two main concerns when it comes to working remotely are ensuring that there is minimal disruption to the workflow and the level of productivity and that quality is not compromised. To ensure this, employees were required to develop pre-determined work schedules, which they regularly report on.

Splitting office space

Where it is paramount that an entire team or section comes into office due to a deadline on a particular project, the staff are spread across vacant office space to limit the risk of contagion.

Replacement teams

Key personnel with relevant expertise were identified to play dual roles and to work as replacement staff in specific areas, such as boarding vessels and at the airport terminal, to ensure continuity of service in case of contamination of the primary workforce in those areas. Customs staff in particular are generally trained...
to different functions via rotation to ensure they are multi-skilled.

**Staggering working hours**

Staff coming to the office can opt to stagger working hours. This was put in place for those who commute to work by public transport (to avoid crowds of commuters at peak hours, thus reducing the risk of contracting the virus) and those with children (since school hours changed and the supply of school childminders dried up).

**Regular communication**

SRC ensures continuous communication with its staff, especially during times of crisis, and shares updates on health measures as published by the Seychelles Health Care Agency. The management team regularly checks in on employees, not only for work purposes but also to ascertain their safety and well-being, especially those who test positive for the virus.

Employees are encouraged to bring up the challenges they face in carrying out their work in a timely manner to manage expectations. They are also encouraged to provide feedback on new working methods in order to rapidly effect necessary changes in procedures, whenever required.

Regular updates are also provided to the public, tax agents and Customs agents on any potential changes in working hours to relieve pressure on staff and at SRC premises.

**Interaction with health authorities**

SRC management ensures that relevant risk assessment and contact tracing is carried out by health professionals whenever an employee tests positive.

SRC provides all relevant contact details of any close contact in the office or with stakeholders to speed up the testing, quarantine and isolation process. This gives another level of responsibility to the HR and management team in ensuring staff well-being.

**New work approaches**

SRC enforcement and compliance officers are continuously briefed on which business categories should not be contacted, due to measures introduced to manage dissatisfaction among customers. They are briefed on new approaches for enforcement work to reduce risk: limited face-to-face meetings; introducing virtual meetings; no field visits to certain types of business, especially tourism-related, where the risk is higher; limited on-site verification of cargo for employee safety; appointments for any unavoidable face-to-face meetings; appointments for cargo verification to reduce crowding; audit review documents placed in drop boxes or sent via email to limit contact and immediate exposure; correspondence, statements or notices of assessment sent via email rather than hand delivered; introducing e-payment or bank transfer facilities to reduce congestion at SRC offices; and taxpayer/importer queries addressed by phone or email.

**New training methods**

We all know that the virus is here to stay, and therefore capacity building and training should not be foregone or compromised, especially for new recruits. Most training is now being done virtually or in keeping with health measures by having not more than four trainees in one room. SRC has invested in additional internet and relevant equipment for its meeting and training rooms to increase space.

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**Key takeaways from case story 3.1**

- Strict adherence to public health measures, to prevent the spread of COVID-19;
- Working from home reduces crowding in offices, but measures have to be in place to ensure minimum disruption to the workflow and to productivity;
- Regularly check on employees, not only for work matters, but also for their well-being;
- Changes in conducting compliance, enforcement and training;
- Allow for additional responsibilities and costs in adhering to health measures;
- Multiskills are a must.
Intrapreneurship is the process by which a group of individuals, in association with their organization, creates a new organization or generates renewal or innovation within that organization.

We selected a representative group of six people from our international firm, from bottom to C-Level, and driven from day one by me as CEO, to create and develop an intrapreneur project: Camille, VP of Sales; Alejandra, VP of Operations; Indira, CFO; two headhunters; and Steffany, administrative staff.

After a brainstorming session we democratically chose our new intrapreneur project: to franchise the firm with the objective of participating in the next Franchise Trade Show, in six months’ time from day one.

To start strongly and efficiently, we established five key steps for a successful intrapreneurship programme:

1. spaces of autonomy
2. formal assessment and support processes
3. strengthened exchange and communication between areas
4. establishment of an incentive system
5. employee awareness.

**Key focus 1**

To franchise a company, you need to know each area perfectly, each process and step of the value chain, which means boosting exchange and communication between areas by 100%. Sales have to communicate with finance, both have to communicate with operations, adapting their communication and behavioural style to understand each other. These are very important skills during crises.

**Key focus 2**

Combining all areas to synthesize all firms into the three spheres of sales, finance and operations. This gives people teamwork and solidarity, which is crucial in a crisis.

**Conclusion**

For our firm, intrapreneurship was the best way to grow in a crisis. The human experience and knowledge it creates are priceless.

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**Key takeaways from case story 3.2**

- Retain valuable employees, talented inventors and developers who might otherwise leave the company to embark on an entrepreneurial venture;
- Encourage engagement;
- Energize and accelerate training;
- Increase the valuation of company branding;
- Boost communication between departments;
- Build strong solidarity between colleagues.
d. Focus area 4:

Health, safety and staff resilience
i. Introduction

The amplification of health and safety measures in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis was seen across the board as organizations rushed to enact safety protocols in line with government and international standards. If people are the competitive advantage in high-performing organizations, then their health and safety should be paramount. As such, protecting employees from the ravages of the pandemic was an immediate priority for HR managers in early 2020 as altered work conditions presented new challenges to employee health and safety.

Health and well-being are all-encompassing terms that can denote many different aspects of the employee experience at work, from the psychosocial to the physical. Prior to the onset of COVID-19, discussions on mental health focused primarily on stress levels, but in the midst of a crisis, mental health is best viewed through the prism of an amalgamation of factors, including work environments, key determinants of health and safety in the workplace and individual characteristics – such as age and gender; human capital endowment; years of education, experience and tenure.

Two seemingly distinct but equally pernicious factors, absenteeism and presenteeism, can threaten the stability of an organization. Outside of a crisis context, both can be detrimental to an organization’s bottom line, in terms of profit, and to worker morale. However, during a crisis they can pose a grave health risk to workers’ lives. If mission-critical staff are absent at critical stages in the organization’s timeline, or conversely, if non-critical or infected staff persist in reporting to physical work locations when specific health guidelines expressly forbid doing so, then the health and safety of the entire workforce could be jeopardised.

Once the immediate health and safety of employees are assured, mental health protocols must be enacted. Best practice includes making information accessible and digestible, offering guidance on well-being and, in the very best-case scenario, creating a level mental health playing field by enabling leaders and senior management to disclose their own mental health struggles in the context of a crisis. Another important aspect that can impact mental health is financial security and many organizations moved to reassure employees that unnecessary layoffs would be avoided in the absence of a firm guarantee. Others provided financial security blankets in the form of, for instance, payday loans.

HR departments are best placed to identify vulnerable employees in times of crisis. International HRM research concluded that certain personality traits and characteristics can prove more adaptable and thus more resilient to volatile environments. Cultural agility competencies – such as tolerance for ambiguity, resilience and curiosity – are all key personality traits that can better withstand the pressures of a crisis environment. HR departments should be able to identify ‘crisis champions’ or to foster emerging stars who are more at ease on virtual platforms than in regular, face-to-face working environments.

To increase employee engagement at a time of general uncertainty, HR departments should take regular pulse surveys to assess the health and well-being of employees and then let the response inform HR policies and procedures.

It is crucial that any gains and footholds made in gender mainstreaming and incorporating diverse perspectives not reverse course in a crisis context. All HR policies on employee health, resilience and personal safety should contain a diversity perspective. The WCO has continued to provide its Members with innovative materials and robust capacity-building initiatives with a specific focus on gender, underpinned by its Declaration on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs. Research has shown that women and minorities have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, with female unemployment figures at an all-time high and diversity hires threatened by the invocation of ‘emergency hiring’ protocols. Organizations must continue to embrace diverse perspectives by broadening the spectrum of employees, particularly during a period of crisis when vulnerable and minority communities can often be overlooked.

ii. Guiding principles 4.1–4.4

This Guide has been informed and inspired by a multitude of resources, including consultations with WCO Members and stakeholders, outcomes of WCO global and regional conferences on HRM, a WCO survey and a literature review that provided the theoretical underpinnings. To distil and streamline the information, four health, safety and staff resilience-related guiding principles specific to the Customs environment have been identified.

Health and safety at work are legislated for by international standards maintained by ISO and, at a national level, by organizations that advocate for the well-being of workers. Organizations have a moral and legal duty to safeguard their employees and the integrity of their business. Occupational Safety and Health Acts in most countries require that employers furnish employees with a place of employment free from recognised hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm. In the midst of a crisis, health and safety protocols that have been established within the organization long before a crisis hits must be invoked and the protection of staff at all levels must be accorded top priority.

Specific measures employed by many organizations during COVID-19 included:

- Regularly disinfecting the workplace;
- Maintaining good indoor ventilation;
- Making sure that employees, suppliers and customers are aware of the employer’s plans;
- Ensuring sufficient supplies of appropriate masks, alcohol wipes, gloves, paper towels, thermometers, disinfectants and so on;
- If employees are required to travel to areas known to have the virus, to assess whether such travel is necessary.

Guiding principle 4.1 Ensure that the workplace has been adapted to respond effectively to the crisis at hand and to protect the safety of staff, clients and partners

Guiding principle 4.2 – Ensure that support, including psychological support, is provided to staff in times of crisis

As remote working became the new norm for hundreds of thousands of employees across the globe in 2020, the HR focus shifted from an emphasis on health and safety to a new, equally important component, mental health. As always, those organizations that had spearheaded initiatives in the mental health realm found the new focus to be an easier transition than in organizations that had never addressed the topic nor embedded policies to safeguard employees’ mental health in their work structures.

Research has shown that investing in employee mental health is a worthwhile endeavour for many reasons, not least of which is financial; the average return on investment across all industries and actions for investing in a mental health initiative in the workplace is 2.3.\(^{(26)}\) Add to this the fact that organizational and business leaders also have duties under work health and safety laws to do whatever is reasonably practicable to eliminate or minimize risks to workers’ mental and physical health meant that mental health became a ‘legitimate’ field of exploration during the pandemic for many organizations that had disregarded its importance.

The new – mostly remote – working reality following new health regulations and stay at home guidelines invoked in response to COVID-19, resulted in a rise in mental health issues, such as burnout among employees, with some researchers estimating that...
burnout levels reached an all-time high in March 2020\(^2\), coinciding with peak levels of panic. In parallel, the mental health conditions most common in the workplace and the broader community – such as anxiety disorders, affective disorders (comprised of mood disorders such as depression) and substance-use disorders – also continued unabated during the crisis and needed to be addressed.

Employee engagement is likely to fall in times of crisis, which can ultimately lead to certain mental health issues manifesting, and it is imperative that organizations provide psychological support programmes to protect staff, such as counselling services, increased flexibility and 'screen holidays'.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 4.2

- Support managers in times of crisis, including psychological support, to enable them to perform their team management duties;
- Equip managers to provide appropriate psychological support to their teams;
- Build and strengthen staff resilience;
- Dedicate a team/unit to support psychological well-being at work, if feasible;
- Take the necessary actions to improve employee experience and to enhance the employee value proposition.

Guiding principle 4.3 – Protect the safety of employees and clients at all times through the development and implementation of occupational health and safety standards

The safety of employees is enshrined in and prescribed by international agreements, and particularly by international standards set by ISO to which many countries ascribe – the ISO OHS Technical Committee 283 is composed of 99 member countries. National legislation has given rise to a significant improvement in the welfare of employees over the last century.\(^2\)

As organizations are obliged to comply with national legislation, these high-level agreements have had a positive trickle-down effect and ensured a high level of compliance and improvements in safety standards. Occupational health and safety (OHS) measures are typically within the purview of HR departments and pertain to the day-to-day safety of employees and clients. Many crises are foreseeable and instituting measures to protect employees from incidents ranging from the extraordinary and unexpected to the more prosaic is not only advisable but also a legal obligation in most jurisdictions. OHS measures may need to be adapted if an extraordinary crisis occurs, as many organizations came to realize during the COVID-19 crisis, and the involvement of HR is crucial. Furthermore, clients and stakeholders expect an organization to demonstrate compliance with national and international OHS standards and norms.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 4.3

- Undertake regular OHS standards/systems reviews with industry specialists;
- Develop and roll-out OHS standards/systems aligned to internationally recognised practice;
- Regularly review and update OHS;
- Embed OHS within the HR portfolio.

Guiding principle 4.4 – Ensure that a staff well-being culture is effectively embedded as a core principle of the organization to support employees in their performance at all times

According to various studies and HR professionals, there is a direct correlation between the level of staff engagement and staff performance. One of the key requirements to ensure a higher level of staff

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engagement is the establishment of a staff well-being culture within an organization.

The COVID-19 crisis has created a growing demand from employees that their organization enhances their services in the area of staff well-being through the provision of, among other things, (i) a safer and more pleasant working environment and (ii) further psychological services in times of crisis.

Organization leaders and HR executives must hence initiate or deepen their efforts to embed a staff well-being culture at work, not only through measuring staff engagement levels, effective work environment design and offering psychological support services, but also through sensitization efforts across the organization on the importance of well-being. This contributes to enhancing staff well-being at work and, ultimately, to enhanced individual and organizational performance.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 4.4

• Assess, re-engineer and nurture the well-being culture (if any) in the workplace;
• Involve employees in the design and implementation of a staff well-being culture;
• Include staff well-being as part of a manager’s responsibility (and eventually evaluation criteria);
• Encourage work place socialization.
### Case story 4.1 Federal Revenue of Brazil

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<tr>
<th>HR focus area</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health, safety and staff resilience</td>
<td>Federal Revenue of Brazil</td>
<td>CS4A</td>
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</table>

Managing people during the pandemic raised the awareness of the Federal Revenue of Brazil (RFB) about the necessity to balance the work and the physical and mental condition of the team.

Moacyr Mondardo Junior, Undersecretary of Corporate Management, RFB

The Special Secretariat of the RFB is directly subordinate to the Ministry of Economy and performs essential functions for the state. RFB is responsible for the administration of Customs, federal taxes, including those on foreign trade, and a significant part of the country’s social security contributions. Its mission is to administer the federal tax and Customs system, contributing to the country’s economic and social welfare. Its vision is to be recognized as essential to the country’s progress, as engaged in innovation, Customs and fiscal compliance, and as offering services of excellence to society.

Human resources is now called Coordination-General of People Management. It was established in 2005 and, with the support of decentralized divisions, it manages over 23,000 staff (according to December 2020 figures), of which 42% are women and 58% are men; 9% of women and 15% of men have a management position.

**Innovative and effective solutions centred on people**

In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic spread all around the globe and, due to the uncertainties of this scenario, measures were needed to tackle its effects on public health and to provide emotional support to employees and their families. With the support of a staff team the RFB established an ‘espaço da fala’, or ‘talk place’, to facilitate reflections on the psychosocial balance of staff in need. Personal or professional issues in the workspace or in the family circle that impact negatively on the workspace are the focus of this team.

The objective is to help individuals tackle their anxieties and distress about the disease, as well as the emotional questions that come from isolation and confinement, helping to maintain mental balance.

This solution was only possible due to an innovative approach by a network of RFB staff, the Appreciation and Quality of Life team (Rede QVT), who identified those most in need. After implementing social and emotional support actions, direct contact was made and qualified counselling services offered, making available tools and techniques for self-knowledge and stress relief. The virtual initiatives included: psychosocial refuge; listening circles; meditation; live sessions; grief counselling; and support to the victims and families of RFB staff.

The visibility and acceptance of these initiatives were so strong and inspiring that it became a programme called ‘Building a network of mental health care in RFB’.

The main results in 13 months were:

- 3,237 services attended
- 1,800 participants on average in the meditation sessions
- More than 10,000 participants in 45 live sessions, supported by staff with special skills (e.g. therapy, nutrition, meditation, ageing, home workouts, mindfulness, coaching) or by professional guests, invited pro bono.

### Conclusion

This approach was possible because all the actions implemented from the start of the pandemic were people-centred and with a human perspective, bringing together the organization and the people on questions that were previously set aside. The mission and objectives of a Customs and revenue organization are clearly to support the state budget, but the pandemic introduced a new scenario that induced a reaction in the team as a whole.
Key takeaways from case story 4.1

- People are important;
- Psychosocial balance brings balance to the organization;
- People management is an organizational strategy;
- People need help and support;
- The COVID-19 pandemic changed us all.
Case story 4.2 Liberia Revenue Authority

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused us to reconsider changes to our business approach. This pandemic has impacted all of us. Therefore, in this current situation it is important we stay connected to our employees, business partners and communities.

Thomas Doe Nah, Commissioner General, Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA)

The LRA was established by the legislature to replace the Department of Revenue of the Ministry of Finance in September 2013. Its primary objective is to administer and enforce the revenue laws in accordance with the Revenue Code of Liberia or related laws on assessing, collecting, auditing and accounting for all national revenues, and to facilitate legitimate international trade and Customs border management enforcement.

The LRA has seven departments, subdivided into divisions, units and sections. The HRMD is a subsection of the Administrative Affairs Department and is headed by an Assistant Commissioner. It is subdivided into four units (compensation, welfare and benefits; performance management; recruitment; and capacity development and training.) To ensure the attainment of the LRA’s objectives through the skills, knowledge and personality of its human resources, the HRMD’s mandate is to interpret and provide general guidelines about LRA policies and procedures for staff.

The total staff complement of the LRA is 949 (737 male, 211 female). The gender distribution of male to female in senior management is 69:22.

Developing the ‘12 Commandments’

The onset of the global pandemic caught a lot of organizations off guard. Too many HR departments were not equipped to handle the unprecedented effects of COVID-19 on their workforce’s productivity and efficiency. To meet the demands and mitigate the risks of COVID-19, one of the first actions taken by the Commissioner General of the LRA was to commission an anti-COVID-19 task force on 17 March 2020 to develop a preparedness and response strategy. The task force included the Deputy Commissioner General for Administrative Affairs, the Assistant Commissioner for HR, the Assistant Commissioner Large Tax Department, the Manager Customs Rural Ports, the Assistant Commissioner Risk Management, the Assistant Commissioner General Services Department, Security Management and the Manager Communication, Media and Public Affairs. From 18 to 20 March 2020 the team held a working session to develop a set of preventive measures that was nicknamed the ‘12 Commandments’ (see Table 1). This list was communicated to all staff and to LRA business partners through internal communication systems, mandating all to adhere strictly to the guidelines.
**Table 2: The 12 Commandments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Measures to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 at the LRA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Mandatory hand washing</strong>&lt;br&gt;It is mandatory that all employees and taxpayers entering LRA premises wash their hands. The LRA has adopted a No Washing Hands, No Entry Policy. HR and security officers will be assigned at major entries with wash stations to ensure that employees and taxpayers entering the building wash their hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Taking temperatures</strong>&lt;br&gt;The LRA will supply thermometers to security assigned at the entrances of premises to monitor employee and taxpayer temperatures. Any person displaying a high temperature reading will not be allowed to enter the building and will be advised on steps to take.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>No visits</strong>&lt;br&gt;All visitors (except taxpayers) will be banned from the building; staff are informed to communicate this message to family members, friends, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Non-essential staff</strong>&lt;br&gt;HR is identifying staff who are ill and nearing retirement as non-essential staff; they will be informed to stay away from work for a specific period, after being identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Personal protective equipment</strong>&lt;br&gt;Staff assigned at borders/port of entries will receive weekly supplies of PPE (hand gloves, face masks), hand sanitizer, alcohol, detergents and faucet-buckets (buckets with tap); they are categorized as high risk because of their exposure to travellers coming into and going out of the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Returning staff</strong>&lt;br&gt;Staff returning from countries considered as high risk will stay away from the office and self-quarantine for 14 days; they will report to work after a clean bill of health is forwarded to the HRD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Restricted meetings</strong>&lt;br&gt;General staff meetings and meetings involving more than 10 persons will be cancelled for the period in question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Training cancelled</strong>&lt;br&gt;All planned staff training and capacity development activities for the period with more than 10 persons are hereby cancelled; an online training link (<a href="http://www.Alison.com">www.Alison.com</a>) on COVID-19 will be shared on ‘Allstaff’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Limited workplace movement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Staff are encouraged to use the inter-office communication systems (desk phones, mobile phones, internet) to avoid too many inter-office movements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Safety for cleaners</strong>&lt;br&gt;Janitors/cleaners will be supplied with face masks and hand gloves for their safety while cleaning the building and restrooms; the janitorial service provider will assign cleaners to the elevators to ensure continuous wipe down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><strong>Biometric signing-in</strong>&lt;br&gt;LRA will procure hand-dryers to be mounted next to the biometric equipment; after washing hands do not wipe them, but rather dry them before doing a biometric sign-in; use sanitizer mounted next to the biometric equipment to clean hands after signing in. Meanwhile, because of the mode of transmission of the virus, LRA is considering reverting to manual time and attendance procedures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Commuting staff</strong>&lt;br&gt;All staff commuting to and from work on public transport are encouraged to employ extra precautionary methods (wearing protective clothing and regularly using sanitizers after getting on, while on and after getting off public transport).</td>
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**Adjusting to change**

The period to transition and adjust to the ‘new normal’ was a unique test for the LRA and staff. The HR team faced difficult adjustments to make sure the organization continued with as little disruption as possible. At the same time, the HR team was busy: working with supervisors to identify and compile the list of non-essential employees; working with procurement to purchase and distribute PPE; managing information dissemination about the virus; and dealing with stress-related incidents due to the virus. The HR team ensured that updates regarding changes to labour laws and other regulations were communicated quickly to managers and staff.
Despite all the measures and support provided to staff, a psychological impact could be seen in the decrease in productivity and in the adherence to policies and procedures. There was a steep rise in absenteeism. Revenue generation decreased due to the challenge of remote management and the closure of collection points. Employee fears and anxieties increased, thereby initiating calls for the complete shutdown of business activities. The HR team found that one effective way to ease employee tensions amid the crisis was to place a strong emphasis on the dissemination of information.

In the face of the challenges, the organization made sure that employee engagement was maintained and strengthened through creative methods. After some time (especially when the National Public Health Institute announced a decrease in COVID cases), staff members’ commitment and resilience was evident in their desire to be back in the office and to start performing their duties.

**Key takeaways from case story 4.2**

- Develop a crisis management strategy that is aligned with the business strategy from the onset to mitigate risk and to increase the level of preparedness before a crisis makes it crucial;
- Communication with employees should be open and honest during a crisis;
- The responsibility for maintaining business continuity should be evenly distributed across the organization and not considered as the duty of just one department.
Focus area: Ensure staff and client safety at all times through the development and implementation of OHS standards

The Australian Border Force (ABF) is Australia’s frontline border law enforcement agency and Customs service within the Department of Home Affairs. Home Affairs, including the ABF, is supported by the People and Culture Division (PCD) through the provision of an integrated range of services and products that enables the ABF to deliver critical front-line functions. There are currently some 300 staff in PCD across the areas of payroll services, people services, workplace relations and work health and safety assurance, people strategy and the COVID-19 Taskforce. As of 31 March 2021 there were 14,223 staff across the Department of Home Affairs (including the ABF).

Development of policy instructions to support the Department of Home Affairs, including the ABF

The COVID-19 Taskforce developed protocols and fact sheets to support Home Affairs to navigate the workplace impacts of the virus and to continue delivering critical business functions without disruption. These spanned COVID-safe practices, workforce continuity, and flexible working arrangements and outlined the care and support arrangements available for staff.

The protocols were designed as an enduring suite of documents to provide certainty and stability across the workforce. The fact sheets were to provide additional guidance, to translate protocol guidance across work areas, to respond to unforeseen developments and to clarify matters raised by staff. The fact sheets are updated on an as-needed basis.

The COVID-19 Taskforce undertook an extensive consultation with the Department’s stakeholders and coordinated activities across the Department and between the Department and the ABF. This feedback and sharing of lessons learned enables the protocols to be updated and adapted to continue supporting the delivery of departmental objectives while ensuring staff safety. A consistent and regular review of the protocols ensures that Home Affairs’ position is contemporary and forward leaning.

Dissemination of State and Territory Public Health Orders

In the Commonwealth of Australia, public health is managed at state and territory levels. Public Health Orders (PHO) are provided by the respective state and territory health authorities. Home Affairs complies with all PHOs issued that relate to or impact our work or workforce. Additional guidance is provided at Commonwealth level. The COVID-19 Taskforce issues communiqués through a number of mechanisms to ensure all staff are kept apprised of changes to PHOs, such as immediate lockdowns in specified areas or increased restrictions in geographic hotspots. Examples of such communication channels range from strategic senior executive hub communiqués to targeted emails in regions and all staff messaging. The timeliness of such messaging is crucial as it may directly impact on the frontline ABF workforce and their operations.

In addition to the official communications disseminated by the senior executive and the COVID-19 Taskforce, the ABF executive also messages staff promoting the importance of following official health advice to ensure the welfare and safety of individual officers, colleagues, clients and families.
Example of protocol

To mitigate the risk of COVID-19 entering the workplace, the COVID-19 Taskforce developed and implemented a protocol on employment outside of Home Affairs. It required senior management to review their staff’s external work agreements for outside employment and voluntary activities to identify occupations with a high risk of exposure to COVID-19. Any agreements that placed staff at a high risk were temporarily suspended. This protocol is in line with advice from Safe Work Australia to ensure that Home Affairs does all that is reasonably practicable to minimize the risk of its staff contracting COVID-19. High risk occupations were identified based on the workers included in Phase 1a and Phase 1b of the Australian Government’s National COVID-19 vaccine roll-out strategy. Given the unique skillsets of Customs officers within the ABF, a significant proportion of staff members had external work agreements for employment outside of Home Affairs. The implementation of this protocol enabled the Department and the ABF to continue to provide a COVID-safe workplace to staff and members of the general public they engage with.

Conclusion

The rapid development of evidence-based health advice and policies across the ABF helped to minimize the risk of staff exposure to COVID-19. More broadly, the development of additional policies around working from home arrangements and protocols for working from the office, ensured safe work practices. The promotion of ABF staff welfare and counselling services and regular senior executive messaging around mental health welfare supported staff resilience during the crisis and in post-crisis environments.

Key takeaways from case story 4.3

- Strong executive leadership enabled HR teams to develop and implement rapid policy changes during the pandemic;
- Developing agency-specific advice, through leveraging government health information, enabled the ABF to remain operationally effective and to protect its workforce and the wider community.
e. Focus area 5:

Learning and development
### i. Introduction

The temptation during a crisis is to let all 'business as usual' aspects of the organization dissipate, but the future impact is certainly detrimental. Research has shown that learning and development are core aspects of an employee engagement strategy and often feature high on an employee's wish list and/or reasons for staying at an organization, potentially compensating for lower pay or worse working conditions. Talent retention in non-crisis environments is a problem faced by many of the best organizations and, as part of their competitive differentiator, many go to great lengths to produce satisfactory learning and development programmes.

HR departments should continue to be guided by the 'build-buy-borrow-bot' philosophy of recruitment. Talent should be nurtured in-house if possible; if not available, talent must be procured externally, and new hires onboarded. Contingent workers can represent a real value saving for organizations; the informal gig economy is replete with experts seeking short-term employment, which can be advantageous for organizations looking to develop talent on a short-term basis. Alternatively, skilled workers can be 'borrowed' in a talent swap system, although this is a difficult scenario to enact in a crisis environment. In an ideal, non-crisis, working environment, the 'bot' element of the HR department would already have been embedded and talent procurement would also rely on artificial intelligence.

Many Customs administrations have already instituted e-learning initiatives that are self-paced and asynchronous, to allow maximum flexibility to employees. These initiatives could be expanded to encompass all aspects of employee learning and development that need to be conducted virtually during times of crises. By embracing virtual learning, employees can choose from a range of options to take ownership of their own career path, moving from a prescriptive vision of learning honed by management, to one in which employees can learn and access information about the entire cross-functional suite of jobs.

Organizations with robust learning and development initiatives in place should not pause or cancel training programmes. Staff retraining and upskilling is not an area in which HR managers should compromise organizational values, particularly not in a crisis period. Indeed, new circumstances mean new realities and new skillsets and training will need to be rolled out to cover, at the very least, new virtual working realities and other new work priorities that become manifest during and after a crisis. Some organizations lack learning and development departments or programmes, an absence that will be keenly felt during a crisis as organizations and employees pivot to deal with new virtual working realities. The learning and development arena has been democratized by technologies that allow for different organizational capacities and forms of learning. Organizations can leverage these new technologies, often referred to as blended learning 2.0, to capitalize on their advantages, such as hybrid learning platforms. The pace of development in this field has accelerated sharply and learners are faced with a wide choice when it comes to course content and delivery, be it blended or hybrid, a mixture of virtual and face-to-face, fully virtual instructor-led training or self-paced online learning.\(^\text{29}\)

However, for many employees, the move from synchronous to asynchronous learning can be challenging, and HR teams are advised to offer maximum support to employees struggling to manage their own time schedules and to set clear learning goals, symptomatic of the disadvantages of asynchronous learning. Furthermore, the rapid change in delivery from fully on-site to fully remote could be problematic for some employees. Continuous engagement, pulse surveys and other forms of communication are advisable – please see the WCO’s Guide for a Successful Transition to Live Virtual Training.\(^\text{30}\) This resource is intended for facilitators and managers looking to incorporate elements of virtual training into their learning and development suite of tools, or to make the switch from on-site to entirely virtual. It provides information for trainers on how to create a stimulating learning environment that empowers their learners to become fully accountable for their own learning objectives, while demonstrating how they can achieve that aim in a virtual environment, without social interaction and physical communication signals.

### ii. Guiding principles 5.1–5.2

*This Guide has been informed and inspired by a multitude of resources, including consultations with WCO Members and stakeholders, outcomes of WCO global and regional*
conferences on HRM, a WCO survey and a literature review that provided the theoretical underpinnings. To distil and streamline the information, two learning and development-related guiding principles specific to the Customs environment have been identified.

Guiding principle 5.1 – Ensure the continuity of learning and development services

Talent risk, or the task of attracting and retaining talent, ranked near the bottom of the list of CEO concerns pre-COVID-19; however, research has demonstrated that since the pandemic it has become the number one perceived threat to long-term growth. CEOs recognize that keeping their people feeling trained, engaged and productive is critical to surviving the crisis.\(^{(31)}\)

Learning and development services are a crucial part of an employee engagement strategy and are particularly important in a crisis scenario where employees are in geographically disparate locations and thus entirely reliant on organizational web solutions to both work and learn. For those modules that are not yet available online, efforts should be made to make the switch prior to the next crisis so that continuity of service can be ensured.

Blended learning, event-based learning, instructor-led training, which were all considered ideal learning mechanisms prior to COVID-19, are not viable options during a crisis, so training curricula should be adapted for online and self-led use. At a minimum, organizations without a learning and development unit should consider nominating a HR professional to fulfil this role for the duration of the crisis. Education technology providers are increasingly embedding novel features into learning programmes, such as gamification technology, micro-learning curricula and network access to subject matter experts,\(^{(32)}\) allowing even smaller organizations to derive benefit from online learning initiatives.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 5.1

- Establish a learning response task force;
- Ensure employee safety and well-being during in-person learning activities;
- Adapt in-person delivery;
- Promote, facilitate and enhance digital learning;
- Explore alternative digital learning strategies;
- Prepare for a sustained crisis and for a post-crisis environment.

Guiding principle 5.2 – Prioritize reskilling and upskilling activities to equip staff with the necessary skills to ensure the organization’s service continuity

As more and more organizations embrace digitization strategies, skill gaps will ensue. To plug these gaps, HR learning and development specialists could partner with managers to upskill a select cohort of motivated and influential employees to provide personalised learning support to colleagues. Conservative estimates show that more than half of all employees will require significant reskilling.\(^{(33)}\) Some organizations are advocating the use of distributed talent management to plug competence gaps and to attract and retain talent. HR is perceived as a support mechanism that provides managers and employees with the necessary tools to perform better and grow faster. It also focuses less on administration and more on strategy and execution. By harnessing data from employee pulse surveys, HR is equipped to provide frequent employee and manager feedback and to identify potential pitfalls. Matching talent to assignments will become more crucial in a crisis as decisions need to be taken rapidly and employees reassigned to ensure business continuity.

Upskilling is also an important aspect of any diversity, equity and inclusion programme, allowing organizations to prepare a future leadership and to safeguard any minority or marginalised groups and to ensure adequate representation in top management positions. Neglecting to upskill staff

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33. How to Transform Workforce Readiness and Build a Culture of Learning, Allego
now will have repercussions on the composition of future management and might negatively impact any diversity, equity and inclusion strategies.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 5.2

- Identify the critical skills the organization’s operations/services depend on;
- Start upskilling the critical workforce pools that will drive a disproportionate amount of value in the organization’s adapted operations/services;
- Initiate learning journeys to close critical skills gaps;
- Build on the reskilling in crisis time to improve overall organizational resilience;
- Adopt an agile approach to reskilling and upskilling;
- Ensure that the learning budget is not cut;
- Refer to the WCO Guide for a Successful Transition to Live Virtual Training.
iii. Case stories and key takeaways 5.1–5.6

Case story 5.1 South African Revenue Service

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<th>HR focus area</th>
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<tr>
<td>Learning and development</td>
<td>RSA – South African Revenue Service</td>
<td>CSSA</td>
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There is no doubt in my mind that we will prevail. This is because South Africans have come together like never before to wage the struggle against this virus, together.

Cyril Ramaphosa, President of South Africa

Impact of COVID-19 on employee development and learning

The South African Revenue Service (SARS) is the authority responsible for the collection of all taxes and Customs duties and for the protection of South Africa's borders. It employs approximately 12,700 staff in branches and offices located throughout the country's nine provinces. SARS Institute of Learning (SIOL) is mandated to develop human capabilities in core areas of business, enabling and support roles for organizational performance.

VUCA world

The advent of COVID-19 imposed a true VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) workplace environment. The degree to which operations were conducted changed drastically with the announcement of lockdown rules and curfews by the President of South Africa in 2020, but under the Disaster Management Act, SARS remained an essential service. Therefore, the importance of balancing the continuity of this service with the risk of transmission called for different strategies.

As circumstances changed, planned operating arrangements had to change. It was important to act immediately to protect employees, taxpayers and the broader community. SARS employees were allowed to work from home and rotations at workplaces were implemented, with SARS providing necessary PPE to all employees in line with COVID-19 measures.

Taxpayers and traders were introduced to a new electronic booking system for office appointments and infrastructure was deployed so that taxpayers visiting the office engaged with an employee working from home.

The employees received training in the new working environment and system to ensure continuity of operations throughout the emergency.

Decisive leadership

A key strategic objective in the SARS vision is to develop a high performing, diverse, agile, engaged and evolved workforce, anchored in employee development and training, predominately using a classroom model. An annual workplace skills plan activated the necessary training and development interventions to leverage high performance and employee engagement. All this was severely affected by the VUCA landscape created by COVID-19.

Quick decision-making as a critical element of leadership had to be demonstrated in a VUCA environment. It was important to pause all the planned training interventions for eight weeks and it became apparent that traditional classroom training was obsolete, despite all the plans and the budget allocated. It was time for a quantum leap toward a virtual environment by migrating the training curriculum and, in parallel, proactively changing the user mind-set.

A virtual learning readiness survey was implemented. It was short and direct to gauge employee readiness to use technology and remote platforms. The overwhelming response embraced distance-based learning and virtual instructor-led training, with 83% of respondents indicating that SARS should invest immediately in virtual learning capabilities. The decision to reassign funds and resources to a virtual environment was inevitable and staff received the necessary training to use the new equipment.
Rapid provision of tools

Travelling to learning centres and to offices for training is a thing of the past and it has become a minimum requirement for learning and development to use new platforms and to rapidly empower learners with tools and licences for: Microsoft Teams, WebEx and video conferencing facilities; data for staff working off-site; mobile phones available to staff for training purposes; virtual private network connectivity; and content development tools used in system simulation and e-learning. This last platform is a work in progress.

Change management and communication

Staff were introduced to a blended learning approach supported by virtual learning. Change management was introduced to ensure a smooth transition. Staff who needed additional assistance were prioritised and training sessions were organised to accommodate everyone. Managers were orientated on the new learning model to ensure the necessary alignment. SARS provided support and guidance on the technologies required during virtual learning (hardware and data). SARS made available a budget to assist learners with data to attend virtual training.

SARS communicated to staff through regular updates on the SARS intranet. Leadership engagement with teams through Zoom meetings engaged staff and kept everyone informed. The Commissioner also had regular conversations through the internet and WebEx. Communication was spread through all channels to ensure staff and trade were aware of SARS activities and requirements. Continuous awareness sessions were conducted on risk and management of COVID-19 for staff members. SARS reports continued through the Bridge Report on a weekly basis.

Adapting to virtual training

COVID-19 changed the training environment from a management perspective. Training was paused to plan and execute a strategy for training in the new reality. Training material was evaluated to determine suitability for the conversion. Most classroom training programmes were converted to new methods of delivery, such as e-learning, self-study, distance-based learning and virtual instructor-led training using Microsoft teams, or a combination of platforms.

The restrictions imposed through COVID-19 guidelines resulted in virtual instructor-led training, also called virtual classroom training, becoming an increasingly popular delivery method. It proved to be a cost-effective way to facilitate courses to a wide range of learners in different locations, while still providing the guidance of a facilitator with opportunities for virtual classroom interaction.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 emergency was the motivation to embrace new technology and to engage the workforce in changing from a traditional training methodology to distance-based learning using Microsoft teams. The innovative approach from SARS leadership and continued investment in new learning tools and staff proved the impetus to ensure continuity in the learning strategy and plans.

Key takeaways from case story 5.1

- Staff welcomed the transition to a blended approach using a virtual platform;
- SARS supported the learning approach and required continuity based on agreed programmes;
- SARS leadership’s openness and communication kept us going stronger.
Case story 5.2 State Customs Service of Ukraine

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In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future.

Eric Hoffer, American social writer and philosopher

The formation of Ukraine as an independent state required it to develop a new approach to creating a multifunctional, competitive Customs service. One of the State Customs Service’s key principles is training qualified, capable specialists to efficiently perform assigned tasks.

The Department for Specialized Training and Canine Services relies on experienced trainers to provide distance and face-to-face training using the latest tools and methodologies. Of the Department’s 69 employees, six are science graduates, one has a PhD, twelve are experienced Customs officers, eight are expert trainers certified by an international organization, one is a WCO Recognised Expert, and three are accredited WCO Experts.

Training sessions focus on implementing modern working techniques and WCO standards in the areas of valuation, origin, classification, promotion and protection of intellectual property rights (IPR), revenue fraud, transit control, implementation of technology related to inspections, combating illicit trade and smuggling, cynology (the study of dogs) and leadership skills development.

The Department also organizes activities as a WCO Regional Training Centre and a WCO Regional Dog Training Centre.

Going fully digital

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed training delivery methods and all activities were delivered through distance learning. This change was challenging, given that it is not easy to design quality training using digital technologies. Trainers have to work hard to inspire and motivate employees and to solve participants’ technical problems.

The Department prioritised organizing the educational process so that the quality offered by new forms of training would be similar to, if not better than, traditional ones. After all, almost 80% of training was already being conducted through a blended form of online and face-to-face training, mixing asynchronous courses (where designers create courses that participants can complete on their own) with synchronous courses. The main difficulty was to convert a number of workshops and courses into an online format, such as control over movement of cultural values, protection of IPR, psychological aspects of professional activity and leadership skills development.

In asynchronous teaching, trainers are still providing trainees with links to video recordings of lectures and to other material and the trainees complete the training on their own. Whereas the synchronous teaching is now exclusively delivered using the free web conferencing software system, BigBlueButton. The system is designed for audio and video conferencing for a large number of users and it allows chats and the exchange of personal messages.

It also includes:

- real-time sharing of audio, video, presentations and screens;
- collaboration tools, such as a whiteboard, shared notes, polling and breakout rooms;
- download presentations in PDF format and formats supported by OpenOffice.org (including Microsoft Office formats);
- drawing functions and a virtual pointer.

Video lectures and webinars have been developed on a range of new topics, including: adapting national IPR legislation to European Union (EU) standards; storage of goods and vehicles under Customs control and temporary storage depots; conflict resolution skills; psychodiagnostic assessment of individuals predisposed to commit Customs offences; and team management.

To help learners overcome psychological issues caused by the pandemic, a webinar on psychological well-being and stress management was recorded during which trainers presented techniques for managing and reducing stress.
The Department also promotes the WCO CLiKC! e-learning platform, which some 450 Ukrainian Customs officers have been using since the pandemic began.

**Dog handling**

Online blended training has already been used in many fields, but the most challenging aspect was to use this format to train dog and handler teams to search for narcotics, weapons and ammunition, tobacco products, currency, amber and CITES goods.

This training has been split into three stages:

- **Stage I** – participants work individually, using recorded theoretical courses and other instructional material, including tests;
- **Stage II** – Department trainers deliver online courses on such topics as: regulations on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors and enforcement procedures; joint use of scanning systems and canine teams to identify prohibited goods; and the composition of the veterinary service that looks after detector dogs. Dog handler teams then conduct practical search exercises for various items and substances, based on scenarios occurring at different facilities and premises. This process is filmed and video files are sent in to the Department;
- **Stage III** – trainers correct the tests, watch the video files and assess the participants’ performance based on predefined criteria.

**Conclusion**

Through the structure outlined above, the relationship between the components of distance learning and the advantages of their application in practice allowed us to make sure that our approach was appropriate. After analyzing the survey on training content, we concluded that 90% of participants believe that the educational process was interesting, useful, informative, rich in novelty, relevant and easily understood.

We believe that the future of professional development is a blended form of learning, a combination of traditional forms of education with the new distance forms. The changes that have taken place in society, the large-scale development of pedagogy of cooperation, the activation and individualization of learning, and the use of creative learning technologies have changed the training process. Developing computer networking technology is a promising platform for the development of modern distance education and e-learning that can be used effectively for various forms of learning.

**Key takeaways from case story 5.2**

- Put people and their safety first;
- Develop a new training strategy;
- Develop a new communication strategy, in this case, between HR, the Department for Specialized Training and Canine Services and the HR divisions of Ukrainian Customs offices;
- Be flexible and search for various educational platforms and new interactive methods of training;
- Learn from the best practice of WCO Members.
Case story 5.3 Qatar  General Authority of Customs

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<tr>
<td>Learning and development</td>
<td>Qatar – General Authority of Customs</td>
<td>CSSSC</td>
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GAC seeks to achieve an advanced maturity level of transformation toward virtual training by institutionalizing virtual training as part of organizational culture.

Dr. Tariq Shbail, Training Expert, Customs Training Center, General Authority of Customs, Qatar

Qatar’s General Authority of Customs (GAC) was established in 2014 (before which it was called the General Administration of Customs) through Emiri decree No. (37) of 2014 as a legal entity with a budget attached to the Ministry of Finance. The GAC plays a pivotal role in ensuring security and sustainable economic development, protecting society and achieving the Qatar National Vision 2030. This strategy focuses mainly on improving the overall performance of the public sector by adopting customer-centric and results-oriented approaches, enhancing transparency and accountability, promoting investment, and fostering international trade.

The GAC realized early on the necessity for developing human resources, as they are perceived as its greatest asset to meet its strategic requirements. As a result, the GAC established a Customs Training Center (CTC) in 2014. This stemmed from a clear vision that focuses on establishing a specialized and modernized CTC that contributes to investing in human resources and developing the values and capabilities of Customs. The CTC’s objectives are to deliver specialized training on Customs matters and other disciplines at national and regional levels in cooperation with the WCO, promoting capacity building, upskilling and upgrading the level of knowledge and competencies of staff and providing them with the skills and qualifications required to perform their jobs.

The CTC also offers unique opportunities for Customs officers to further their education through an Associate Degree in Customs Management and a Bachelor of Border Management – delivered jointly with the Community College of Qatar and the Centre for Customs and Excise Studies at Charles Sturt University, Australia. These programmes meet the WCO Professional Standards requirements. The CTC has 38 well-qualified officers and experts (10 of them female).

Developing a virtual training plan

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the GAC realised the importance of maintaining and developing human resources. The GAC was among the forerunner authorities at a national level that responded early to disruptions caused by COVID-19 by developing a plan to keep training and upskilling to the fore. Since the beginning of precautionary measures in Qatar on 15 March 2020, the GAC has actively sought alternatives and immediately embraced virtual training platforms to maintain work continuity with skilled staff, and to support staff on a personal level and to keep them qualified, motivated and engaged.

The GAC reviewed the training plan to update Customs-relevant topics and procedures, to incorporate best practice and lessons learned from COVID-19 with the aim of: (i) facilitating and expediting the movement of essential goods, and ensuring work continuity by upskilling staff; (ii) maintaining and supporting staff in these challenging times on a personal level; and (iii) keeping staff safe and healthy and allowing them to work in a safe environment. The updated training plan focused mainly on four key areas:

- **Learning content and curricula** – After acknowledging that traditional learning content and curricula were not compatible with virtual training, the CTC updated its curriculum to include interactive features, collaborative and group exercises and audio/video content – in consultation with training and content experts. The developed curriculum included COVID-19 relevant topics, such as personal protection measures to ensure staff safety and health and to educate them about measures that should be taken inside Customs houses.

- **Trainer skills** – The CTC realised the importance of its trainers to the success of virtual training, and the need to improve their skills and competencies in the use of virtual training platforms. It therefore delivered intensive training on how to use effectively
and how to improve communication skills via virtual platforms, and to familiarize trainers with online interaction tools.

- **Trainees** - To educate staff and improve their competencies on how to use virtual training, the CTC developed a virtual training platform user guide and deployed it via a mobile application and a local area network. The CTC realised the importance of addressing trainee behaviours and negative attitudes to virtual training, and used emotional and motivational elements, such as those used in social media. The CTC also offered technical support teams across all worksites, available at all times.

- **E-readiness and IT infrastructure** - The CTC sought to mobilize and develop the virtual training infrastructure with audio-video equipment such as online interactive whiteboards, microphones and headphones. The CTC also provided laptops for trainers and trainees, and prepared and equipped live virtual classrooms.

**Achievements and future vision**

During the pandemic, the CTC delivered more than 32 training courses for 947 Customs staff, and for other concerned authorities. The training covered many Customs subjects needed to ensure the continuity of Customs operations and measures required to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The programmes enjoyed national and international participation.

The CTC delivered many awareness programmes to educate Customs staff and other parties, including brokers, using training, signboards, pamphlets and brochures. These included the effects of COVID-19, measures that should be taken inside Customs houses, and personal protection measures. The CTC constantly evaluates its virtual training experience by polling trainees, trainers, managers and supervisors in Customs centres about their satisfaction with the virtual training approach. The CTC uses examinations to evaluate the level of knowledge gained and these make trainees more committed and attentive in virtual training.

The CTC is developing its database management and learning management system and is looking forward to developing its virtual training experience to include an integrated virtual training platform.

**Key takeaways from case story 5.3**

- The commitment and support of GAC senior management were among the key success factors of virtual training in CTC. They allocated all the resources required, motivating and urging both training centre staff and Customs officers as trainees to shift to virtual training. During the pandemic, top management placed training and capacity building as a top priority in mitigating the effects of COVID-19, and there was daily follow-up.

- To ensure the successful implementation of virtual training, the CTC established a virtual training team that included IT and training experts, headed by the Director of CTC under the direct supervision of the GAC’s chairperson. This team is responsible for following up and coordinating between the CTC and other directorates concerned, for addressing issues that may arise, for providing the support needed for implementation and for participating in developing content.

- Qatar is on the verge of a global event, the World Cup 2022, and COVID-19 will not stop the GAC from achieving its objectives. To support virtual training in achieving national objectives and supporting this event, the CTC signed a Memorandum of Understanding with other relevant authorities to deliver related World Cup training courses, and to educate staff about procedures and prevention measures that should be taken by Customs before, during and after the event.

- This virtual training strategy has contributed significantly to making the GAC resilient to extraordinary conditions and sudden disruptions, and to efficiently and effectively recovering control during the COVID-19 crisis. The virtual training has boosted staff morale and maintained their general sense of comfort when simultaneously facing disruptions and managing change.
PwC Luxembourg is the largest professional services firm in Luxembourg, employing nearly 2,800 people from 77 countries to provide audit, tax and advisory services, including management consulting, transaction, financing and regulatory advice. Clients include local and middle market entrepreneurs and large multinational companies in Luxembourg and beyond. PwC Luxembourg is also the leading service provider to the Luxembourg and European public sectors and is part of a network of PwC firms in 155 countries with over 284,000 people. www.pwc.lu

We help our clients to create value in their operations and we provide advice through an industry-focused approach, our ultimate goal being to build trust and to solve important problems for our clients and society at large.

The 21st century is shaped by megatrends changing the face of economies, and some of the most challenging are technology advancements, changing political landscapes (such as Brexit for the EU), demography, climate change and rapid urbanization. The pace of change is accelerating their impact, as the COVID-19 crisis showed us. Organizations across the globe have to reinvent themselves and their business and operating models. All mentioned trends have a tremendous impact on the key asset of any organization, its workforce – and Customs administrations are at the frontline of international trade and cooperation.

It is now recognised that 5% to 10% of organizational roles change radically every year due to technological investments or other drivers of transformation in the industry concerned (e.g. new regulations). Organizations need to plan for this, as simply attempting to replace mismatched workers is hard, time-consuming and increasingly expensive. This challenge needs to be tackled and embraced by all parties involved: individuals, employers and governments.

Many of PwC’s public and private-sector clients are acting now to anticipate and prevent these challenges. These are some of the typical questions we are helping them to solve:

- What are the emerging and disappearing skills in my industry?
- We have invested a lot in technology; for the high impacted jobs (e.g. automation of repeatable tasks), do we have a perspective on possible job adjacencies?
- How will our business and operating models of tomorrow impact our workforce? What can we do to ensure our workforce remains relevant to our business?
- How effective are our skills policies and how do they materialize?
- Are we building the right transferable skills alongside digital skills in our people?
- How and where will work get done in the future? (i.e. what will be the mix of work done between humans and machines, the balance of contingent workers and employees, and between work locations)

**Example 1: Qualitative study on the workforce of the future for tax and Customs**

We supported a multilateral organization to explore the trends impacting tax and Customs administrations from such multiple perspectives as globalization, technology, demographics and climate change. The aim of the study was to understand the big picture of the future of work in tax and Customs to better anticipate prospects in terms of future skills demand for digital, technical, business and human skills and to identify recommendations on tackling those challenges.

**Example 2: Impact of technology on future workforce (continental Europe)**

The client is active in the land transport industry in continental Europe. Conscious of the challenges related to the future of mobility, they asked us to support them with a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the impact of digital and technology disruption of their future operating model on their workforce within a time frame of 5, 10 and 15 years. Thanks to AI-enabled
solutions, we could identify the number of jobs likely to be automated and/or augmented by technology, and we could project upcoming demographic challenges. Augmented by a qualitative review of corporate information, 20+ interviews and more than 75 industry-specific studies, our recommendations helped our client to set up a roadmap around four thematic clusters: maintaining, training and developing skills; actively planning and controlling technologies and workforce impacts; promoting new forms of work and culture; and creating framework conditions for a new social dialogue.

Example 3: Strategic workforce planning in the pharma industry (EU)

In the fast-paced pharma industry, innovation and the take up of new technologies are essential. Our client was looking for help to analyse their future workforce needs and to develop a pragmatic and effective, high-level implementation roadmap for their strategic workforce planning. We considered a number of different drivers for transformation to define optimal staffing levels and types of roles the client would need, based on evolution prospects for their production models. We could identify challenges and drivers based on interviews and workshops and reviewed the workforce impacts for each of them individually, before consolidating toward one comprehensive view and outlook. Our recommendations covered many aspects, including organizational design, recruitment strategies and change management, to support our client’s transformation.

Example 4: AI-enabled mass reskilling initiative for a sectoral body (South-East Asia)

We are supporting a government-related agency with the design, development and implementation of an AI-based platform that facilitates mass-reskilling of the workforce in a specific industry at national level. The sector is already heavily impacted by automation and shifts in its business model and is anticipating a significant number of jobs being displaced over the coming years. The purpose of our platform is to help our client and its member organizations to identify job adjacencies, skills gaps and training recommendations to help sector employees remain relevant and to promote the attractiveness of this industry. The ultimate goal is to facilitate secured job transitions for all impacted employees.

Key takeaways from case story 5.4

- Multiple and accelerating trends are impacting the world of work. It is of utmost importance to understand their impacts on the workforce and to anticipate future skills demand to ensure growth for all involved (beginning with employees and employers);
- 5% to 10% of roles encounter radical change every year – anticipating is key to equip the workforce with the right skills, at the right time, on the right job;
- Digital skills play an essential role in workforce transformation, but they are only part of the game and, in addition, role-specific, business and soft skills will enable workers to be successful in the new digital world.
A large percentage of learning and development (L&D) investment in training is spent on formal training. However, employees continue to learn on their own (informal learning) and they hardly turn toward formal training for learning opportunities. As a result, the gap between how employees learn and what L&D teams deliver continues to widen.

How can L&D teams address these challenges?

The answer lies in creating a connected learning solution in which you support formal training with informal learning opportunities. As you read on, we will share insights on how L&D teams can use informal learning to reinforce, augment and support formal training solutions.

How do you create a connected learning solution by supporting formal training with informal learning?

The concept of a learning culture based on a learning and performance ecosystem meshed approach to blended formal training with informal learning opportunities is vital for an effective integration of modalities.

To do this, L&D teams need to redefine the role of formal training, using it to add structure to informal learning and to give employees a sense of direction and to help them achieve baseline proficiency.

A large proportion of formal training needs to switch to help employees understand:

How to learn – Many employees, especially those who depend on others to tell them what to learn and when to do it, may have either forgotten or never learned the art of learning.

How to cut through noise – Between daily stand-up meetings, emails from HR, IT problems and completing their basic job responsibilities, employees must maximize what time they have for learning, instead of being distracted by vacuous emails, social media and other interruptions.

How to eliminate distractions – Focusing on learning that will guide them in their career and job role.

How to focus on actual results – Learned and adopted behaviours, experiments and iterations, and improved cross-silo relationships.

This should lead to:

- A bias for action, clear-headed iteration, learning, and honest evaluation and feedback is more valuable than heads-down checklists and safe inaction;
- The value of celebrating the learning process and appreciating failed experiments as learning opportunities.

As organizations foster a learning culture, employees will have the courage and ability to seek continuous improvement on the job. That will enable them to use informal learning for practice, collaboration, and learning on the job, moving toward mastery.

How to incorporate informal learning strategies to support formal training?

Informal learning is a way for L&D teams to attain the holy grail of learning – content personalised to the individual. L&D teams can give direction, recommendations and access to content, and a space for employees to curate and share their own content and experiences. This can then be used by L&D teams for even more focused and efficient formal training and learning paths.

It is also important for L&D teams to strike a balance, incorporating informal learning strategies to support formal training, by:

35. www.eidesign.net/how-to-leverage-on-demand-learning-to-step-up-the-application-of-learning-on-the-job/
36. www.eidesign.net/informal-learning/
• investing in informal learning platforms
• supporting self-directed learning, social learning, curation, and learning in the flow of work\(^{38}\)
• mapping informal learning efforts to formal training objectives
• creating extended learning solutions that don’t focus on a moment in time, but include ongoing practice, evaluation and follow-up opportunities.

Creativity, innovation and effective tactical execution starts with a healthy culture of learning. I hope this helps you get the requisite insights on how you can leverage informal learning to augment, support and bolster formal training, and to create holistic training programmes to facilitate organizational success.

**Key takeaways from case story 5.5**

- Employees continue to learn on their own (informal learning) and they hardly turn toward formal training for learning opportunities;
- L&D teams need to redefine the role of formal training, using it to add structure to informal learning and to give employees a sense of direction and to help them achieve baseline proficiency;
- L&D teams can give direction, recommendations and access to content, and a space for employees to curate and share their own content and experiences;
- L&D teams can strike a balance between formal training and informal learning by investing in informal learning platforms, self-directed learning, social learning, curation, learning in the flow of work and so on.

Case story 5.6 EI Design

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How to promote, facilitate, and enhance your digital learning programmes

Ms. Asha Pandey, Founder and Chief Learning Strategist, EI Design, India

From soft skills and technical training to on-the-job learning and compliance training, modern learners have drastically changed how they learn.

Compared to yesteryear, today’s learning is more fast-paced, self-paced, more frequent and more adaptive. Using yesterday’s methods to train modern learners in the era of fast-paced learning doesn’t work anymore.

A paradigm shift in approach is required. As you read on, we will show you how to promote, facilitate and enhance digital learning among modern learners.

Why existing corporate training programmes don’t deliver the desired value to learners?

This is on account of inherent shortcomings in how they are structured. Look at the following aspects that clearly highlight how often existing approaches may not be in sync with what learners need and ask for:

1. L&D teams push training to employees rather than them pulling it on their own;
2. Existing training interrupts work and can be distracting;
3. Limited-duration corporate training is just not enough;
4. Formal training ignores the realities of today’s remote working dynamics;
5. Corporate training programmes train to curricula.

What must organizations do to promote and facilitate digital learning?

To promote and facilitate digital learning, organizations seeking to develop an effective learning culture should foster:

1. Executive support and modelling of desired learning behaviours; high-level executives should share on the digital learning platform what they’re learning and how they’re applying what they’ve learned;
2. A safe environment for learning, experimentation and failure – people don’t learn when they succeed, people learn when they fail;
3. A culture of curiosity and safe experimentation in which ideas and product iterations are rewarded and failure is celebrated;
4. Opportunities, both in time and funding, for learning;
5. Concrete rewards for those who make the effort to initiate, apply and share learning;
6. On-the-job support in the form of performance support systems, job aids, and coaching and mentoring;
7. Self-directed informal learning.

What training delivery strategies and content formats should you invest in to enhance digital learning?

If you plan on investing heavily to enhance and upgrade your corporate training programmes in the near future, here are some training strategies and content formats worth investing in:

• For learning in the flow of work
  - Microlearning – to offer the modern learner small-footprint, bite-sized learning for easy consumption on mobile devices and additional content to supplement formal training;
  - Apps for learning – that offer flexible, anytime, anywhere learning and that can serve as on-demand job aids at the point of need;

40. www.eidgesign.net/strategies-encourage-drive-informal-learning-in-a-remote-working-environment/
• Personalised learning – that leverages learner preferences to deliver uniquely tailored learning content;

• Just-in-time learning\(^{42}\) – to deliver learning on demand and to support employees with job aids and performance support tools.

**For creating immersive learning experiences**

• Gamification\(^{43}\) – that uses ‘fun and play’ training delivery approaches to teach collaborative skills, to breed competitiveness and to allow experimentation;

• Interactive videos – including ‘How To’ and ‘Try This’ video content that promotes greater learner engagement;

• Scenario based learning\(^{44}\) – which allows learners to explore multiple learning paths in a safe environment;

• Next gen strategies – such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR).

**For collaborative learning**

• Social learning – via group projects and collaboration forms;

• Discussion forums – through chat groups and text messaging platforms;

• Content curation – by making available curated libraries of training content that learners can explore, including learner-driven Wikis.

Today’s adult learners have starkly different learning profiles than their predecessors from half a decade ago. Employees feel empowered as a result of training content that they consume on their own terms. These shifting trends have also forced employers to view training in a whole new light.

The intersection of workforce mobility and a continuous learning culture has produced new learning paradigms supported by evolving training delivery strategies and new content formats.

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**Key takeaways from case story 5.6**

• Modern learners have drastically changed how they learn; today’s learning is more fast-paced, self-paced, more frequent and more adaptive;

• To promote and facilitate digital learning organizations should develop: an effective learning culture to foster executive support and modelling of desired learning behaviours; a safe environment for learning, experimentation and failure; a culture of curiosity; on-the-job support; self-directed learning; and so on;

• If you plan on investing heavily to enhance and upgrade your corporate training programmes in the near future, you should invest in learning in the flow of work, immersive learning strategies and collaborative learning.


f. Focus area 6:

Managing teams, individuals and performance
i. Introduction

As organizations pursue new ways to equip employees for growth and success in the face of crises, managers are essential to ensuring everyone on their team is empowered to do their best work.

A skilled manager is attuned to a person’s mental, emotional and behavioural commitment to work. In a best-case scenario, managers and employees do not simply respond to what is happening in their organization, but rather create an environment that brings out the best in employees. That ongoing collaboration contributes to their organization’s purpose and business results.

In times of crisis, empathy is more important than accountability and soft skills can take precedence over hard skills in the realm of people management. It should not be assumed that managers have the right skillsets or competencies to respond effectively to employees in times of crisis. HR departments will need to support and guide managers to transition from taskmaster in a non-crisis context to a support system in times of crisis. All the challenges faced by employees during the early stages of the pandemic were also faced by managers and amplified as they tried to tackle new responsibilities, such as imposing new structures, abiding by new operating procedures and creating an environment for their staff to thrive in less-than-ideal circumstances.

If managers are central to unlocking an employee’s potential, then they must be equipped to best perform their roles by HR policies and procedures. The rise of asynchronous work and hybrid teams requires managers to be more flexible and perhaps to work longer hours to respond to employees engaged at different times of the day. All of this equates to additional stress for managers, who are also affected by financial, familial and health concerns.

Employee engagement is a predictor of organizational performance, and managers must strive to retain engagement levels, even during a crisis. If individuals or teams become actively disengaged, steps must be taken to rectify the situation. Professional performance is strongly correlated with personal success and fulfilment, and if a multitude of employees are struggling in a personal capacity, key performance indicators need to be adjusted accordingly. The workplace must be a psychological safe space for employees, and if their performance suffers temporarily on account of extenuating circumstances, such as a global pandemic, empathy and compassion must be extended.

ii. Guiding principles 6.1–6.3

This Guide has been informed and inspired by a multitude of resources, including consultations with WCO Members and stakeholders, outcomes of WCO global and regional conferences on HRM, a WCO survey and a literature review that provided the theoretical underpinnings. To distil and streamline the information, two managing teams, individuals and performance-related guiding principles specific to the Customs environment have been identified.

**Guiding principle 6.1 – Ensure that teams and individuals are managed effectively during a crisis**

Management during a crisis requires a special skillset that not all managers possess. There is no blueprint on how to manage during specific pandemic or other crisis conditions, therefore, patience will be required as employees and managers alike embark on a learning curve. As outlined above, most organizations moved to a network structure to ensure continuity and to safeguard employees. As a result, many managers and employees were at risk of ‘free falling’, as former accountability structures gave rise to a more fluid management style.

Employee engagement strategies must be deployed to alleviate the social isolation that many remote workers experience. However, HR managers must be cognizant of the multiple demands placed on employees during a crisis, and the dangers of screen fatigue and burnout. Many big multinational companies devised and employed novel ways to combat screen fatigue, feelings of isolation and, ultimately, burnout. Some imposed meeting-free days, when employees were given an opportunity to focus exclusively on their tasks without interruption. Others increased paid time off in a bid to ward off higher levels of absenteeism.

Salient best practice in a crisis context will take some time to emerge post-crisis, however, reminding employees that ‘managers are people too’, emphasizing shared vulnerabilities and, in the case of Deloitte, inviting leaders to divulge information about personal pandemic challenges through the medium of a podcast, are all examples of good practice that organizations can adopt.

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Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 6.1

- Establish regular check-ins with the team and individuals;
- Boost communication efforts with the team and leverage available technology (add rules of engagement);

Guiding principle 6.2 – Ensure that managers are equipped to manage teams and individuals during a crisis

Managers are the key ingredient in any crisis or change-management scenario, but they can often be overlooked and their absolute commitment taken for granted. On top of their day-to-day managerial tasks, managers are also tasked with forging strategies to survive the crisis, driving new changes and providing guidance, empathy and support to employees – and they are expected to fulfil these responsibilities while working remotely. The absence of a physical work environment presents its own difficulties and managers will face challenges in integrating and aligning perspectives within and across teams.\(^{(46)}\) According to some estimates, manager burnout increased 78% between quarters one and four of 2020.\(^{(47)}\)

Managers are integral to the success of any organization, they drive business outcomes by ensuring that employees are focused on the organization’s priorities, aligned to their interests and strengths, and have the support to execute their tasks well. As organizations begin to embrace people-centred thinking, so too must managers prioritize people in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. To do so, many have turned to learning and development to plug any knowledge gaps, the number of managers using LinkedIn Learning grew by 102% from 2019 to 2020, with a 49% increase in learning hours per manager\(^{(48)}\).

Some organizations incubated new training programmes for mid-level and senior managers to assist them in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. In addition to providing an instructive framework for managers, such an endeavour sends an important signal to management of all descriptions that the organization supports them and is fully aware of the difficulties they face.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 6.2

- Define the purpose and focus on outcomes rather than on activity;
- Clearly define performance expectations and provide regular feedback;
- Demonstrate flexibility and exhibit empathy;
- Encourage and facilitate collaborative work.

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46. Ibid
48. 2021 Workplace Learning Report, LinkedIn
iii. Case stories and key takeaways 6.1–6.3

Case story 6.1 Lesotho Revenue Authority

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR focus area</th>
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<tr>
<td>Managing teams, individuals and</td>
<td>Lesotho Revenue</td>
<td>CS6A</td>
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<tr>
<td>performance</td>
<td>Authority</td>
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Effective preparedness, response and recovery from major incidents such as COVID-19 rely entirely on the ownership and commitment from the highest governance structure of an institution.

Lejone Mpotjoane, Senior Risk and Governance, LRA

Introduction

The Lesotho Revenue Authority (LRA) is an operationally autonomous body that was established in 2001 and became operational in 2003. The LRA mandate, on behalf of the government, is to be responsible for the assessment and collection of specified revenue such as income tax, Customs and excise and sales tax income, and for the administration and enforcement of laws relating to such revenue and for related matters. The LRA was established to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of revenue collection and to provide an improved service to the public. The LRA is required to maintain the highest standards of financial integrity and corporate governance. Despite operating outside the framework of the Civil Service, the LRA is fully accountable to Parliament.

The LRA has about 740 employees of which about 650 are permanent full-time. The LRA also partners with other government agencies, especially in the frontier department, to deliver on its mandate. Core to its people management strategy is talent acquisition, based on merit and performance. Employee well-being is key in our people management approach and this was well demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. From a gender equity perspective, the LRA is fairly diversified: 40% of the senior leadership are female executives; and 55% of other staff are female.

Setting the tone from the top

Effective preparedness, response and recovery from major incidents such as COVID-19 rely entirely on ownership and commitment from the highest governance structure of an organization. The Commissioner General, as the Chief Accounting Officer, committed to the LRA COVID-19 response strategy wholeheartedly. While the pandemic was rampant and spreading in China, the LRA risk management function raised an alarm to the Authority’s Management and Commissioner General and his EXCO committed and expressed undivided support to the technical teams. As the pandemic spread across the globe and, more specifically, throughout our South African counterpart, the LRA Executive Committee was reconstituted as the Crisis Management Committee, chaired by the Commissioner General, supported by response teams at the operational level. Weekly meetings were scheduled to assess prevailing circumstances and to plan appropriate interventions. The Committee thus provided strategic direction, delivered necessary resources to the response teams, and provided emotional support and appropriate instruments of support across the organization. This approach enabled quick and relevant decision-making, top-to-bottom and vice-versa accountability on initiatives and enabled effective preparedness and response.

Effective communication

The LRA’s fight against COVID-19 entailed effective and robust communication across staff and other government agencies at the frontline. An LRA crisis communication strategy was developed and communication platforms, such as toolbox talks, were held daily with staff members on COVID-19 prevention protocols, and the Commissioner General held weekly online staff engagement to update on COVID-19 cases. Social media posters and weekly technical team meetings were led by operational managers and health practitioners. The LRA stakeholder relations and public relations team also formed part of the LRA’s business continuity governance structures. A critical network of contacts was created and made available at all workstations to enable a rapid response.
Conclusion

Thanks to a LRA leadership focused on the effective disbursement of its mandate, the authority up to board level upheld zero tolerance to loss of life due to work-related risk incidences. At the core of our strategic performance therefore, our human resources were seen as an asset to the organization. The LRA enterprise risk management policy ensured continuous capability of all operations, with its ability not only to manage disruptions to business of any nature and complexity but also to restore operations to normal as much as possible through various initiatives.

The COVID-19 crisis presented an opportunity for the LRA to test its business continuity and restoration strategy supported by the effectiveness of our risk management process, in line with Winston Churchill’s saying, ‘Never let a good crisis go to waste’.

This strategy led to 0% deaths of officers, both HQ-based and frontline officers, so far in this crisis. The LRA established the factors in Figure 5 as critical to the positive results, leading to a change in working conditions and cost management from physical office/work space with fixed costs, regardless of expected production levels, to an online/virtual work environment. All this with a view to saving lives and to maintaining the effectiveness of government revenue collection, despite a debilitating virus.

![Figure 26: COVID-19 lessons and service factor considerations – new working conditions](image)

The business restoration process ensured that business processes were maintained through remote operations where possible and that the requisite support was provided through risk management, ICT, emergency response teams and other initiatives as and when required. This restoration process and/or business continuity plan is shown in Figure 27. It depicts a risk management and communication process, followed by the LRS addressing risk to staff and business operations, regardless of complexity and magnitude, during the current crisis and for any future ones.
Implement corrective measures
1. Implement corrective measures to sustain the new environment.
2. Integrate new changes into the system.

Assess the situation
1. Assess the new environment associated risks and make recommendations.

Resume other process
1. Resume important and necessary business processes with recommended changes
2. Assess safety of staff
3. Assess effectiveness of new changes

Resume critical process
1. Resume identified critical processes with recommended changes
2. Provide necessary support to affected staff
3. Assess safety of staff

Assess the incident
1. Seek expert opinion on the incident
2. Assess the impact of the incident
3. Assess the risk of recurrence of the incident
4. Implement corrective measures

These processes ensured the effectiveness of our operations during the crisis and improved cost-efficiency through remote access. They also improved the LRA’s competence in Lesotho to manage the crisis and sustain the safety and health of all officers, inclusive of other agencies. Because of this, the LRA Commissioner General was seconded to the national COVID-19 Response Centre for six months to lead the nation in the crisis, based on Lesotho’s infection rate at the time, health system challenges and escalating infection rates and containment measures in South Africa.

Key takeaways from case story 6.1
- Political support and leadership brand (leading by empathy and compassion);
- Effective communication and openness;
- Accountability across the organization supported by swift decision-making;
- Continuous situation analysis and quick response time;
- Continuous situation assessment and perseverance.
Iceland Revenue and Customs was founded when the Icelandic Tax Authorities and the Icelandic Customs Authorities were merged in January 2020. The organization has 500 employees in 11 different offices around the island. The HR units were merged and have only five employees, all female. The role of the HR division is to be responsible for general HR issues, ensuring that the HR strategy is implemented for payroll, recruitment, training and development, and employee relations. The timing of the COVID-19 pandemic was highly challenging as the organization, including HR, was just starting the merging phase and the organization was still operating from two headquarters. On top of that, the newly-founded Iceland Revenue and Customs was central in implementing stimulus packages for the economy to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic.

**Key focus 1 – Inform and inspire employees**

The key focus was to keep employees informed and inspired to fight common challenges during the pandemic. Government-imposed rules and restrictions were constantly changing, but had to be fulfilled and implemented in the organization and employees had to be informed. This was the role of HR, which had to send daily emails to all employees, at the same time, that were not only brief, clear and informative but also inspiring and uplifting. These emails were still being sent in the spring of 2021, but not on a daily basis, to cover the latest in meeting constraints, reminding people of the importance of personal hygiene, as well as including general encouragement and reminders to staff to take care of their mental health. Sometimes there was something encouraging in these posts, such as a song or a short story. However, an effort was made to avoid jokes related directly to the COVID-19 pandemic as the issue was too serious and sensitive.

Staff meetings with all staff were scheduled at regular intervals to keep them informed about progress of the merger and key operational activities and highlights, but the main focus was on keeping spirits high.

The workplace did various things to try and make life during the pandemic more tolerable for those still working in the office and for those working from home. In spring 2020 each employee received a gift of a water bottle with the logo of the newly-merged organization and the initials of the employee, sweets and an orchid. The orchid was chosen because it sends a beautiful message as a symbol of love, beauty and strength. In the summer, the staff got extra vacation days to rest and recharge their minds for the ongoing challenges.

Innovative thinking was also needed to meet the need for socializing. As it was not possible to hold the annual dinner or the Christmas buffet, all employees received a gift certificate for hotel accommodation for two nights, a breakfast and a nice dinner so they could celebrate in smaller groups within social distancing limitations. Technology such as Zoom was used to organize events like bingo, concerts, stand-up comedians and so on.

**Key focus 2 – Maintain the operation and be open for business**

The main objective was to keep the operation as undisturbed as possible. Workplaces were divided into quarantine compartments to meet the restrictions at any given time. Each compartment had to have its own entrance, toilets and coffee area. However, canteens had to be shut. Physical meetings between employees in different compartments were not allowed. Therefore, the organization had to quickly adapt to using meeting platforms such as Zoom and Teams.

For those relatively few employees who had to work from home, extra equipment was delivered, such as bigger computer screens or office chairs. Attempts were made to have groups of employees alternate each week so that they sometimes worked at home and sometimes in the workplace. Some, however, worked entirely in the workplace and others entirely at home.

The HR team prepared guidelines for line managers on how to manage employees remotely (at home or in a different quarantine compartment) and encouraged managers to host regular online meetings.
The organization ran several online courses and training on relevant issues, such as how to use and behave in online meetings and how to cope with COVID-19-related stress. There was an extra emphasis on physical and mental exercises, such as yoga and mindfulness.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that the Icelandic Revenue and Customs organization was able to operate with minimal disturbance throughout the COVID pandemic, despite the challenges of a newly-merged organization, extensive new tasks and significant recruitment of new employees. This was only possible due to a fast adjustment to a new way of working, be it from home or in smaller quarantine compartments.

Despite the obvious negative side of having the organization in so many different locations, it proved beneficial during the pandemic, allowing for extensive compartmentalization.

We learned that socializing is important and, once regular operations resume, there will be an added emphasis on connecting employees and striving toward a team spirit. Everyone needs to feel they are an appreciated and valuable member of the team.

It is clear that online meetings will continue to some extent and it has been valuable for the workforce to learn so quickly how to work through online meetings. In future, Iceland Revenue and Customs is likely to offer people the chance to work from home one day a week, if possible and if certain criteria are met.

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**Key takeaways from case story 6.2**

- Socializing is important;
- Teleworking in some form and online meetings are here to stay.
The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, a tremendous impact on our societies and economies. Individuals and organizations around the world have had to adjust very quickly to new ways of working. Zoom became a household name overnight. The vaccination roll-out has started in some countries and restrictions have been eased in others, yet there is still significant uncertainty and a long road to recovery ahead of us. From an organizational perspective, the future of how we work will be different, and we will not be March 2020.

Many leaders and managers had to change how they worked with their organizations and teams, during a very difficult time. For many, very little guidance was available and they had to adapt rapidly as the situation progressed, including managing teams who were working remotely. A massive obstacle for many was how to mobilize people to perform when they were coping with deaths or serious illness within their immediate families, or with the challenge of working from home while simultaneously caring for children because of school closures. In a survey by SAP, the IT firm, 75% of people felt more socially isolated, 67% reported higher stress levels, 57% suffered greater anxiety and 53% felt more emotionally exhausted. Shockingly, nearly 40% said their company had not even asked them how they had been doing since the pandemic started.\(^{(49)}\)

According to management consulting firm Gallup\(^{(50)}\):

> ‘Leaders don’t need to predict the future. What followers need most are trust, compassion, stability and hope.’

The COVID-19 pandemic is dramatically increasing the demand for leadership and management capacity. To lead our organizations and people through this historic moment effectively, leaders and managers need to show the very best versions of themselves. The ISO Leadership and Management Development programme (which itself had to be adapted for virtual delivery in 2020) uses the concept of ‘Grip’ to remind leaders and managers of a few basics when working with teams and individuals. Grip is defined as keeping a firm hold, and providing safety and support. It consists of three connected parts: self, team, and task.\(^{(51)}\) This concept is fully aligned with the triple focus areas for leaders, inner, other and outer, as defined by Daniel Goleman\(^{(52)}\) and depicted in Figure 28.

![Figure 28: The triple focus areas for leaders defined by Daniel Goleman](image-url)

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According to him, ‘chief executives need self-awareness to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and so surround themselves with a team of people whose strengths in those core abilities complement their own. This means inner focus.’ This is the self part of the Grip concept. Before the pandemic all but halted flights, one of the first announcements in the safety demonstration before the flight commenced called on travellers to put their own mask on first before helping others. The same applies to leaders. Even experienced leaders have their limits and need to invest in themselves and build their inner focus. They can only support their teams and achieve their goals if they show up fully centred. Leaders have to look after themselves in order to look after others. Adopting a daily practice, such as mindfulness, meditation or a walk, can be helpful.

The second element of the Grip concept, maintaining a grip on your team, or the other focus in Goleman’s triple focus model, is about rallying people behind a shared purpose and keeping your team together and focused during tough times. A key ingredient here is empathy. This is the ability to understand the members of your team. What is important for them? What fears and concerns do they have? What do they need from you to perform? This is essential to build trust. Real teamwork begins and ends with building trust. Patrick Lencioni, in The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, regards trust as the most important ingredient for teamwork. Some practical tips are to have regular calls if possible, to listen carefully to tone, body language and facial expressions, and deliberately to ask each person for input, even on something as basic as how they are coping. In other words, there should be no ‘invisible’ team members.

As for the third part of the Grip concept, maintaining a grip on the task, or Goleman’s outer focus, the management consulting firm McKinsey advocates a rethink to improve performance. According to them, ‘the current crisis has dramatically affected goals and performance plans, with the added wrinkle of making the people who are working remotely even more reliant on performance management to tell them how they are doing’. It is essential for managers to have regular conversations with their teams around priorities that may be changing frequently as a result of the pandemic. This not only ensures transparency but also signals flexibility. In addition to these regular conversations, managers need to connect priorities with individual tasks and activities. This will hopefully contribute to teams staying focused during challenging times. However, all of this needs to be underpinned by a strong sense of direction and focus (‘It starts with Why’). In difficult times, we need to remind our teams (and ourselves!): Why does this matter? What are our goals? How do you contribute?

Another key issue that McKinsey recognises is continuous learning and adaptation.

For Customs administrations, managing staff performance in a crisis period and beyond necessitates active leadership and extensive deployment of learning tools, underpinned by consistent application of feedback loops and active dialogue across and between teams. Adopting a learning and leadership framework provides a pathway for organizations to develop their most precious resource and to cement a learning and innovation culture in which teams can continually learn together, and where creativity and innovation are encouraged and celebrated at all levels.

Peter Senge, in The Fifth Discipline: the Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, describes an organization adopting such an approach as follows: ‘Learning organizations are places where people continually expand their capacity to create results … patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.’

Senge extends this definition as follows:

The core of Learning Organization work is based upon five learning disciplines:

**Personal Mastery** – learning to expand personal capacity to create desired results, creating an organizational environment which encourages members to develop.

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53. A meta-ability is an underlying, learned ability which plays an important role in allowing a wider range of management knowledge and skills to be used effectively. Butcher D., Harvey P. (1998) ‘Meta-ability development: a new concept for career management’, Career Development International, 1 April.


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Mental Models – reflecting upon, continuing clarifying, and improving our pictures of the world.

Shared-Vision – building a sense of group commitment by developing shared images of the future and the principles and guiding practices to get there.

Team Learning – Transforming conversational and collective thinking skills, so that groups develop greater talents than the sum of the individuals.

Systems Thinking – A way of thinking about, and a language for describing and understanding, the forces and interrelationships that shape the behaviour of systems.

Transforming Customs administrations into entities that remain agile and are able to respond to crisis situations, both in the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic and in the future, requires a long-term approach to building a learning and leadership culture, by adopting incremental building blocks that contribute to the realization of an organizational shared vision.

Garvin\(^{59}\) suggests five building blocks to guide and extend organizational learning. These are described in Table 3: systematic problem solving, experimentation, learning from past experience, learning from others, and transferring knowledge.

**Table 3: Five building blocks of organizational learning. Source: Garvin 1993**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building block</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systematic problem solving</td>
<td>Decisions are based on scientific methods to diagnose problems. Accuracy and precision are critical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimentation</td>
<td>Experimentation with new approaches includes the systematic search for and systematic testing of new knowledge. This activity comprises both one time (e.g. demonstration projects) and continuous (e.g. research and development) experiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from past experience</td>
<td>Learning from individual experience and history requires constant reflection upon successes and failures to provide implications applicable to all individuals. Learning should result from careful planning (e.g. postmortem evaluations) rather than chance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from others</td>
<td>Learning from the experiences and best practices of others comprises benchmarking with clients or other external organizations to develop new ideas. Managers need to be open to criticism and new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferring knowledge</td>
<td>Transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization through written or oral reports, personnel rotations or training</td>
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In addition to these building blocks, integrating and communicating milestones and innovative approaches for learning can assist in reinforcing the necessary organizational culture change. Innovative approaches and milestones may include:

- Moving from training to learning;
- Creating learning and innovation labs\(^{60}\) to test and pilot interventions;
- Encouraging scenario planning;
- Sharing results with organizations across borders to underpin Customs as the lead agency at the border;
- Implementing active dialogue at all levels within the organization to reinforce innovation and learning – dialogue is a key cross-cutting tool.

Active dialogue can be defined as:

The intention of dialogue is to reach new understanding and, in doing so, to form a totally new basis from which to think and act. In dialogue, one not only solves problems, one dissolves them. We do not merely try to reach agreement, we try to create a context from which many new agreements might come.\(^{61}\)

**Conclusion**

Leading a 21st-century organization was already complex, given the rapid pace of change and digitalization. With the pandemic this has accelerated. For Customs administrations to respond and recover from this and future crises, a number of critical workforce strategies are needed. These include strategies and measures to develop leadership and
management capacity. The concept of a learning organization provides a set of guiding principles and tools to integrate innovation, team learning and the agility to respond as needed.

**Key takeaways from case story 6.3**

- It’s all about people;
- The importance of the concept of ‘Grip’ when managing people;
- A long-term approach to building a learning and leadership culture, by adopting incremental building blocks that contribute to the realization of an organizational shared vision.
g. Focus area 7:

Easing in the post-crisis environment
i. Introduction

If emergency preparedness and business continuity are key enablers for boosting an organization’s resilience and agility, then equally important are the strategies and processes that enable them to return to the ‘new normal’.

COVID-19 inaugurated a new era centred around human experience management, powered by smart technologies. This new breed of HR management represents a departure from the traditional HR focus on organizational goals and collecting data to support them, to a new, more holistic perspective that considers not only what is happening, but also why it is happening and addressing this through the employee experience.

When LinkedIn Learning asked L&D pros to identify the most important current skills, four of the top five related to human strengths: resilience and adaptability; technology skills/digital fluency; communication across remote or distributed teams; emotional intelligence; and cross-functional collaboration.

Employee value propositions in the post-COVID world will look somewhat different. Emphasis will more than likely be placed on employee well-being, stability and flexibility as a direct response to the threat to human health and instability that were prominent features of the pandemic. Moreover, remote working or, at a minimal level, hybrid working solutions will be part of the new normal.

Talent acquisition will also undergo changes, as the skills that organizations require are reconciled to the new set of circumstances. Performance measurement parameters will also change as new skillsets are incorporated in the working paradigm.

ii. Guiding principles 7.1–7.3

This Guide has been informed and inspired by a multitude of resources, including consultations with WCO Members and stakeholders, outcomes of WCO global and regional conferences on HRM, a WCO survey and a literature review that provided the theoretical underpinnings. To distil and streamline the information, three preparing for the post-crisis environment and embracing HR 4.0-related guiding principles specific to the Customs environment have been identified.

Guiding principle 7.1 – Ensure that the full impact of the crisis on the organization’s operations is assessed and that future work trends are considered

Flexible work arrangements predate COVID-19, however, one form in particular looks like it is here to stay, remote working. The pandemic offered an opportunity for managers to explore how to implement flexible work arrangements that can enhance the safety and health of employees well into the future, particularly that of globally mobile employees. A holistic review of remote working practices implemented during the pandemic will allow organizations to determine a blueprint for employees. If employees seem likely to demand some flexibility in this regard then, as part of a new employee-centred strategy, organizations should prepare to accede to their demands.

Much of the research previously conducted in the field of international human resource management focused exclusively on high-status professional employees. The pandemic created conditions that in some cases exacerbated the gap between high- and low-status employees, and insecurity, disempowerment and vulnerability among certain members of the workforce. Moving forward, a comprehensive review of working conditions for all employees must be undertaken to ensure that some of the HR vernacular so familiar to large organizations can also be made relevant to low-status employees.

The work reality fostered by the pandemic has helped to supersede structural, geographic and social barriers that previously limited talent management decisions. Predictions around future trends abound but it seems likely that organizations will adapt to this new, economically beneficial reality. The pool of talent has expanded to include contingent workers and those resident in low- and middle-income countries. HR recruitment strategies will have to take account of this new reality.

[64] Ibid
Key activities to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 7.1

- Review the impact of the crisis on the organization’s operations;
- Retain and attract critical competencies and emerging critical competencies;
- Build the required levels of staff resilience and performance.

Guiding principle 7.2 – Ensure that the HR strategy is agile and adapts seamlessly to the post-crisis environment

HR departments were required to react almost overnight in many cases to the rapidly changing pandemic environment. Some changes had positive repercussions for employees, some not, but all HR leaders were required to act with agility and a degree of compassion. Changes that were instituted during the pandemic will require further testing before being permanently embedded in the organizational fabric. However, the need to update existing HR strategies is urgent. Although most organizations acknowledge the need to have a plan in place for hybrid work strategies, and nine out of ten executives envision a hybrid model, most have, at best, a high-level plan or vision for how to carry it out and only one in ten organizations have begun communicating and piloting that vision.\(^{65}\)

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 7.2

- Review and update HR strategy based on assessing the impact of an emergency/crisis on the organization;
- Communicate the updated HR strategy to all staff.

Guiding principle 7.3 – Ensure that HR policies, processes and systems meet the (new) demands of the post-crisis environment

The pace of change in HR departments in the post-crisis environment will be aligned with that of the workforce and, according to some experts, employees are ripe for radical change in the months and years ahead. On average, companies are likely to make 17% of the workforce redundant and approximately 35% of employees will need to be reskilled or upskilled.\(^{66}\) As always, HR departments will be required to demonstrate their added value in the face of such large-scale layoffs, and particularly to C-suite executives, who disagree on whether HR departments are largely administrative or strategic. HR departments can respond to these dual challenges by instituting learning and development initiatives that foster new and emerging talent, and allow a diverse workforce to reskill or upskill, based on a needs assessment analysis.

It will be more important than ever for HR departments to leverage analytics in service of their work, both to demonstrate their utility and to provide executives with a dynamic overview of staffing requirements, and to drive the process of matching skills and job profiles, examining all employee profiles and not limiting recruitment to current employee job profiles.

Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 7.3

- Review HR policies, processes and systems;
- Update HR policies and re-engineer HR processes and systems.

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iii. Case story and key takeaway 7.1

Case story 7.1 JALAN

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<tr>
<th>HR focus area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easing in the post-crisis environment</td>
<td>JALAN</td>
<td>CS7A</td>
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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a diverse and multifaceted impact at individual and collective level alike:

Many individuals and families have been affected by bereavement or have had to deal with the disease's devastating repercussions. For others, the way they organize their lives has been heavily influenced by the imposition of barrier precautions and the Government’s introduction of further protective measures.

At the collective level, regulatory and economic considerations have led individual governments, on the one hand, to roll out imaginative and robust policies of support for the business sector and, on the other hand, to set up direct and indirect support measures (grants, supplementary payments, short-time working arrangements, etc.) for the different categories within the workforce.

The pandemic has therefore either accelerated or highlighted the ongoing or underlying changes in the world of work. In this context, we have identified six key changes in relation to:

(1) physical proximity;
(2) trust;
(3) autonomy;
(4) reporting procedures;
(5) the role of shared office space; and
(6) stakeholder diversity.

These six changes can be divided further into four key areas in relation to:

(A) TIME;
(B) PHYSICAL SPACE;
(C) OTHERS; and
(D) THE INDIVIDUAL’S IDENTITY.

With a view to meeting the challenges presented by these changes specifically in these four areas, we are focusing on the need to establish a HUMAN RESOURCE strategy structured around three pillars:

HEALTH AND SAFETY – MEANING – SUBSIDIARY

HEALTH AND SAFETY: The primary focus of this human resource strategy is not only to provide the necessary practical health and safety measures for the teams of men and women in the workplace (social distancing – disinfectants – masks – one-way systems) but also to highlight their importance and promote awareness of them. The sense of importance that the organization attributes to these measures is as vital as the measures themselves, not only for providing a firm guarantee of safety but also for generating a general feeling of safety.

MEANING: The second challenge to be addressed by the human resource strategy is the breaking up of tasks and teams and the rupturing of personal bonds. Dealing with this situation will call for measures primarily aimed at restoring meaning to work and the communities involved.

We draw attention to the following three focus areas in particular:

First, the need to organize a return-to-work mechanism for teams: upon their return to the shared working environment, team members should have the opportunity to express their views and tell each other about their experiences throughout the pandemic. The purpose of this mechanism is to create a picture of their shared past experiences in order to distinguish the elements that everyone found painful from the lessons learned from those experiences, which, in some cases, generated creativity and imagination ... and even positive achievement.

Secondly, the need to assist management to provide positive feedback for their teams (when duly merited, of course) so that men and women at work really feel that they are noticed and appreciated for the efforts they make or the results they obtain. Throughout this

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67 This case story has been provided by Michel CALEF, corporate partner at Jalan.
period, workers have cultivated an overwhelming need to feel valued. Managing and improving feedback is a key area to be developed in the future … but this is not something we can master overnight!

Lastly, the need to **strive to set out individual objectives and expectations as clearly as possible** will become increasingly imperative: in a world where work will more frequently assume a hybrid form (teleworking and attendance in the workplace), the need to be explicitly clear (as well as qualitatively explicit, making the clear distinction between the level of the goals aspired to and the level of the objectives achieved, and between the respective levels of desire and willingness) will also be a condition determining collective effectiveness. This too is something that has to be learned.

**SUBSIDIARITY:** Subsidiarity is the principle facilitating the distribution of roles and tasks to be performed in a complementary manner among the various levels or locations of an organization, thus making each part of the business, beyond its individual function, an integral stakeholder in the organization as a whole.

For this principle to be effective, it is essential to give careful advance consideration to what is expected of teams and co-workers when they are working remotely, creating a clear distinction to the expectations of them when they are in attendance in the workplace. Stimulating workshops will provide the necessary forum for considering this issue prior to any reconstruction of the workforce as a collective entity. Shared premises may, as a result, be reconfigured to assist and promote all creative or project-based team working.

Looking ahead beyond this financial year, we are aiming to make all teams individually responsible for their integral functions AND, at the same time, confer on them a share of responsibility in the cross-cutting issues requiring them to work in collaboration with other teams.

**Key takeaways from case story 7.1**

1. Organize a mechanism for teams gradually to return to joint working in offices, so that they can ultimately be a part of the shared emotional experience;

2. Train the managers to handle feedback more effectively, in terms of both its analysis and formulation, and raise their level of requirements as regards the definition of expectations and objectives (techniques for tackling vagueness); and

3. Jointly build a firm understanding of what collective and creative working in the workplace will entail, in parallel with what individual remote working will continue to entail; make a formal note of these components and incorporate them into the management of the workspace.
Section IV

CONCLUSION
The objective of this HRM Guide has been: to show WCO Members current and emerging best practice within the burgeoning field of international HRM research; to provide the theoretical underpinnings to new HR strategies for Members seeking to reform their HR practices; and to provide feedback and testimonies from Members and top private sector firms to ground the theory in the day-to-day business realities faced by employees during the challenging COVID-19 crisis.

The seven thematic areas – leading and communicating; business continuity; work design; employees’ well-being and resilience; learning and development; performance management; and preparing for the post-crisis – converged on some key takeaways for readers. Extensive desk research and communication with WCO Members in real time enabled the authors to draw the following conclusions.

It is crucial that the leadership of an administration or organization collaborate closely with the HR department, thereby operating cross-functionally and ensuring that HR assumes a leadership role, thus operating optimally and effectively during a crisis.

In its most distilled form, business continuity focuses on the planning efforts needed to ensure an organization’s critical functions remain operational, even if somewhat reduced, during and following a crisis, in addition to safeguarding company stakeholders and protecting human capital. The elaboration and implementation of such a plan before the COVID crisis was something that many administrations undertook, however, the sheer scale of the pandemic revealed that many such plans were ill-adapted or outdated. Customs administrations must ensure that business continuity plans are formulated with input from all relevant departments (including HR), are widely disseminated and are regularly updated.

Adaptation and flexibility in a crisis are predictors of survival, if not success, and those organizations that had already embraced a streamlined work design featuring flexible working arrangements had a distinct advantage when an estimated 75% of organizations introduced some working from home or flexible working arrangements at the height of the pandemic. Work design, by its very nature, is evolving, and Customs administrations, like all other organizations, must remain agile and adaptable to respond to change and pivot accordingly. HR departments must lead the way in the redesign of work processes in the aftermath of the pandemic to ensure that they are adapted for future crises.

Customs administrations must continue to emphasize the health and safety of their employees in preparation for future crises and to comply with internationally recognized safety protocols. Respondents to the survey compiled by the authors of this Guide revealed that many employees were satisfied with efforts made by their administrations to protect their health and safety, however, Customs administrations must remain vigilant and keep abreast of the latest developments in the OHS field.

COVID-19 inaugurated a new era centred around human experience management, powered by smart technologies. This new breed of HR management represents a departure from the traditional HR focus on organizational goals and the collection of data to support these goals, to a new, more holistic perspective that considers not only what is happening, but why it is happening and addressing this through the employee experience. Customs administrations must try to address this new HR reality to remain competitive as an employer and to attract the best talent. They must endeavour to create attractive employee value propositions with limited resources by emphasizing their commitment to the health and welfare of employees and by leveraging new, readily available technologies. Organizations that are people-centred outperform those that have yet to embrace this new reality.

The authors of this guide are cognisant of the constraints faced by modern Customs administrations and the commendable work carried out by frontline Customs officers during the pandemic that ensured the rapid delivery and deployment of PPE and, at a later stage, vaccines. The contents of this guide are merely suggestions that Customs administrations may choose to consider when designing a post-COVID workforce:

- to shift from human resources management to human experience management;
- to anticipate the full impact of COVID-19 on Customs operations and the required levels of staff resilience and performance to operate effectively post-crisis;
- to build agility and resilience to accelerate business recovery;

• to build organizational resilience through staff resilience;
• to act as an emergent leader;
• to be agile and flexible enough to pivot around multiple scenarios;
• to rethink HR operating models to build staff and organizational resilience;
• to leverage new technologies;
• to make employee experience the key metric in order to enhance employee value proposition and engagement.
Section V

ANNEXES
A. ANNEX 1 – GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH HR FOCUS AREA

**HR focus area 1: Acting as a leader in times of crisis (leading and communicating)**

1.1 - Ensure that a humanistic-based, people-centred, leadership culture is established within the organization
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 1.1
- Support the development and delivery of a people-centred and value-focused leadership and management development programme;
- Multiply and empower local leaders;
- Design and deliver a training module on ‘Leading and communicating in times of crisis’ for top and senior management;
- Design and deliver a training module focused on the organization’s values and on the importance of a human-centric culture and leadership in the organization (and ensure this module is taken by officers on an annual basis as a refresher course).

1.2 - Ensure that HR embraces its strategic partner role by providing timely and effective solutions to complex problems/crises
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 1.2
- Identify key HR metrics and develop a strategic HR dashboard;
- Develop the staff planning and risk management capacities of HR services to boost their ability to design and provide tailored solutions to complex problems/crises;
- Lead and apply a ‘design thinking’ methodology/process in the organization to ensure that the solutions developed to manage the crisis and the post-crisis environment are human-centred.

1.3 - Ensure that HR is communicating effectively with staff and relevant stakeholders during a crisis
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 1.3
- Develop an effective communication plan and protocol for HR-related notices during a crisis;
- Ensure that employees can reach out to their line managers and HR throughout the crisis to enhance employee-listening/human connection (support system).

**HR focus area 2: Business continuity in times of crisis**

2.1 - Ensure that HR is a key actor/influencer within the organizational structure in charge of emergency management and business continuity, to guarantee that disaster recovery and business continuity plans also include the human aspect of crises
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 2.1
- Support the organization in developing and nurturing competences in emergency management and business continuity;
- Secure the position and influence of HR within the organization’s structure in charge of emergency management and business continuity;
- Help the organization anticipate impacts of a crisis on itself and its employees, and determine what means and resources should be made available to guarantee service continuity while keeping people safe, including the identification of safe alternate work areas.

2.2 - Ensure that the HR service also manages its own continuity and has a business continuity plan
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 2.2
- Leverage technology to the greatest possible extent, to automate HR processes, with a particular focus on administrative processes;
- Develop a business continuity plan for the HR function in times of crisis;
- Establish HR services to the greatest possible extent to support staff during crises, such as helplines or dedicated apps that feed pertinent data to employees.

**HR focus area 3: Work design in times of crisis**

3.1 - Ensure the optimization of the organizational structure in times of crisis to facilitate the delivery of operations/services, including the establishment of core competencies teams/structures benefiting from more autonomy and decision-making authority
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 3.1
- Shift to a simpler, more agile structure, moving away from a traditional, multi-layered organization;
- Design and implement competency-based HRM tools according to the WCO approach and develop a specialised core competencies team with more decision-making.
### 3.2 Ensure an effective transition to remote working modalities and facilities
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 3.2
- Rebuild from designing for efficiency to designing for resilience;
- Accelerate the digitalization of critical work processes;
- Develop methodologies to assess employee morale, engagement and understanding of job tasks when in-person relationships are not possible.

### 3.3 Ensure that the workplace adapts to the ‘new normal’ and that the workforce transitions to the new nature of work
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 3.3
- Structure the workforce in terms of organizational charts, reporting structures and more when managing employees remotely – a participative, engaged approach;
- Manage remote and in-person teams after the recovery – consider the different ways people will go back to work; all remote, mixed remote/in-person, all in-person;
- Coordinate the workforce to come back to in-person environments – contact tracing, cleaning, vaccines, masks, other processes.

### HR focus area 4: Keeping staff and clients safe and healthy in times of crisis and building staff resilience

#### 4.1 Ensure that the workplace has been adapted to respond effectively to the crisis at hand and to protect the safety of staff, clients and partners
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 4.1
- Undertake a risk assessment (employers, managers, OHS advisor);
- Devise and implement measures for low, medium and high risk environments;
- Adopt a staggered/phased approach to ‘return to work’;
- Assess the impact of the measures and reassess the risks accordingly.

#### 4.2 Ensure that support, including psychological support, is provided to staff in times of crisis
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 4.2
- Support managers in times of crises, including psychological support, to enable them to perform their team management duties;
- Equip managers to provide appropriate psychological support to their teams;
- Build and strengthen staff resilience;
- Dedicate a team/Unit to support psychological well-being at work, if feasible;
- Take the necessary actions to improve employee experience and to enhance the employee value proposition.

#### 4.3 Protect the safety of employees and clients at all times through the development and implementation of occupational health and safety standards
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 4.3
- Undertake regular OHS standards/systems reviews with industry specialists;
- Develop and roll-out OHS standards/systems aligned to internationally recognised practice;
- Regularly review and update OHS;
- Embed OHS within the HR portfolio.

#### 4.4 Ensure that staff well-being is a core principle of the organization and that a staff well-being culture is effectively embedded to support employees in their performance at all times
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 4.4
- Assess, re-engineer and nurture the well-being culture (if any) in the workplace;
- Involve employees in the design and implementation of a staff well-being culture;
- Include staff well-being as part of a manager’s responsibility (and eventually evaluation criteria);
- Encourage workplace socialization.

### HR focus area 5: Learning and development in times of crisis

#### 5.1 Ensure the continuity of learning and development services
- Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 5.1
- Establish a learning response task force;
- Ensure employee safety and well-being during in-person learning activities;
- Adapt in-person delivery;
- Promote, facilitate and enhance digital learning;
- Explore alternative digital learning strategies;
- Prepare for a sustained crisis and for a post-crisis environment.
| 5.2 | - Prioritise reskilling and upskilling activities to equip staff with the necessary skills to ensure the organization’s service continuity  
  - Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 5.2  
  - Identify the critical skills the organization’s operations/services depends on;  
  - Identify critical skills and start upskilling the critical workforce pools that will drive a disproportionate amount of value in the organization’s adapted operations/services;  
  - Initiate learning journeys to close critical skills gaps;  
  - Build on the reskilling in crisis time to improve overall organizational resilience;  
  - Adopt an agile approach to reskilling and upskilling;  
  - Ensure that the learning budget is not cut;  
  - Refer to the WCO Guide for a Successful Transition to Live Virtual Training. |
|---|---|
| **HR focus area 6: Managing teams, individuals and performance in times of crisis** | 6.1 | - Ensure that teams and individuals are managed effectively during a crisis  
  - Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 6.1  
  - Establish regular check-ins with the team and individuals;  
  - Boost communication efforts with the team and leverage on available technology (add rules of engagement);  
  - Define the purpose and focus on outcomes rather than on activity;  
  - Clearly define performance expectations and provide regular feedback;  
  - Demonstrate flexibility and exhibit empathy;  
  - Encourage and facilitate collaborative work. |
| 6.2 | - Ensure that managers are equipped to manage teams and individuals during a crisis  
  - Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 6.2  
  - Communicate the board’s strategic priorities, performance targets and new business operating model (pivot model) to all managers and line managers;  
  - To equip managers with the necessary skill sets, tools and information to act as an effective leader, mentor and manager in times of crisis. |
| **HR focus area 7: Preparing for the post-crisis environment and embracing HR 4.0** | 7.1 | - Ensure that the full impact of the crisis on the organization’s operations is assessed and that future work trends are considered  
  - Key activities to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 7.1  
  - Review the impact of the crisis on the organization’s operations;  
  - Retain and attract critical competencies and emerging critical competencies;  
  - Build the required levels of staff resilience and performance. |
| 7.2 | - Ensure that the HR strategy is agile and adapts seamlessly to the post-crisis environment  
  - Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 7.2  
  - Review and update HR strategy based on assessing the impact of an emergency/crisis on the organization;  
  - Communicate the updated HR strategy to all staff. |
| 7.3 | - Ensure that HR policies, processes and systems meet the (new) demands of the post-crisis environment  
  - Key actions and recommendations to facilitate the implementation of guiding principle 7.3  
  - Review HR policies, processes and systems;  
  - Update HR policies and re-engineer HR processes and systems. |
B. ANNEX 2 – BIBLIOGRAPHY


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The design and publication of this guide have been sponsored by the United Kingdom through the Trade Facilitation in Middle Income Countries Programme.