Role of HR professionals Has Taken on Greater Importance During Pandemic, Survey Finds

Add human resource professionals to the list of essential workers.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, 48% of employees indicate having reported an issue to their HR departments, according to a Paychex survey. More than half of HR managers said the number of issues being reported has increased during the same period.

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"The transition to a remote or mobile work environment can be difficult, and these unprecedented times have forced both businesses and their employees to adapt to a new normal," the survey report said. "These dramatic changes can be a challenge to the mental health and sense of motivation for workers everywhere.

"As businesses continue to iterate and innovate new operational guidelines, they're learning how to do more with less. Employees may feel removed

from their traditional HR resources at work during the pandemic, but that doesn't mean they need them any less."

More than half of HR reports filed during the pandemic are from male employees. Seventy-nine percent of small businesses saw an issue reported to HR, followed by 58% of midsize companies and 21% of large companies.

For employees submitting issues to HR, 80% sent them by email, followed by video call (63%), phone call (52%), text message (42%) and direct in-person conversations (27%).

Common workplace concerns. Five issues have become more prevalent while employees are working remotely:

Employee benefits, 48%

Employee stress, 39%

Employee disputes, 35%

Workplace safety, 32%

Equipment or technology issues, 31%

Raising the bar for HR engagement. The expectations that employees have of their HR resources have changed as well:

60% of employees expected their HR departments to ensure they have everything they need to work remotely.

Nearly half of employees believed HR should be responsible for managing employee benefits, promoting employee work-life balance, hiring employees and building an inclusive workplace environment.

Non-negotiable workplace decisions. When asked what would most make them consider quitting their job, employees identified:

Having their pay cut, 62%

Being refused sick time off, 54%

Being refused vacation time, 44%

Internal HR struggles. Since transitioning to a remote work environment, the benefits that HR professionals appreciated the most include:

Spending less time commuting, 55%

Having happier employees, 45%

Having fewer HR issues to deal with, 43%

"As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of working Americans have transitioned into remote environments for the first time, requiring companies and their employees to adapt to these new digital frontiers without warning or time to acclimate to the changes," the report concluded.

"Since the pandemic began, many HR professionals working for small and midsize businesses reported an increase in the number of issues being reported, particularly around employee disputes, employee benefits, and even more sensitive topics, including both perceived racism and sexism. And while the demand for HR resources has increased, the challenges for HR professionals have also changed."

By Alan Goforth