



THE COVID-19 CRISIS, A CRASH TEST FOR COMPANIES' HUMAN RESOURCES

- ▶ **Health, employment, inequality...**
The Covid-19 crisis has put the Human aspect back at the centre of debate.
The pandemic and its consequences constitute a crash test for company HR policies.

EXPERT OPINION



**JEAN-PHILIPPE
DESMARTIN**

*Head of Responsible
Investment at
Edmond de Rothschild
Asset Management*

Following the Paris Agreement adopted at end-2015, responsible finance has focused on environmental urgencies such as climate change and biodiversity. The crisis has brought to the centre of debate a number of social themes, such as public health, supply chains, employment, inequality and human resources. This **rebalancing between social and environmental** issues sends us back to the roots of sustainable development as formalised in 1987 in the Brundtland Report - development geared to the future generations and balanced among the economic, social and environmental aspects.

AN ADAPTATION TEST

The current pandemic is a crash test of the quality of companies' human resources management: **employee protection** (gel, masks, vaccination, etc.), **business continuity**, notably via the boom of teleworking, or **efforts to maintain a quality working climate**.

The current situation reveals good practices, for example, European industrial aerospace group **Safran** negotiated with social partners and the governments concerned for a limited number of voluntary departures in order to safeguard competencies in terms of engineers, technicians and labourers between now and the recovery of the sector expected in 2024.

Forced to rapidly adapt their organisations in March 2020, then frequently in accordance with the changes in the health situation, companies have had to organise themselves, thereby entering an economy of adaptation/innovation, inventing solutions to the problems raised by the health restrictions as they go along.

Accordingly, on the other side of the Atlantic, US consulting firm **Accenture** invested in training, e-learning in particular, to enable thousands of employees

to develop the expertise most in demand from clients, such as artificial intelligence or cybersecurity.

A TEST OF CONFIDENCE AND MEANING

The Covid-19 crisis has also been a decisive period in terms of the confidence - or distrust - of employees in their employers. Each day, directors and managers have been - and still are - confronted with a large number of questions, both diverse and novel in nature, which for the most part do not call for an obvious right or wrong answer, but which represent choices that will ultimately be judged by employees, whether in terms of agility, decision-making, adequate employee protection, but also listening to and heeding the different needs.

An example of internal confidence, 80% of **Cisco**'s employees hailed their company's management of the Covid-19 crisis in 2020. It was therefore not a surprise to learn that the US company was voted the No. 1 "Great place to work for" in 2019 and 2020.

At a time when all activities are being branded either essential or non-essential, the Covid-19 crisis has also been an occasion for employees to question their relationship with work. According to Randstad¹, 29% of

French people do not perceive the meaning or usefulness of their job, and for 16% the pandemic gave them this awareness.

NEW CHALLENGES FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

Fatigue, inability to concentrate, respiratory problems, tachycardia, headaches, loss of taste and smell. The list of Covid-19 after-effects grows longer as time goes by. "**Long Covid**" is likely something we are going to have to live with for some time, with 10%-15% of Covid sufferers having developed the symptoms.

These effects are not only a health issue, but also represent economic stakes for employees and employers alike. Carrying out one's job while experiencing illness is far from simple. Many sufferers are forced to adapt their activity, slow their pace or stop working completely.

Human resources will therefore be a pillar for the return to reality, between communication, protection and support for employees.

1. Randstad study: the meaning of work and the impact of Covid-19, published in July 2020.

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18 rue de Hesse
1204 Geneva
www.edmond-de-rothschild.com