

# HR Insights: Redesigning Return to Work

Redesigning strategy, leading teams through COVID-19 impacts, and navigating through the accelerated adaption of the 'workplace of the future' highlights the significant role of today's human resources leaders.

In conversation with Boyden's [Neil Morrison](#), four APAC HR leaders share their experiences and insights:

- Adeline Foo, Group Talent Acquisition Director, [DKSH](#)
- Macy Tsang, Regional Director, Human Resources, [Seko Logistics](#)
- Sean Hurley, VP, Human Resources Asia, [Iron Mountain](#)
- June Chung, Head of Human Resources, Asia Pacific, [Dachser](#)

**Morrison:** Has the period we have been through had any impact on your Company's business continuity planning (BCP) for the future?

**Foo:** A large part of the DKSH workforce are blue-collar employees, providing essential services in distribution centers and field staff who ensure that daily consumer and healthcare necessities remain available in retail stores, as well as on e-commerce platforms. Knowing the well-being of our employees' and clients' is our highest priority, this focus did affect our BCP plans. Precedent was given to doubling on safety including enhanced internal communications and emergency contact procedures. We also identified opportunities to review IT security and strengthen core operations, HR and finance systems, which led to transformation initiatives. Ultimately, we have become more agile and are now able to pivot with more dexterity arising from unforeseen circumstances.

**Tsang:** We found our existing BCP accommodated the challenges this pandemic posed. Technology and IT hardware were already available and as work from home policies were initiated. Our staff adapted quickly and responded well. We did increase our internal communications to ensure clear direction and support were provided, which ultimately helped us build team trust.

**Hurley:** While we already had a very robust BCP in place, they were largely to address natural disasters. COVID19 did force us to review and strengthen our plans even further.

**Chung:** This period has prompted us to review a number our policies, including those related to travel, training, and meetings. We also thoroughly reviewed our technology platforms to ensure we have robust video conferencing systems and back-up communication systems in place. Overall, the pandemic did enhance our BCP plans.

**Morrison: What is going to be the future of your work from home (WFH) policy?**

**Chung:** Taking the nature of the job into account, we have adjusted to reflect new models. We quickly moved to a hybrid office concept for our support and shared service staff. Our operation staff are still on-site, with a heightened focus on our environmental, health & safety (EHS) management systems.

**Hurley:** For the 70% of the Iron Mountain workforce that is considered "front line", there is no change as the physical nature of their work does not allow them to work from home. However, for the remaining 30% office-based staff, there will definitely be a "hybrid" approach, where people can elect to work from home, work from the office, or a combination of the two.

**Foo:** When many markets where DKSH operates started to lockdown, we were quick to review the need for a WFH policy. By Jan 2021, we officially implemented Flexible Work Arrangement ("FWA") guidelines, wherein DKSH recognizes that our world has changed, and technology enables us to work differently and efficiently in non-traditional work setting. Our employees have new expectations, with more ownership on how and where they work and the boundaries between work, personal life and commitments outside of the workplace are less delimited. While we believe that collaboration, creativity, teamwork and connections are best nourished when interacting face-to-face in an office environment, where appropriate, alternative flexible work arrangements can offer viable (and at times better) solutions in achieving work/life balance for employees and is part of refreshing our DKSH culture and Employer Value Proposition. We want to offer flexibility and build trust with employees. Where FWAs are concerned, we promote flexi-work hours, allowing changes to employees' start and finish times, the patterns of work (e.g. split shifts) and work from home. Where possible, depending on roles and job requirements, with prior approval the manager may allow employees to work from home for up to 40% per week.

**Tsang:** Interestingly we no longer anticipate a significant shift from how we typically operated. Our staff rather quickly returned to working in the office once they were comfortable with the new safety & security procedures in place. Our teams have been resilient and kept customers at the forefront of their activities. We are very fortunate to have the team together once again.

**Morrison: With remote work becoming more of a norm, will a workforce that isn't constrained by borders be closer to reality than ever? If so, will this impact your talent acquisition strategy?**

**Hurley:** The past 18 months have proven that working remotely can be done, so physical location is less important going forward. This will impact our talent acquisition strategy going forward, as people can work from pretty much anywhere, at a minimum within the same time zone.

**Chung:** Work from Home vs. Work from Anywhere are two very different scenarios. For front-line roles, time zones and geographies are key. Cultural understanding and appreciation are also very important. However, there are certainly opportunities to look at off shoring some support functions and this period has hastened these views.

**Tsang:** Whereas the majority of our workforce is constrained by their function, with the increased use and acceptance of video-conferencing platforms has enhanced the execution of our talent acquisition strategies, with speed-to-hire increasing significantly.

**Foo:** We are still exploring how this concept can become a reality. We operate in over 30 markets and do hire wherever the talent is, provided we have an operating entity in that market, whilst being cognizant of compliance. We see more opportunities to harness the benefits of remote working where there are regional roles, and it may matter less where the talent is based. Unfortunately, most country-specific roles may still require one to be physically in that market to be effective.

**Morrison: A year from now, what would you like to point to as successful outcomes for HR in your company?**

**Tsang:** Recognizing our response as an organization that demonstrated employee well-being was top priority. That is certainly one of our most successful outcomes from the pandemic, based on the teamwork, collegiality, and wellness programs we have in place and continue to promote.

**Foo:** Hiring the future workforce with less border constraints, especially for skills that are in high demand such as digital, technology. More cross-border and cross-functional learning and a heightened level of collaboration, as people realize that travel restrictions mean we need to break down silos, now more than ever and leverage on teamwork for organizational success.

**Chung:** I would like to think increased flexibility, improved staff retention, enhanced automation, upgraded remote technical support and increased part-time functions and roles will define our success across our organization.

**Hurley:** With the creation of regional shared service centers, successful HR will be where employees and managers embrace the "self-service" model and readily engage with the shared service center when they have queries/issues to be resolved. In addition, success will be where the HRBP is able to make a difference and continuously add value to the business overall, rather than just in the HR space.

Discussion Top Takeaways:

- BCPs, while robust, are deserving of review and new considerations;
- WFH hybrid is a reality;
- Value of communication cannot be underestimated;
- Talent acquisition models are evolving;
- Employee well-being is at the forefront;
- HR is playing an increasingly important role in the business.



*Written by:*

**Neil Morrison**  
Managing Partner, Boyden  
China and Singapore