

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN CONTEXT

January 2023

SECTION A - Case Study

Note: In your responses, you are allowed to improvise or add to the case study details provided below. However, the case study should not be changed or compromised in any way.

SECTION A

B-Line Accounting is a medium sized accountancy organisation. Its customer base is made up of large international and domestic organisations. It has offices in Europe, Asia, and South America. Head Office is located in London in premises that are large, opulent, and situated approximately fifteen miles south of London's financial quarters. Property rentals are high and B-Line Accounting struggles to keep pace with recent increases.

Overall, the organisation has an employee base of thirty thousand. Of these the London office employs ten thousand, the majority of whom are highly qualified often with specialist skills. Around five hundred employees are in general administrative roles. Employees are divided according to whether they work in audit, advisory, consulting or tax.

Head office specialist staff are much sought after. They are often from prestigious universities, have both a degree and professional qualifications. Many have also studied a master's in business administration (MBA) usually from one of the top three international universities. Consequently, these employees have invested heavily in their education and expect to be highly rewarded in return.

In addition to high salaries there is an expectation of flexible working, and a range of well-being activities in a culture of high levels of stress and a strong work ethic. Traditionally, the finance sector has been regarded as comprising employees with a sense of entitlement in terms of a high standard of living, and strong individual aspirations for high bonus payments and career promotion.

The workforce is predominantly middle-aged and graduate recruitment is now focused on generation Z. Born after 1995 this generation includes amongst its characteristics a high level of knowledge and drive for learning through digital technology; experience and understanding of diversity in terms of race, sexual orientation, religion and belief, and family structure; and an appreciation of financial security and economic stability. This generation also tends to be more politically progressive than previous generations, and more concerned with social issues.

During Covid there was government intervention in organisational finance and working arrangements. A coronavirus job retention scheme (furlough) was established which B-Line Accounting was able to take advantage of for around half of its administrative staff. The majority of its specialist employees moved to homeworking and a core of specialists and administrative staff continued to work at head office.

By the beginning of 2022 most covid restrictions had been lifted and the government looked forward to seeing a mass return to the workplace.

The return to the workplace was a difficult time for B-Line Accounting; it was slow, as individual line managers were given discretion over whether or not it was mandatory. B-Line

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Accounting had a meeting of its most senior people to determine how to handle the return-to-work issue for their organisation. The current situation was unsustainable as it meant the premises were under-occupied and not all administrative staff were fully occupied.

There was pressure from the finance department to consider homeworking which would be cost-effective. It was suggested that with fewer employees using the office, B-Line Accounting could negotiate early release from its rental contract and move to smaller premises. There would be a further cost benefit as some administrative staff would be made redundant. B-Line Accounting was aware that agreeing to a significant amount of homeworking, moving to smaller premises further out of London and making some staff redundant ran contrary to what government hoped to achieve. It was also unsure how its competitor organisations would behave as it didn't want to be out of step with its larger competitors.

HR had sought employees' opinions and found that fifty per cent were in favour of continuing to work from home and thirty per cent were keen to return to the workplace. The remaining twenty per cent were undecided, and of these ten per cent suggested ways in which they could combine working from home with some time working at head office. There was a mixed response about the advantages and drawbacks of homeworking.

In the HR survey of employees, the following issues were raised as having both negative and positive impacts, dependent on employee circumstances.

Caring responsibilities

Working space

Cost

Health and well-being

Social interaction

Team working

Identity and prestige

B-Line needs to move forward with a clear plan which will bring security and stability for its employees and financial viability and profitability for the organisation.