GoCo

How to Pandemic-Proof Your HR Processes

Learn how to adapt wisely to the growing demand for digitized processes so your HR department can weather the pandemic with grace and skill.

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Introduction

It's no longer a question of when you go digital but how.

Employers across the globe are learning to operate in a new digital environment. This brings many new challenges for HR departments, employees, and companies. Especially in this time of transition, managing HR for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) can be messy, painful, and complex.

The pandemic has forced us to take HR to the next level, whether we thought we were ready or not. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. No longer can HR put off needed changes until next year—the time to act is now.

This means you need to both solve your immediate pain points and guard against the uncertainty we all face by pandemic-proofing HR workflows. Adaptation for the long-haul is the name of the game, because we're unlikely to ever go back to the previous normal.
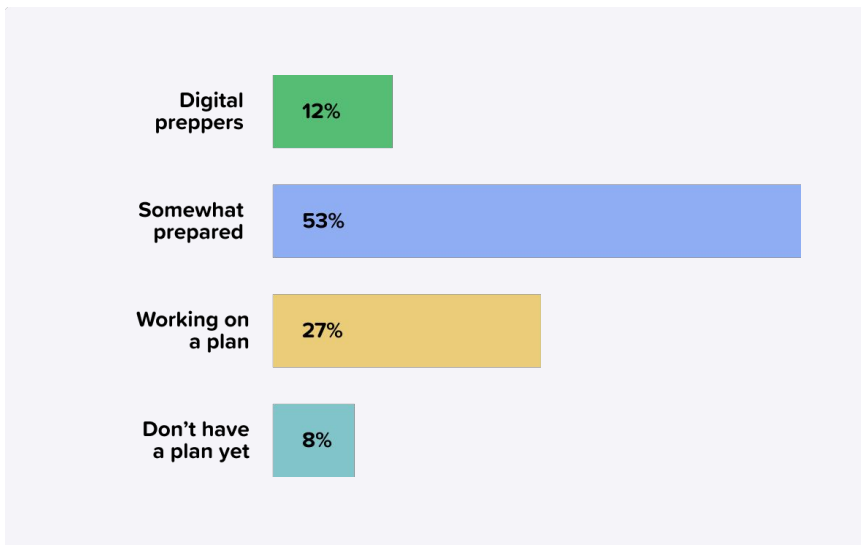
GoCo recently conducted a panel discussion, "Pandemic Proofing Your HR Processes", and got expert tips from HR pros on how HR can adapt in smart ways through digitization. Read on for key insights that will help you navigate this changing climate with the best tools available.

What Pain Points are HR Departments Facing?

Across the globe, HR staff are wrestling with new (and longstanding) challenges as companies strive to adapt to the realities of the pandemic. This brings distinct challenges for personnel management.

We posed the question below to webinar participants in an audience poll. While many had begun to digitize, most had a long way to go:

Do you have the bomb-shelter equivalent of digital HR, or do you still need a plan?

Category	Percentage
Digital preppers	12%
Somewhat prepared	53%
Working on a plan	27%
Don't have a plan yet	8%

Furthermore, 75% of the audience was using a hybrid model of having some employees work remotely while others come into the office. From an HR perspective, that is the most complex situation to manage. Only 16% of participants said all of their employees were working remotely.
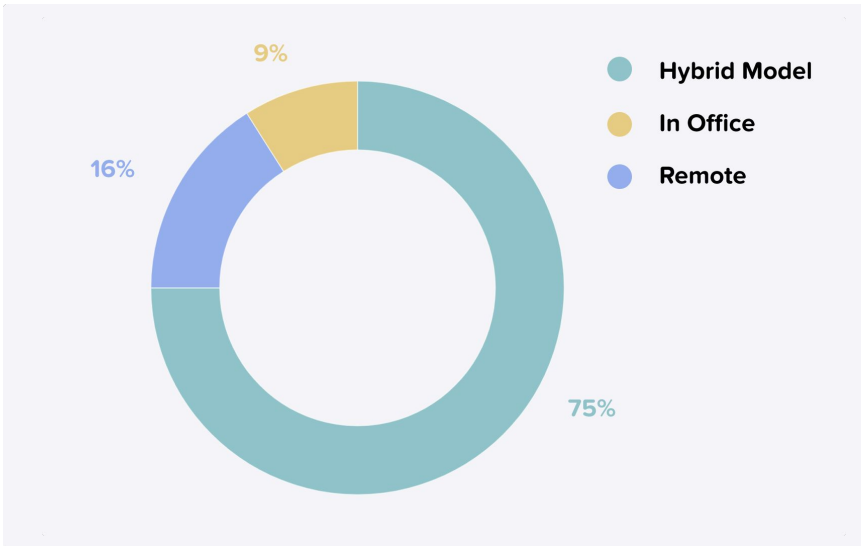
Most HR departments of small and medium-sized businesses need to find solutions to the following significant challenges, according to Samantha Retana, customer success manager at GoCo:

- Employee paperwork is time-consuming, frustrating, and tedious.

- Employee software is costly, disjointed, and outdated.

- Compliance laws are increasingly complex and constantly changing.

- HR departments face a widespread lack of funding.

All of these issues prevent HR staff from bringing more strategic value to their company.

"HR has been underfunded and asked to do the impossible for a very long time. At the same time, compliance is growing more difficult with the advent of new regulations and the need to keep track of location-specific rules across different countries and states."

Nir Leibovich
CEO and co-founder of GoCo

In addition to exacerbating ongoing problems, the pandemic has brought forth new issues for many companies, like managing a remote workforce and helping employees feel connected as a team. Let's take a look at a couple of key issues that HR has been struggling with.

Administrative Overload

The administrative burden that rests on HR's shoulders makes it challenging for HR to focus on higher-level strategic planning.

> "We're now starting to think of HR as a trusted advisor rather than just an administrative role—they can bring business-changing strategies and insights, so we need to relieve their administrative burden."
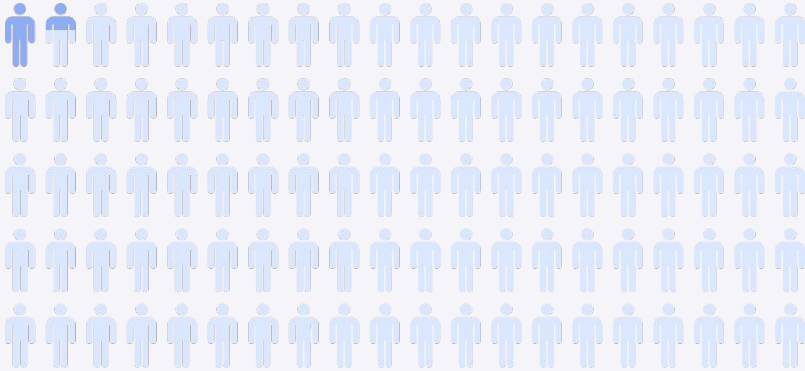>
> **Nir Leibovich**
> **CEO and co-founder of GoCo**

Adding to this problem, HR is highly understaffed, says Sarah Burch, Human Resources Manager of AbiMar Foods, Inc.

In her company, there are 1.22 HR people for every 100 employees.

Nir co-founded GoCo five years ago to solve HR's key dilemmas. In previous companies, he'd seen that nearly every department was involved in a digital transformation. They each used some form of automation for record-keeping, data centralization, and streamlining workflows.

Except for HR.

He was thinking, *why is our HR department lagging behind*?

He saw that HR was overburdened with antiquated workflows and inundated with paperwork. He wanted to help HR professionals get up to speed, giving them more bandwidth for higher-level strategic roles. Centralized data and streamlined workflows were the name of the game.

Today, many organizations have already achieved that goal, and the pandemic is forcing the rest of the crowd to move towards it quickly

Communicating across distances (and languages)

During COVID-19, HR workflows have had to change rapidly for companies that hadn't yet gone digital. Passing papers back and forth doesn't work in today's world, points out Sarah Koller, People Operations Manager at GoCo. The minimization of all direct contact and the fact that people are working across a geographic distance makes sharing paperwork a logistical nightmare.

Sarah Burch points out that many of us are also tasked with communicating with employees who speak a different language than us. Technology can facilitate communication that otherwise wouldn't be possible.

Additionally, most employees now expect everything to be digitized for their convenience, improving the employee experience.

What Processes Should HR Be Digitizing?

All companies can reap immense benefits by digitizing these core processes:

- Interviewing

- Onboarding

- Project management

- Employee requests

- Benefits management

Let's take a look at how companies can take their personnel management digital in all of these ways.

Interviewing and Onboarding

In light of the pandemic, HR staff must consider all of these issues when hiring:

- How to ensure the safety of all employees

- How to get paperwork signed in a timely manner

- How to support new hires who are working remotely from day 1

In the time of COVID-19, employees' health and safety are of paramount concern for HR. Implementing stringent safety measures plays a central role in the hiring and onboarding processes, Sarah Burch explains. Holding interviews by video conference provides a great alternative to in-person interviews. Then, HR can onboard new hires digitally and have them take a COVID-19 test before they ever set foot through the doors, she explains.

This means employees must have a fully digitized hiring and onboarding system, allowing all paperwork to be handled remotely. A quality system will keep track of all documents that need to be signed and send prompts to the appropriate people. As a bonus, employees no longer need to spend their first day filling out paperwork rather than meeting the team and starting training. Now, they can jump right in since they've completed their paperwork in advance.

Through a digitized system, you can automatically collect documents like the following:

- I-9s

- W2s

- Confidentiality agreements

- Offer letters

Then, you can store them in one centralized place that's accessible to everyone. You don't need to handle the paperwork, be in direct contact with the employee, or even send requests for signatures. It's all contactless and streamlined.

Also, departments can automatically receive notifications that concern them specifically. For instance, IT can be notified that a new employee needs a laptop.

A solid platform can help you structure a multi-month onboarding process, which can be extremely complex. GoCo's onboarding tools have greatly helped Sarah Burch's company with orienting new hires through the first 90 days—by the end of this period, they were truly engaged and in tune with the company culture. Because almost 28% of employees quit their jobs within the first 90 days, supporting them during this time is critical.

Maintaining Compliance

Let's consider a few ways that a digitized system can help with compliance in our remote world:

- Relieving HR of complex paperwork burdens

- Ensuring compliance across geographical boundaries

- Avoiding in-person contact to minimize health risks

Sarah Burch, HR Manager at AbiMar Foods, Inc. is a longtime fan of GoCo's onboarding and compliance tools. Prior to adopting GoCo, her company had been doing things manually using Google spreadsheets and numerous checklists, and menial tasks consumed countless hours of HR's time and energy.

Plus, Sarah would get interrupted throughout the day and forget what she'd just been doing.

GoCo's platform changed her life, she says. Now, it couldn't be simpler—she can send out one form to everyone at one time. And when she gets interrupted, the system knows exactly what she was doing. If she were to handle compliance manually right now, she says, "it would be a mess to untangle."

Project Management

Digitized project management innovations can also be a life-saver. Due to the pandemic, many companies are facing these challenges with workflow processes:

- Tasks getting forgotten

- Productivity dropping

- Teams communicating poorly and losing cohesiveness

With a digital platform, managers can set up workflows and tasks for employees who aren't physically together. When employees work remotely, tasks easily fall through the cracks, but these workflows keep everyone on track and productivity high. As a result, team members are always in sync.

A great system offers a high degree of flexibility, letting you do all of the following:

- Dynamically assign tasks and choose due dates

- Choose the order in which tasks are completed

- See task statuses at a glance

- Assign tasks to either departments or individuals
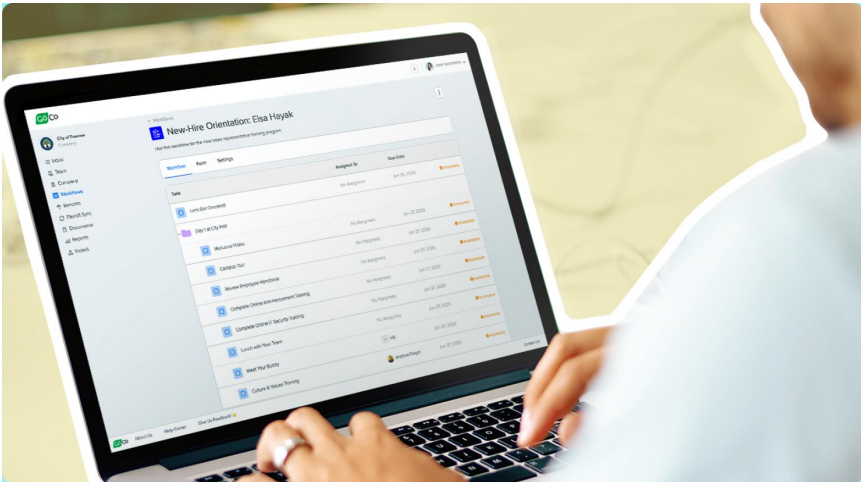
The system will send notifications accordingly. These workflows allow you to get things done without feeling like you're interrupting or nagging people, adds Sarah Koller. Plus, people can easily find the info they need without digging through unwieldy email chains.

Benefits

Here are a few COVID-19-specific benefits challenges you're probably facing:

- Family members may be losing jobs at a higher rate and, thus, will need to enroll in benefits.

- Employees may be using more of their benefits.

- You may have implemented new leave policies based on the realities of the pandemic.

> "You could have the best benefits plan ever, but if nobody knows about it, it doesn't really exist."
>
> **Sarah Koller**
> **People Operations Manager At Goco.lo**

Having the ability to access all their benefits information in one place ensures people have the info they need.

A good system will help you track the needs of employees' families so everyone gets enrolled in the right benefits. It will also track employees' use of paid time off and leave based on the policies your company has in place.

Wellness initiatives

Many HR departments are working to manage new programs that have arisen in response to the pandemic, like the following:

- Ways to stay connected with coworkers

- Tools for relaxing and recharging

- Support in staying physically healthy

GoCo rolled out a subscription to Headspace, a meditation app, for all of its employees, along with a walk-and-talk challenge that lets teams stay connected and physically active at the same time. Your online platform can prompt people to take advantage of such tools.

Best Practices for Automating Your HR

Learning some key tips on making the most of your digitized platform will help you get more from its features.

Designing templates

Create workflow process templates that you can use over and over again, saving time down the road, says Rachel Limb, Lead Client Success Manager at GoCo. Whenever you launch a new project or repeat a process, they'll be available to help.

Here are a few processes that you might use a template for:

- Onboarding employees

Task
☐ Send Offer Letter
⌄ 📁 Prepare Equipment & Supplies
☐ Order Laptop
☐ Prepare Workstation
☐ Assign Access Key + Badge
☐ Assemble Welcome Basket
⌄ 📁 Provision Tech Access
1 Add to Office 360
2 Add to Slack

- Orienting new hires

Task
☐ Let's Get Oriented!
⌄ 📁 Day 1 at City Hall
☐ Welcome Video
☐ Campus Tour
☐ Review Employee Handbook
☐ Complete Online Anti-Harassment Training
☐ Complete Online IT Security Training
☐ Meet Your Buddy

- ## Conducting performance reviews

Task
📁 Employee Self Assessment
1　Complete Employee Self Assessment Form
📁 Manager Assessment
1　Review Employee Self-Assessment
2　Complete Manager Assessment Form
3　Conduct Performance Review Meeting
4　Submit Merit Award, Comp Change, or Promotion Reques
📁 Executive Approvals
1　Approve or Deny Change Requests

- ## Handling employee requests

Task
📁 Equipment Request
1　Initiate Employee Request
2　Manager Approval
3　Admin Approval
4　Fulfill Order

- Setting up meetings

- Mentoring a new employee

Use template creation as a chance to revisit and refine your existing processes, Rachel advises.

First things first

Getting basic paperwork, benefits info, and an employee handbook in your digital system will take the bulk of the administrative tasks off your plate. Thus, if you're working to gradually phase in digital HR during COVID-19, those should be your priorities.

You can create any processes you want, Rachel emphasizes. And employees, HR, managers, or anyone else in your company can initiate a workflow, which empowers everyone to work as efficiently as possible!

Pro tips:

1.   If you're relying on other systems for specific tasks, it's best to build those functions into a centralized digital system so you can handle all tasks on the same platform.

2.   Choose a system that lets you send candidates a link to a benefits preview so they can type in their information and see example benefits plans without giving their personal info to HR.

3.   Use a digital platform to increase touch-points with the employee in the first 90 days to make sure they feel connected.

Going digital is no longer a choice but a necessity, and companies are also finding that it resolves pain points that had been plaguing them for years. You can master the transition to the digital realm by using the best practices for implementing these changes and learning how to pitch the idea to your company leadership.

Sources

Inc., "The Top 3 Reasons Why New Employees Quit in the First 90 Days and How to Prevent It"

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