U1-HR

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# SUMMARY KEYWORDS

employees, people, campus, departments, home, hr, perspective, hear, work, nines, remote, temporary, carrie, university, talk, hiring freeze, laptop, furloughs, couple, vpn

# SPEAKERS

Interviewer L:, Participant 2, Participant 1, Interviewer A:

**Interviewer L:** 00:00:00

…taking a little bit of time, taking a little time to talk with us today. And I'll just go through some questions and then give you a chance, you know, to add anything that you think we've missed, if you wouldn't mind. Could we just start with sort of your title and what you do. [REDACTED], would you go first?

**Participant 1** 00:00:19

Absolutely. I'm a senior HR director at the university human resource management, my primary functions that I oversee our HR service delivery, embedded HR on campus and performance management.

**Interviewer L:** 00:00:34 Thanks. And [REDACTED] and

**Participant 2** 00:00:37

[REDACTED], and I'm the Deputy Chief Human Resource Officer on campus side. And I oversee most operations on in campus HR. And during COVID. I was a member of the COVID task force at the university level.

**Interviewer L:** 00:00:51

Okay, great. So I'm [REDACTED]. I'm a researcher in public health. [REDACTED]?

**Interviewer A:** 00:00:59

I am [REDACTED], and I actually go to [REDACTED UNIVERSITY], and I'm about to be a junior majoring in kinesiology and I'm here working with [REDACTED] on this research project. So I'm excited to hear your response.

**Interviewer L:** 00:01:17

Okay, thank you. So the first thing I'd like to start with is, when we decided in March of 2020, that this was going to be a real thing. I'm sure HR was impacted in ways that nobody knew about. So can you sort of talk us through what kinds of things happened when you initially had to make a lot of changes about where people were working and how people were working?

**Participant 2** 00:01:47

I don't know who wants to start there,

**Participant 1** 00:01:49

we could probably layered, you're gonna hear a lot from both of us. So why don’t you start because you were at the highest leadership levels, and then I'll tell them about the things my team worked on. So

**Participant 2** 00:01:56

okay, so at the highest levels, there was immediately a task force that was created, a COVID task force that consisted of members across campus, and I can email you their names and titles and what department they work with. But from an HR perspective, it was really about getting people home, how are we going to get people who can work from home? What are the duties that can go home? How do we identify that? How do we get them the training the resources they need to get them home? Because I want to say it was like within a week's time, [REDACTED], we were telling everybody stay home, like you stay home, yes, don't come to work, hoping that we have the infrastructure set up appropriately.

Some of the other things we did quite like immediately is pull up our telecommuting policy and start reworking that because we knew that there were some holes in that policy, created some guidelines quickly created training in order for supervisors and managers to just learn how to do this. This was new for all of us, right. And I think in the beginning to be it was probably more like three weeks later, because I think in the beginning, we thought this is going to be like two weeks, we'll be home for two weeks, and then we'll be back in the office and everything will be back to normal. And after a few weeks, we realized that's not going to be the case we better, we better full throttle forward and figure out how we're going to help our departments navigate their staffing issues.

**Participant 1** 00:03:21

So I'm going to interject by saying we started way before March, right when when we started hearing about this, we pulled out our old pandemic procedures that had been made 10 years ago, we started just preparing for even like a week absence from campus, way ahead of time, started looking at our protocols, adjusting them, we start identifying who's essential and who's not essential. That document must have went through 150 drafts, right? Finally got to a point where we knew who was essential meaning they have to work on campus, there's literally no way they could do this from home. Sorry, I have a zoom bomber. So we started working on that essential workers. So when it came time when it was becoming inevitable that people are going to have to go home, we had that list saying there's a few people who they're going to keep doing what they're doing. And there were some of them in HR who were essential. But the people who were going home, how are we going to manage that. And then a couple of things that my team started working on at that point. I think all of HR was helping with communication. I mean, all of us with our customers. But one of the pieces that my team had to work on is - but I didn't mention my interest - I'm also over employment services like lifecycle of an employee, which includes onboarding and I-9s and an I-9 is a face to face process. So with all these people

leaving campus with, where are you going to go to and I know that I kind of go to people's houses. So we created an I-9 team in record time at Central HR, built the stations, got got a schedule for who was going to do it, and people came to central HR to do do their I-9s. And we put that thing together, I mean, two weeks or something very quickly, we had I-9s, centralized for not all of campus but a portion of campus. And then we said the portion of campus we didn't build it for, we're not going to say anything. But if they call us and say I don't know where to go, we’ll we'll offer to share our space with them. So that was something my team had to do very quickly, in addition to the all the things that [REDACTED] talked about, then the other thing we started working on was the website, or the communication. So that website kept growing and building just having all the resources people would need about how to work from home and how to VPN, if you didn't remember how to do that, all of that we put on a website.

**Interviewer L:** 00:05:42

So I'm wondering if you could expand a little bit. So [REDACTED] had said, we started working on training. And you've mentioned a couple of things, [REDACTED], about training. So how you actually access things was one of the issues. What about equipment? It seems to me that in the past, it's sort of been like your equipment stays in the office. Yeah, all of a sudden, had to get equipment people's homes,

**Participant 2** 00:06:08

we had to move quickly with that. Specifically, in HR, we told employees to take their equipment home. And that was new for us, we did an inventory, we had our IT department track inventory, who was taking what home, you know what was staying in the office, the one thing that was very clear to us is that working from home shouldn't be an added expense to the university. So for example, if you have two screens on your desk, at work, you can take one home, but we're not going to purchase equipment to make this happen. But we were lucky again in HR because we all have laptops. So that was kind of a vision of [REDACTED] sharing is that he wanted all of his team to have laptops and be mobile. So for HR specifically, that was very easy, because everyone had a laptop, they could go home, they could take one of the monitors if they needed to. We did have some, you know, concern about purchasing additional equipment and things like that we worked through. But for other departments that have desktop computers, it became a little bit more difficult. But it wasn't a central decision for that it really came down to the Deans and the directors, what they wanted to allow their employees to take home and what that that process looked like, under the direction from our CFO office was don't We don't want to expend money to buy equipment for employees to work at home.

**Interviewer L:** 00:07:28

Okay. When you started making all these changes, can you talk about what felt comfortable in your as you were navigating changes and what felt like wow, we really didn't think about this. This is new for us.

**Participant 2** 00:07:51

It was all new, to be honest, that's how I felt. From my perspective, it was all new, because we had been talking about allowing employees to remote work as part of a work life balance for years and years and years. But a lot of times it wasn't. It wasn't accepted as something that was okay for employees to do. So for us to get people up to speed and understand that it's okay for employees to

work from home. I don't know [REDACTED], about you. But looking back on that I want to say it was a two year two year period for us. Besides the things that we were ready for, like [REDACTED] said, we had some things that we had pre planned for, it was all new. And from my perspective we were every day we learned something new that we should be thinking about and working on. And we're lucky because we belong to a couple of organizations – CUPA-HR for one, and SHRM. And so you could follow a lot of trends and things that other employers were working on and doing that would help guide us through this as well. What do you want to add? [REDACTED]?

00:08:50

I'm trying to think of what what's the challenge? I guess, there were some people who, when they would take vacation or go sick, they'd have their laptop with them. And so they they'd work from their daughter's home in another state or they'd work from home. So some, I guess that's the only thing that some people had already known how to work from home and how to how to VPN. So I think for them, there were other challenges, but the idea of picking up your laptop and working, you know, at the airport or from your home. Okay, they done that before they understood VPN. But beyond that, I really think everything else was new. I think the one of the biggest challenges was that, you know, workplaces were getting shut down at the same time as school. So I know a lot of our workforce don't have children. So I'm not going to overgeneralize, but a lot of them do. Yeah, it seems like one of the biggest challenges was for people to have to navigate working from home while having their school aged kids at home all at the same time. And quite frankly, what I heard that over time, is maybe almost just as challenging. Is there some people who have a lot of stress around isolation and they weren't around people. So those of us with kids were stressed out because there were too many people around. But I heard just as many stories of people who got really stressed out about the isolation. So yeah, there were challenges all around.

**Participant 2** 00:10:15

And to [REDACTED]’s point, we tried to set up committees around these topics here is, for example, childcare, we set up a childcare committee, again, committee made up across campus that talked about different activities we could offer for parents and their children, different resources, what tutoring services we could contract with to help our parents with their children. So

**Interviewer L:** 00:10:38

Do you think that you know, did you roll out programs? And people said, Yeah, that's exactly what we need and started using it? Or did you roll things out? Some of them? And people said, yeah, not helpful. Don't don't need it.

**Participant 2** 00:10:53

I didn't ever hear of anything not being helpful. To be honest. I think everyone was craving.

**Participant 1** 00:10:59

Please, help us help us. Okay, great. In fact, I just thought something else. Yeah. [REDACTED], who's our training and development director, she started creating content on bridge, so you could watch it on your computer, about how to work from home and do remote things. So we even started, our team started creating training that people could watch from home to help them.

**Interviewer L:** 00:11:24

Okay. Yeah. I imagine that there were changes that you were making a policy or at least procedures and sending sort of that out into the campus world. And I imagine that people in departments and colleges, and you know, whatever their organizational grouping is, we're saying, we aren't equipped to manage this. Did they contact you about that? Or were they just trying to problem solve on their own? How did that sort of happen?

**Participant 2** 00:12:00

Some of both? I think you had some we have some departments. I'll give you an example. When we had some furloughs and some reductions in forces happening. We had some of our departments reach out and say, can you sit with me? Will you come to my employee meetings with me and talk to them about unemployment insurance and what's going to happen with Workforce Services? And but then we had other departments who felt comfortable doing that on their own. So my experience, from my perspective is that we had a little bit of both, some who really wanted our help, and were relying on everything and anything we could do for them. And others said, No, we've got this. We'll let you know if we need anything.

**Interviewer L:** 00:12:36

Okay. Um, can you talk about the permanence of changes? So as you were rolling things out, were there things that you have started to now hold back from that? Or are changes going to become permanent? From your perspective? You know, I know we've talked about this work life balance at the university. And I remember, I think it was about the time the pandemic started, or maybe a year in where we were all supposed to declare how much time we wanted to spend on the campus. Yeah. And I haven't seen anything sort of official happen with that yet. But maybe you could talk about what things were really sort of targeted to this is an emergency we have to deal with, and then it'll go back to normal and what things you said, Well, maybe this is about work life balance, maybe we have to make some changes.

**Participant 2** 00:13:28

I think the big one that we as as far as [REDACTED]’s perspective is that the hybrid work, I think, from his perspective, that's here to stay for a while. That's a permanent, there are of course, like [REDACTED] mentioned earlier, some departments here student facing that might not work, if you're patient facing that won't work. Certainly…

# Participant 1

Public safety…

# Participant 2

Yes. But there are definitely some pockets that hybrid or fully remote work is a benefit to both the institution and the employee. A couple of things I'm thinking right off the top of my head that were temporary fixes or kind of to get us through, we had what we call temporary work adjustments, they were TWAs. And that was more when an employee when it was we were bringing people back to campus. And we had some of our our employees who were more at risk because of their health

conditions or because of their age or because they had employer or they had people who lived with them who were at risk of of getting COVID and severe COVID, and that they would put in for these temporary work adjustments to continue working at home for a certain period of time. That's phasing out. Admin leave, for when people get COVID or when they get tested for COVID. We're phasing that out as well. Um

**Participant 1** 00:14:40

Very luckily the hiring freeze was temporary and always tended to be temporary. It that was stressful too man. Whoo. That was hard when there was a temporary hiring freeze. So we were very happy when that was lifted. But the centralized I-9s. We're going full forward with that. So originally we thought that was going to be temporary. So I had current employees just taking a day of their schedule and, and doing that, but we realized how important it was we started hiring student employees. And now we're

up to five student employees who rotate through doing I-9s, we're still only doing that for a portion of campus. But our plan long term is to expand it. So we're centralized for all of campus, so that one was a win.

**Participant 2** 00:15:19

The other is we created a fund called [REDACTED]. And it's so that employees if they were having a financial crisis that could apply for this fund that is funded by employee donations, that will continue as well, that was a successful program and will continue. Okay.

**Interviewer L:** 00:15:37

Um, tell me about problems that happened. I want to move now more towards the staff perspective. What did you hear were challenges for staff? And how did that potentially create burdens in HR that you had to address?

**Participant 2** 00:15:54

I think a lot of what I heard was about the temporary work, my boss wants me to come back to work, I don't think I need to be back in the office, I can be fully remote my boss doesn't think I can. And we even had discussions with deans and directors about that, like, Are you sure, let's consider whether this job has to be in the office or whether it can be remote from home. I heard that a lot from employees that they weren't being treated fairly, an employee in another department was being allowed to, that's doing the same job as them.

**Participant 1** 00:16:23

Kind of I'd say, from an employee relations perspective, we had some supervisors on campus who when they sent their employees home, they they had things set up in such a way that they felt confident that was gonna be fine, the work is gonna get done. Then we had other supervisors who were really nervous about sending people home, and we're worried the work wasn't gonna get done. So they call us and say, Well, how do we know if they're doing their work? And we said, well, you need to have a process where they report out to, I mean, so they kind of almost asked us about how to structure the work, because they've always been there watching employees, again, depends on the type of work.

And so we have to help them and say you set the expectations, and they do the product. And if they don't, then you can talk to us about written warnings. But it was so interesting that some supervisors

like gave the employees autonomy, and others were like, well, how do I know they're working? So our employee relations team was busy in those first few months for sure.

**Participant 2** 00:17:17

I think a lot of employees were nervous too, about when they got COVID. Or when a co worker got called or when they were exposed to COVID. There were there was all this unrest about or unsure of what they do, who do they report to? Do they come to work? Can they come to work? Do they need to clean their offices when they come back to work? I think that caused a lot of employee unrest as well.

**Participant 1** 00:17:40

And then, oh, my goodness, everything around masks became controversial that everything about the vaccine became clear. I mean, just as much in the country right now as divisiveness. Guess what?

That's true on campus, too. So some people would say they would refuse to come to work if all their co workers weren't masked up. But some people were like, Well I don't need to mask until the [REDACTED] county had their mandate. That was fascinating, too.

**Interviewer L:** 00:18:07

That's an interesting perspective, because I'm up on the [part of the university]. And we're still masked, right? So we've never had that happen. But I ensure that on the [other part of the university], it was very different. Yeah, that's useful to hear. Okay. So did you implement evaluations of those changes? Or were you getting feedback that was sort of informing how changes were going at the HR level at, you know, the manager level out and about on the campus?

**Participant 2** 00:18:42

So we're very lucky with the way we're structured because we have embedded departments, wait so what I mean by that is we have HR directors who report directly to us, but they sit in those departments. They feed us information daily, we were having, I want to say we were meeting twice a week or three times a week with our HR directors,

# Participant 1

It was awesome.

# Participant 2

It was great. And so they were feeding us all of the information, what policies are working, what's not working? What do we need to tweak on those policies? What do we need to change? Those relationships became critical in implementing everything we're doing.

**Participant 1** 00:19:15

Yeah, and that was a great opportunity for all of us who had implemented, so I implemented centralized I-9s, [REDACTED] introduced benefits, solutions that are introduced TWA, so every time we'd meet, we’d say, Okay, what's the status this week? How's it going this week? That was so helpful, I think was two or three times a week we're meeting and that was the right thing to do. Yeah.

**Interviewer L:** 00:19:38

Okay. This is sort of the end of my questions. Tell me what you think, from department or college or whatever level what was really successful, who was successful and what was not success? For or who was not successful, and this is leading towards, we want to begin talking to staff. And we want very different perspectives, right. And so I, I'm sort of hoping what we can do is begin thinking about who ought we to talk to, because it went really well for them, or they really struggled. And both can tell us some things about what works and doesn't work.

**Participant 2** 00:20:28

I can tell you probably, I don't know all of the specifics, but [REDACTED department] did a phenomenal job with remote work, they're still remote work and doing a great job with it. I, I know, they had some remote work before this started, but I've met with them several times to just get best practices from them. They've done a fantastic job.

# Interviewer L:

Okay.

**Participant 1** 00:20:53

I'm trying to think of what was successful, it seems like the areas that had a clear communication method, whether that be zoom, or teams or meetings or a shared drive, so the departments that kept that communication flowing, seem to do better than maybe departments who didn't have that. And I don't I can't even tell you who that is. But like I said, some people would say they felt isolated, and they didn’t know what's going on. Whereas we pretty quickly set up teams, tons of teams, so you can always go to teams and chat a question back to each other. So we felt like we knew what was going on. So and again, can't tell you who but I can tell you that it seems like anybody who set up really clean communication methods felt a little bit more that they weren't so isolated.

**Participant 2** 00:21:42

I think it'd be interesting to get the perspective from some of those departments who had to do some furloughs. That would be like [REDACTED], we had [REDACTED]. Yeah, we had some of those. And then also, I think it'd be interesting to hear the perspective of those who we considered mandatory on campus staff, for example, some of our – who did we just designate as mandatory on campus staff – well, of course, the patient safety,

**Participant 1** 00:22:13

Public safety, patient sensitive? What else - student facing…

**Participant 2** 00:22:20

some of the facilities on campus

**Participant 1** 00:22:24 Student-facing?

**Participant 2** 00:22:24

And that’s the other thing... There were some Deans who allowed their advisors to be remote, while others didn't. So it might be interesting to talk to a couple of different departments say, you might want to talk to this engineering advisor, for one and maybe humanities and see how they were different because I, I'm pretty confident they handled those very differently.

**Participant 1** 00:22:48

You know, who might be good to talk to not that she's got a small group, but just kind of her perspective is, is [REDACTED], our Chief Sustainability Officer, because for her, the idea of remote work is like, Well, yeah, I'm sustainable. So So talking to [REDACTED] might be interesting, not because her department did things differently. But just to see if people call her to say, how do I do this? She might be good.

**Interviewer L:** 00:23:15

Okay. Do you know if there were departments that experienced high turnover versus low turnover related to you know, the couple of years that we've been doing this now?

**Participant 2** 00:23:30

My perspective is during the heat of COVID, nobody was leaving…not nobody… turnover reduced. Because I think everyone was fearful of the stability, what was happening, you know, could would I go to another employer, and they're going to lay me off that type of thing.

**Participant 1** 00:23:46

2020 people were not leaving now. They were scared. 2022 Everybody's everybody's leaving.

**Participant 2** 00:23:49

Yeah, all of those that didn't leave in 2020 and 2021 are now leaving, they held off leaving and now it's all

**Participant 1** 00:24:02

Because the economy changed. Yeah.

**Participant 2** 00:24:05

But I can't think of one department who was impacted more than others. It's spread across- pretty even…

**Participant 1** 00:24:10

It's yeah, I agree. Okay, so, but, and maybe this didn't happen right away, but it happened probably by 2021 You're gonna want to talk to the patient care side of things.

# Participant 2

Yeah. You’re right.

Because we all know this, we saw on the news, the health care workers got burned out. So if there's any area that maybe started to see some some people leaving, not 2020 but maybe 2021. I look at the healthcare side and the patient care side.

**Participant 2** 00:24:37 Good point.

**Interviewer L:** 00:24:39

Okay, so let me just make sure I've got everybody that you sort of mentioned to us. [REDACTED]?

**Participant 2** 00:24:46 Yeah.

**Interviewer L:** 00:24:49

People who had furloughs were the [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED]

**Participant 2** 00:24:55 People at [REDACTED]

**Interviewer L:** 00:24:58

Okay. People who were mandatory to be on campus would have been public safety, patient sensitive kinds of places, facilities. And then advisors who probably had different experiences in the patient, excuse me, in the student facing side would have been engineering and humanities for us to talk to them. And then [REDACTED], what's [REDACTED]’s last name, please? Sorry, say it again?

**Participant 1** 00:25:30

No, we're trying to remember Oh, [REDACTED]… hold on…. we'll [REDACTED]

**Participant 2** 00:25:33

[REDACTED,] chief sustainability officer, if I Google it I’ll

**Participant 1** 00:25:35

I can’t believe I’m not thinking of her name off the top of my head because I just always call her [REDACTED], we'll pull it up here. First,

**Interviewer L:** 00:25:44

We'll find it. All right. And then I'm thinking on patient care, like maybe we talked to [REDACTED department], which is huge and would have been really involved in COVID care. While you're looking for [REDACTED]’s last name, just let me toss out - is there anything else that you think we ought to know about this that we haven't asked about yet?

**Participant 2** 00:26:14

Your focus is on staff, right staff?

**Interviewer L:** 00:26:17

Right now. Yes. Although if you have suggestions that we should add, this will expand to be larger and do some student interviews and some faculty interviews as well. So if there are other groups we ought to be talking to, happy to hear it for future work.

**Participant 2** 00:26:35

I can't think of anything right now. But if I think of something after we get off, I will send you an email.

**Interviewer L:** 00:26:41 Perfect. All right. Well, again,

**Participant 1** 00:26:45

I think, and we mentioned just the thing about, if we didn't, mental health. Mental health was already a big deal. But it became critical, I think, isn't that the time when [REDACTED] opened up the employee assistance program. So we have an employee assistance program for employees who need help, but it's really meant for benefited employees. During this time, she worked with the vendor to allow them to see non-benefited employees, because the need was so high. So yeah, I mean, we could do huge research papers, and articles just on people's mental health. So I think that was a huge thing.

**Interviewer L:** 00:27:22

Yeah, we'll ask about that. We did a previous survey. And 50% of people said their mental health was worse.