U2 HR Interview Notes\*

\*The recording did not work, so we only have these field notes.

Interview: 7/15/22 School: [U2]

* [REDACTED], Associate Director HR (employment, compensation, HR

information systems) .

* [REDACTED], Associate Director HR (benefits, wellness, employee relations)

. **Tell me briefly about the experience for HR during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

-They were just starting open enrollment and not being able to meet in person for

interactions was a challenge

-They thought that the lockdown would onlylast a few weeks and then everyone would be back

-When it became clear this was longer term, their question *was* "how will customer needs be met?"

-They adapted by using communications tools (Zoom, Slack. Box) - this was seen as

a positive, and something to keep

* + Associate VP (HR) sat on the COVID Council and a major benefit was him bringing back information and sharing it with the HR team in a weekly zoom
  + The HR solutions center had up-to-date information weekly and created HR alignment with [U2] decision-making at highest level
  + That meant HR team could be responsive and provide accurate information
  + With regard to communications, HR felt it was "better than before COVID"
  + Use of Slack meant that people were incredibly responsive to queries within the HR team and didn't require a meeting to address an issue
  + They implemented Voluntary Separation (VSEP) - many people took them up on this offer – this was seen as a positive
* **"What changes were made for staff about work arrangements when lockdown happened?**

-In HR, they initially sent everyone home, except those who did not have an effective workspace at home - they came in to the office under social distancing, but eventually

everyone was able to move home by transferring work assets to home (computers, monitors, chairs, etc. by creating inventory of what equipment went where)

-It became policy across campus to transition & track equipment that went home

* **"What changes had to be implemented by HRfor staff across the institution?!**

-VSEP - they created 6 options based on age, length of employment, position; this involved the VP, budget office, and supervisors in order to create equity across the campus

-FFCRA - they created a system in 2 weeks too provide a way for non-benefited employees to declare leave 9COVID-related); this was successful in a short time because they didn't have to go through normal channels (due to how quickly it needed to be implemented) where people can bring up issues & impacts

-The university created an executive team that created and updated a new COVID

website to communicate information about COVID and related campus procedures

-Successful operations that they will keep: I

* + Benefits open enrollment fair moved to online/virtual - this was seen as a benefit because they have locations across the state and now access was the same at every location (i.e., equity issue)
  + Town Hall to share information ([U2] president)
  + Changes in how we do meetings - everything will remain a hybrid option
  + The ability to work from home when sick (so don't infect others, but you aren't sick enough to not work)
  + The option for telework is now seen as a benefit for recruitment & retention purposes - again, this is seen as a benefit/equity issue for their rural communities and ties in with the Governor's initiative BUT the challenge for HR is how to manage out-of-state employees due to differences bystatein labor laws
  + **When changes wereimplemented, were they appropriately timed for the issues that needed to be addressed?**
    - **Were the changes outside the scope of the HR's expertise?**
    - **If it was outside the HR scope, who did you talk to about the changes?**
    - **Were the changes outside the scope of what the staff person was used to doing?**
    - **When (if atall) did those changes get reversed or permanently implemented?**

-The team felt they were able to respond quickly because some of the normal

channels for implementation were bypassed due to the need to quickly adjust to changinglandscape

-In HR, much of the work that occurred was new or required a new way of doing things, but they quickly pivoted to growth mindset

* Weekly meeting internally was useful
* Embracing change made it OK to take on new tasks
* Encouraged creativity to solve problems, because you couldn't always do things the way you'd done them before
* They created a monthly delivery so that they kept in touch with all of their staff; this was positive, and people looked forward to the next delivery

-Regarding campus staff, people who couldn't telework (ex: facilities) perceived that

teleworking staff were "on vacation" while they were still working

-[U2] pivoted well initially, especially because they already had strong virtual -

educational offerings I

* One challenge was how long they were in the disrupted mode, i.e. people's mental health was of concern (isolation, etc)this meant that they added more

support for mental health services for faculty & staff (student programs already existed)

* **What problems did you encounter with staff at your institution?**
  + **What issues did staff raise about challenges?**
  + **What burdens occurred for HR?**

-See above note about teleworkers vs staff who stayed on campus

-Some managers were concerned about how to know if staff were really working (or had different levels of comfort with these arrangements); this led to implementation of trainings for methods to lead telework employees (accountability, engagement, productivity)

* Notably, ADA requests increased when there were disagreements between staff and managers about returning to previous duties (ex: coming back to campus)
* The pivot to remote was easy, but return to campus was challenging (ex: USHE requirement that 75% of courses be in person)
* They are still determining what telework & return to campus will be as a long- term strategy
* **Was there an evaluation of what staff thought about the changes?**
* **Was there an evaluation of whether the changes were successful?**
  + **How satisfied were HR managers with these changes overall?**
  + **How satisfied were university staff with these changes overall?**

-There wasn't time for formal evaluation, but the communications methods (Zoom, Slack) they implemented meant that there was rapid exchange of information and they were constantly pivoting/responding to address employee needs

-They could measure things like attendance at virtual meetings (at least as high as previously), applications for telework, use of onsite testing to see what was being utilized

* Onsite testing was a big, interdisciplinary effort that they perceived as being successful (involved, science, logistic, documentation, communication)
* **Who was successful in managing these changes?**
  + **Which departments had little turnover due to COVID-19?**
    - **Why were they successful in keeping personnel?**
  + **Which department had high turnover due to COVID-19?**
    - **What were their challenges?**
  + **Which departments (n=3) should we talk with on your campus to get staff perspectives?**

**TALKTO**

Dining Services [[REDACTED](mailto:(alan.andersen@usu.edu)]\*

Housing [REDACTED]\*

Facilities [REDACTED]\*

Academic & Instructional Services [REDACTED] VP-Research [REDACTED]

Contact tracing [[REDACTED]](mailto:(ellis.bruch@usu.edu)

\* These were departments who had to stay on campus to do their jobs

* Is **there anything else you would like to share with us?**

Athletics was highly impacted: testing all athletes, logistics (ex: last minute cancellations), so we might also want to talk with them [[REDACTED]](mailto:(john.hartwell@usu.edu)

[thank you-note of appreciation]