



INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, social justice, and other matters has resulted in employers and employees experiencing crisis, change, and circumstances beyond our control. We really don't know how these turning points will impact the future and we only have the present knowledge or perspective to make the best possible decisions. Both employers and their employees are in a sustainability and survival mode. Simultaneously employees have new concerns, motivations, performance expectations, new work environments, and priorities.

The “*Unraveling*” and current “*Crisis*” were also described by organizational theorist Peter B. Vaill as “*Permanent White Water*,¹” used to explain the increasing experience of complexity and change in the 21st century. As Vaill explained, most managers and organizational teams are taught to think of themselves as “...paddling their canoes on calm, still lakes...” and to prepare for the “...periods when you will have to shoot the rapids.” **Most people expect that there will be disruptions to things, after that things will “settle down,” and that soon they will be back on “calm lake mode.” But what Vaill warned about has become increasingly true: we never get out of the rapids, but rather are riding the tide of permanent white water.** The 21st century has not only become more complex, but increasingly volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous. These conditions require new attention and skills to cope with living in a VUCA² world.

¹ Vaill, P.B. (1989) *Permanent White Water*.

² Bennis W. and Nanus B. (1985) *Leaders – The Strategies for Taking Charge*.

Definition of VUCA

V = Volatility: The nature and dynamics of change, and the nature and speed of change forces and change catalysts.

U = Uncertainty: The lack of predictability, the prospects for surprise, and the sense of awareness and understanding of issues and events.

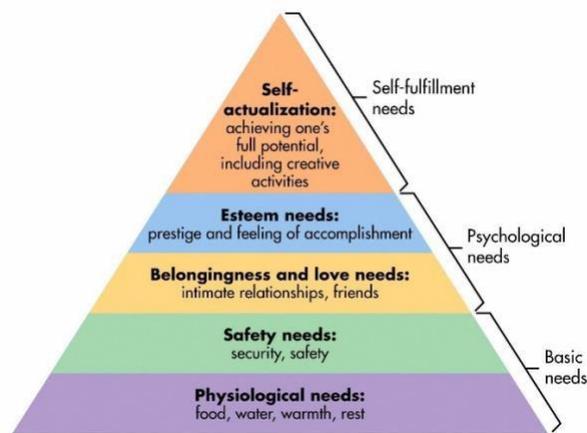
C = Complexity: The multiplex of forces, the confounding of issues, no cause-and-effect chain, and confusion that surrounds an organization.

A = Ambiguity: The haziness of reality, the potential for misreads, and the mixed meanings of conditions; cause-and-effect confusion.

As a result of a sustained experience of **VUCA**, we experience less stability, less ability to predict the future outcomes, and more emotional intensity. Therefore, it is necessary for employees to develop skills in understanding their emotions and to help develop their ability to manage reactions which is increasingly important to personal and organizational success.

Another social theory is *Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*³. This theory in psychology is comprised of a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. The theory states that human needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before one can attend to needs higher up. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, **the needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization**. When employees are concerned about their basic life needs, it is likely impossible for them to achieve their employer's business goals.

³ Maslow, A. (2011) *Hierarchy of Needs: A Theory of Human Motivation*.



HR Anew provides 10 ideas in this document to help employers create a supportive work environment in this crisis, changing, and uncertain time. Employers and employees have a responsibility for the health and well-being of the workforce. **When employees are well, it promotes positive business outcomes.**

The goal is to ensure an employer can pivot, care for, and help employees manage and resolve the concerns they face. In addition, employers can ensure employees are in the best position to be engaged and achieve high performance and productivity, assure exceptional customer experiences, and safeguard and limit liabilities for the company. In doing so, the employer has the assurance of effective and compliant human resources (HR) policies, procedures, processes, and proven best practices to advance the business goals and achieve the desired success for everyone involved.

1. Provide Mental Wellness, an Employee Assistance Program, access to a Therapist, and access to Telehealth services.

Help employees have greater security and to be less stressed, fearful, distracted, depressed, tired, and fearful. Ensure employees are aware and know how to access the mental wellness, employee assistance, therapist, telehealth, and health and safety resources in a private and confidential manner.

2. Train managers and supervisors to be aware of the signs of mental health illnesses.

According to research, one in every five Americans are dealing with mental health illnesses. Managers and supervisors are to be inclusive and knowledgeable about their staff. It is essential that they are able to proactively recognize when someone is responding or behaving out of character, experiencing a hardship, or shows signs of low performance and productivity, depression, anger, anxiety, alcoholism, drug dependency, etc. Employers can provide training, mentoring, and coaching to help managers to regularly connect with their employees.

3. Deliver Financial Wellness training and resources to help address financial pressures.

Help employees learn how to manage their short and long term personal financial matters and unforeseen expenses. Training topics recommended include financial planning, debt elimination, budgeting, spending, investing, saving, and preparing for retirement.

4. Assess the employee benefits program to determine what are the 21st century must have benefits to support the workforce's physical, financial, mental, and social needs.

For example, a progressive 21st century employee benefits program may include personal protective equipment (PPE), job sharing/workshare, paid time off, medical, dental, vision, prescription, health savings account, short and long term disability insurance, 401(k) or 403(b), auto insurance, home insurance, life insurance, family/caregiver leave, professional development, defined benefit pension plan, legal services, employee assistance program, and a diversity and inclusion program.

5. Deliver professional and life skills training that meets the needs of the business and the five generations in today's workplace.

We have five generations in the workplace today. They are Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X (Gen X), Generation Y (Gen Y/Millennials), and Generation Z (Gen Z). There are also Cuspers, persons born at the beginning, end, or in between the generations. This phenomenon of diversity and inclusion in the workplace brings great creativity and innovation, and in contrast introduces many similarities and differences. Consider providing training opportunities on topics to include career development, management and leadership, teamwork, job sharing/workshare, telework/remote work best practices, conflict resolution, business communications, technology resources, social justice, racism prevention, diversity and inclusion, parenting, single parenting, homeschooling, eldercare, illness, as well as death and dying.

6. Drive productivity, engagement, and loyalty, and mitigate depression, stress, and burnout.

Establish diversity and inclusion, affinity, and social support groups that give employees hope and confidence that together they can get through a crisis or challenge. Express empathy, show respect, be kind, and demonstrate employee recognition and appreciation.

7. Involve managers and employees in business continuity planning conversations.

Embrace shared goals and articulate clear outcomes. Create systems of prevention and recovery to deal with potential threats to the viability of the business. In addition to prevention, enable ongoing operations before and during execution of disaster recovery. Business continuity planning helps a company to look ahead, see around corners, resist failure, and have the ability to withstand natural disasters and changes in its environment and still function.

8. Stay connected with frequent communication and personal check-ins with your employees.

Communication is a major concern in today's workplace. During this season of uncertainty, prudent employers are ensuring that they establish formal daily or weekly check-ins with their employees. They are also taking action to update communication and learning technologies for the telework/remote workers as well as those who work onsite. This allows the employer to communicate evolving changes in a timely and transparent manner. Doing so also helps the employer to be an early knower to proactively address and resolve potential mental health, physical health, financial education, social matters, performance, productivity, and engagement concerns. Communicating regularly with employees also provides purpose, builds a positive company culture, creates accountability, and limits confusion.

9. Provide remote/telework employees with training, standard operating policies and procedures, resources, and tools to help them to succeed in their new work and life blending environments⁴.

Offer training for managers and employees to appropriately establish performance, productivity, engagement, and manage work and life blending boundaries. Empower employees with a more flexible/longer workday to ensure there is sufficient time for them to care for their work deliverables, as well as care for themselves and loved ones. For example, an employer could provide a workday of 5:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m. This scenario provides the flexibility for an employee to complete their workday and deliverables anytime within a 16-hour framework and expands service hours for customers, thus enhancing the customer experience.

According to a 2020 MetLife Trends Study⁵, about 50% of employees agreed that modern technology makes it very difficult to switch off and stop thinking about work. Employees who telework or work remotely are finding that greater flexibility is needed to respond to life obligations, commitments, and circumstances, e.g., homeschooling children, caring for elderly loved ones, and technology sharing in the home (e.g., internet access).

⁴Stallings, D. (2020) *Telework: How to Navigate the New Flexible Work Model*.

⁵MetLife's Annual U.S. Employee Benefit Trends Study. (2020)

10. Ensure HR policies and procedures are created or updated to support the new and previously existing workplace legislation at the federal, state, and local levels.

Age Discrimination Prevention
Business Travel
Disabilities and Reasonable Accommodations
Employee Relations and Conflict Resolution
Employee Wellness (Health and Safety, Physical, Mental, Financial)
Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)
Family Medical Leave and Paid Leave
Pregnancy Discrimination Prevention
Privacy and Confidentiality
Recruitment and Hiring in COVID-19
Remote/Telework/Workshare Programs
Technology Usage and Cybersecurity
Wage and Hour Violation Prevention
Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Prevention

The **Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)** requires certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. The Department of Labor’s Wage and Hour Division administers and enforces the new law’s paid leave requirements. These provisions will apply from the effective date through December 31, 2020. The FFCRA, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Title VII,



and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), along with other employment laws rules and regulations continue to prohibit discrimination. Although nothing is certain and we are learning more about COVID-19 and its impact daily, employers can reasonably expect the requests made by their employees will look differently in the future than those in the past.



ABOUT HR ANEW

HR Anew is an integrated Human Resource Management, Training, and Equal Employment Opportunity professional services firm. Headquartered in Columbia, Maryland, the company delivers solutions to government, commercial, and non-profit clients. The mission is to provide high quality services and products to employers with proven processes and a team of dedicated and caring professionals. HR Anew's experience, creativity, innovation, and philosophy of steady progress enables the company to deliver the specific guidance, options, and results required by clients. HR Anew is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives we touch. We are socially responsible, committed to high touch customer experiences and performance excellence, passionate about our work, accountable, flexible, collaborative, innovative, solution oriented, life- long learners, have integrity, are respectful, and support our employees with rewards, recognition, and balanced work.

HR Anew's Core Solutions Include:

- Administrative Support
- Career Management and Career Coaching
- Diversity and Inclusion
- EEO Counseling, ADR/Mediation, Investigations, and Final Agency Decisions
- EEO, Diversity, and Inclusion Training and Advisory
- Employee and Labor Relations/Fact-Finding Investigations
- Employee Benefits
- HR Policy and Employment Law Compliance
- HR Portals
- Management, Leadership, and Employee Training
- Organizational Assessments, Stay & Exit Interviews, and Workforce Studies
- Performance Management and Engagement
- Talent Acquisition (Recruitment and Staffing)

HR Anew and CEO Awards and Recognition





Certifications and Contracting Vehicles

GSA Schedule 738 X- HR & EEO (Schedule Number: GS-02F-0097Y)

Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) – Maryland, WBENC

Women Owned Small Business (WOSB)

Economically Disadvantaged Women Owned Small Business (EDWOSB)

Invite Positive Change

Open the door to creative, innovative, and fresh thinking in your organization. To find out more about our full array of service and product offerings, contact HR Anew at 410-381-5220, Deborah@hranew.com, or visit www.hranew.com.

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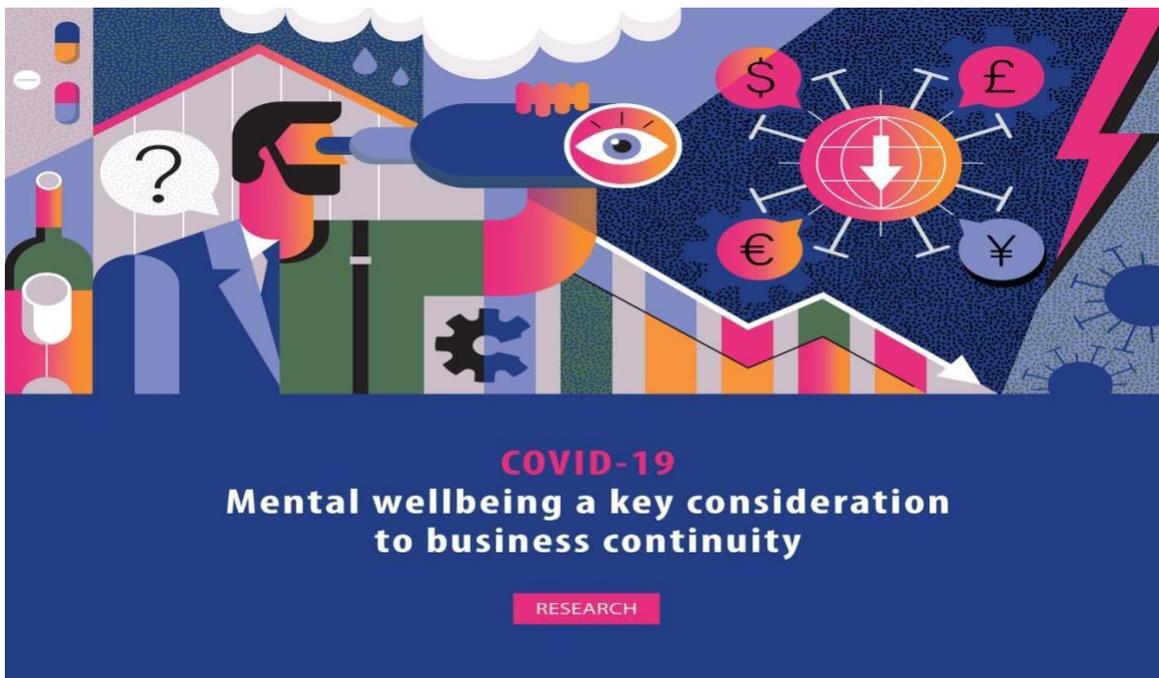
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