



Small Scenarios for Changing Times:

Conversation

The Heart of the Organization

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Conversation: The Heart of the Organization

Before the pandemic, employees spent between 1.8 to 2.5 hours per day discovering information about their employment and their work.¹² Today, the volume of questions has exploded. It's just one way of defining the level of uncertainty we face in our businesses and our jobs.

Question volume is growing while the speed at which answers change is accelerating.

We are discovering what works in real time. That means trying things and discovering whether or not they work in real time. Like our understanding of the underlying virus, our understanding of how things work is rapidly evolving.

Looking back, centralized work allowed us the luxury of having out of date documentation about our policies and procedures. We could afford to let key documents multiply without cross checking their meaning. Many of the documents circulating in your organization, are outdated, inaccurate, or downright in conflict with current policies, procedures, or product information. HR Generalists provided continuity and reconciliation between conflicting



"A 'reader' in a cigar factory," National Archives, General Records of the Department of Labor

documents stored in multiple locations.

The system was not designed to scale during an abrupt shift from centralized to distributed work. Suddenly, every employee has multiple pressing questions about seemingly mundane topics such as medical and mental health benefits, network providers, covered procedures, leave of absence, telecommuting, dress codes, work hours, and information security. They are suddenly working in the midst of family members, rather than their usual cubicle neighbors, and they were, and still

are, scrambling with questions of where to go...? who to contact...? how do I...?

Those same questions, if unanswered, place additional burdens of stress on already overburdened employees. The HR team is managing new critical processes for health and safety while navigating the complexities

of organizational redeployment and reductions in force. The crushing volume of questions about the fundamentals of work is the straw that is breaking the camel's back. Unanswered or worse, badly answered questions simply increase employee anxieties.

In a distributed work environment, your operation will be dependent on a question answering system. This is where the promised benefits of AI in the workforce make their appearance.

¹ IIDC, 2019: Content Management and the Knowledge Worker

² McKinsey, 2012: The social economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies

Here is a process for reducing the workload of question answerers while improving the speed and quality delivered to employees:

1. *Inventory your employee-facing content.*

The axiom, “You can’t manage what you don’t measure” holds true here. Although often a daunting task, building a list of the policies, procedures, articles, and other sources of information used by your employees is a critical first step. As the list comes together, you will want to organize the information into categories and sub-categories.

2. *Every time an employee interacts with the organization, ask if the encounter was easy and useful.*

Also ask about the answers they cannot find. You want to have an inventory that includes current assets and a map of what’s needed. Ultimately, every interaction between the employee and the company is a part of a conversation. In today’s work environment, it’s your responsibility to care for and maintain that conversation.

3. *Focus on questions.*

Documents, articles, videos, and other forms of content serve two basic purposes; first, to convey important information from the organization to the individual, and second, to answer day-to-day questions that arise from your employees. To be effective, your content needs to be accessible and approachable.

4. *Change your tone.*

Any content that is not engaging or understandable is your starting point. Declare war on any document that sounds overly legal. Imagine the exact opposite of Silicon Valley terms and conditions. Create must-read content. Then, make it accessible in under 20 seconds.

5. *Accept the fact that the lifespan of content is getting shorter.*

Some of your organization’s content will age gracefully, but most of it will age like fish, no matter how much work you invested in getting it right. When HR can’t be everywhere to tell people what you really meant, the documentation has to.

Offering consistent answers to questions is not a very sexy idea. But, building the trust of your newly distributed organization depends on it. If not done well, you then have some questions to answer.

About the Small Scenarios series:

Massive change is afoot. The pandemic gives us the opportunity to rethink and reappraise. The small scenarios project is designed to provoke thought about the medium-term future and how it will be different. The goal is to help HR prepare for the future we will encounter in a few short months.

The Small Scenarios Team



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About HRExaminer

HRExaminer is a research and publishing company focused on the evolving edges of HR and HRTechnology. The publications team includes a 25 member editorial advisory board who deliver insight and opinion. The company also produces two award winning podcasts (live on Thursday and Friday mornings at 8:00 AM Pacific). Each year, HRExaminer delivers the market benchmark report on the evolution of Intelligent tools in HRTechnology.

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