



Navigating the Road Blocks Facing Today's Human Resource Professionals



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Introduction

The last few years have shifted priorities in nearly all aspects of business. While some of these changes directly resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, others came as a natural side effect of technological advancements and an ever-evolving workforce.

BRI conducted a national survey and engaged in small group discussions with HR professionals across the country. Analyzing the results helped us learn about the pain points and challenges the industry is facing – the findings inform the best path forward.

PURPOSE & METHODOLOGY

In the spring of 2021, we held open discussions with our Client Advisory Board members about what was weighing on their minds at the time. This became the launchpad for our study, which was conducted in August 2021. BRI surveyed over 100 Human Resource professionals about their current priorities. We were interested in learning more about how the day-to-day uncertainties brought about by the pandemic have created additional challenges and impacted the workforce, specifically pertaining to Human Resource departments.

Our goal is to help you identify your priorities so you can effectively overcome any hurdles, both immediately post-COVID and for years to come. While the timing of our survey had the pandemic at the forefront of everyone's minds, we have factored in current and upcoming trends too so that the solutions provided here will ensure that you are set up for success.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:

- 1. Priorities for Human Resources & Employee Benefits**
- 2. Challenges to Success (& How to Overcome Those Obstacles)**
- 3. Communication and Open Enrollment**



PART ONE

Priorities for Human Resources & Employee Benefits



Survey Results

The pandemic has impacted businesses across all industries and HR departments have been handed their fair share of challenges, even prior to the past two years. In BRI's recent survey with Human Resources practitioners, we asked the question:

“As you look at the next twelve to eighteen months, please rank the following priorities for HR and Benefits for your organization”

It may not come as a significant surprise that “Managing Cost Increases” topped the list of priorities, as this has been a primary focus for many HR and benefits teams over the better part of the past two decades. Premiums have risen an average of 49% since 2010 (despite implementing many cost-curbing measures).

We grouped the topics into the following sections to explore the responses:

1. Managing Cost Increases
2. Workforce Planning
3. Mental Health
4. Talent Acquisition and DEI
5. Expansion of Benefits

As you look at the next twelve to eighteen months, please rank the following priorities for your organization.



Figure 1:

Responses were ranked in order of importance with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most important.

Managing Cost Increases

Keeping costs low was a priority even before the pandemic. How to accomplish that continues to be complex. In addition to apparent expenditures, intangibles can often come with a hidden higher price tag.



HOW TO GET AROUND IT:

Often the underlying health plan will be the keystone in reducing costs. Still, how you position those plans and the opportunities for employees to pay for their increasing out-of-pocket is our business. See our suggestions below for additional ways to contain your costs.

We want to work with you to really maximize your plan design. By setting yourself up for high employee engagement, it will be easier to reach the adoption rates that make savings possible.



FOUR WAYS TO CONTAIN COSTS



1

Offer a High-Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) paired with a Health Savings Account (HSA).

HSAs have become one of the most popular options in recent years as they allow both the employee and the employer to contribute, funds automatically rollover, and are portable in employment changes.

2

Consider the Advantages of Self-Funded Plans.

Self-funded plans often put employers in the driver's seat regarding how they are going to manage costs.

3

Utilize Education Tools.

Resources are available to help compare multiple options so everyone can get the best deal. MyMedicalShopper* by Talon Health Tech compares over 500 of the most common procedures for price, quality, and ratings.

4

Go Straight to the Source.

Connect directly with leading, board-certified doctors for a second opinion. 2ndMD* provides connections with experts across the country, via phone or video in 3-5 days.

* These vendors are not affiliated with BRI or its website. These vendors do not sponsor or endorse BRI or any of its products or comments.

Workforce Planning

Workforce Planning is a blanket term addressing returning to the office, a permanent remote workforce, and hybrid workforce management. Employers are wrestling with decisions on:

- Incorporating a hybrid work model
- If they will support remote employees
- If they should return full-time or a hybrid environment
- If they will support permanent remote employees
- Whether or not this will be the new normal

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, there are things employers can do to meet this increased need for flexibility, whether it's temporary or a new business plan.



ADAPTING YOUR BENEFITS TO THE CHANGING WORKPLACE

Employees experiencing the changing workplace will love these ideas:

COVER THE ESSENTIALS

Most, if not all, remote jobs require the Internet. By reimbursing this expense, you help ensure that your remote workforce has a stable and reliable connection to the rest of the organization. Other “essential” job-related expenses you could cover include electricity and office supplies.

WELLNESS IS WELLBEING

Specialty or Wellness Accounts are one of the most popular post-tax account designs, and for a good reason: a healthy workforce means reduced medical costs for the employer and employee. Get creative and turn it into a general “wellbeing” account instead to cover subscriptions to fitness apps, mental health services, meal delivery kits, and more!

COMMUTING FLEXIBILITY

Commuter benefits become less of a staple benefit if employees aren't commuting every day, but you can still cover plenty of other related expenses. Examples include gas, a walk/bike to work incentive, reimbursement for bike-share programs, etc.

MEAL SERVICES

One perk of an in-person workforce is the ability to treat your employees to something delicious. Whether it's an early-morning breakfast, some sweet treats, or a fully catered lunch, it's a great way to show employees you care. With meal delivery services, employees can choose what they want, and you don't have to worry about allergies or dietary restrictions.

Mental Health

19% of American adults are currently experiencing at least one form of mental illness, which is equivalent to over 47 million people. This is up 6% from 2020 and continues to grow. With the increased demand for mental health services, companies are beginning to incorporate resources to help struggling and at risk employees. The typical Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may not cut it in today's environment. Updating your EAP

offering is a chance for HR to modernize the system while adding new support for employees. Average employees are tired of the "business as usual" environment. In today's fast-paced, competitive market, there is a need for better support systems to alleviate stress and add value to employees. And because of this, Human Resources can be on the front lines in adding value to their business by making EAPs more sophisticated.



MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

HEALTH JOY

This platform simplifies the benefits experience and supports healthcare decisions while providing an easier way to discover benefits. It has also been cited as a system that aids in addressing employee communication challenges.

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID CERTIFICATION

Mental Health First Aid is a course that teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training gives you the skills you need to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.

MEDITATION & STRESS-REDUCTION APPS

Promote apps designed to improve mindfulness and reduce stress. Examples include Personal Zen, Sanvello, Headspace, Happify, Insight Timer, and MyLife Meditation.

BETTERHELP

Provide comprehensive mental health programs for organizations through online experiences, including connecting individuals to licensed therapists, live therapy sessions, interactive group sessions, and more. There are simple pricing models – usage-based and fixed price per member.

Talent Acquisition & DEI

How companies treat their employees and the culture employees work in can make a big difference between retaining talent and losing employees to other organizations. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) often go hand-in-hand

with mental health. Workers with diverse backgrounds and those identifying as LGBTQ+ are more prone to experience a lack of a strong community or social network.

TALENT ACQUISITION RESOURCES

TALKING TALENT

Talking Talent connects talent to confidential coaching. This approach creates a culture shift which places emphasis on building safety, belonging, retention and growth. This platform is geared towards both employees and leaders for real impact.

BRAVELY

Bravely helps companies provide underrepresented employees with access to confidential coaching.

ASSOCIATION FOR TALENT DEVELOPMENT

A membership association with over 27,000 members and more than 100 local chapters. Their mission is to empower professionals to develop Talent in the workplace.

SOCIAL TALENT

Enables organizations to find, engage, hire, and on-board great Talent through their training platform.

IDENTIFYING QUALIFIED CONTRACT WORK

Sites geared towards helping you identify freelance and contract work to meet your specific needs, budget and timeline. Some examples include Fiverr, Freelancer.com, UpWork, and TopTal.

Expansion of Benefits

In addition to the Specialty Accounts mentioned earlier, there are other ways to enhance your overall benefits package. Provide your employees with a unique blend of service, convenience, and savings with a comprehensive benefits package.

PRE-TAX BENEFITS

- **Flexible Spending Account (FSA):** FSAs, governed by Internal Revenue Code (IRC) Section 125, allow you to have pre-tax payroll deductions for certain medical and dependent care expenses.
- **Health Savings Account (HSA):** is a tax-free account used to pay for out-of-pocket medical expenses.
- **Health Reimbursement Account (HRA):** Employer funds a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) on employees' behalf that employees can use to pay for certain medical expenses.
- **Commuter Benefits:** A Commuter Benefit Plan allows you to conveniently pay for qualified mass transit and parking expenses with tax-free dollars.

TARGETED SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

A great way to support working parents is by providing targeted benefits that specifically help balance work and family. Many companies offer paid parental leave that allows new parents to take time off to care for their new dependents. Other benefits may include affordable childcare, flexible work arrangements, and parental leave for spouses. These types of benefits allow parents to stay employed while also taking time to care for their children.

MILK STORK

Milk Stork is a family benefit to support and retain working moms. It provides solutions related to breast milk delivery, pumping & lactation, childcare & learning pods, and health & wellness.

KINSIDE *Coordination of Child Care Services*

Kinside helps parents find open childcare spaces and save up to 40% on their annual tuition costs. The easy-to-use platform enables parents to enter their specific childcare needs, from when they'll need care to their budget and location. Enables parents to pay for their care using their pre-tax debit card, eliminating friction and reducing the need for claims and reimbursement submissions.



PART TWO

Challenges to Success



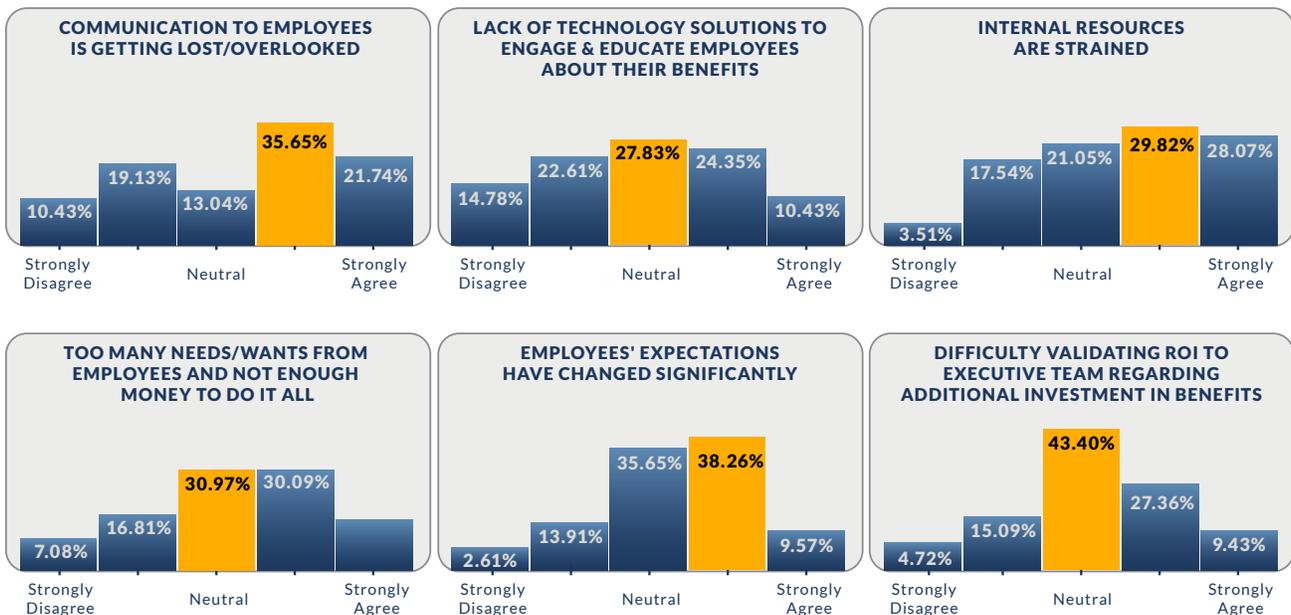
Survey Results

The COVID pandemic has significantly impacted human resource departments and how they conduct day-to-day business. With COVID-19 affecting business worldwide, HR professionals have been forced to deal with a wide range of new challenges. While some companies struggle to cope after losing many of their best

employees, others seem immune and even prosperous under the same conditions. How HR professionals approach these challenges has made all the difference in their organization's success or failure during this pandemic.

As HR challenges expand, let's take a step back and learn how to rise above them.

As you look at the next twelve to eighteen months, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

1 Nearly 60% indicated internal resources are strained, with 1 in 3 strongly agreeing.

2 1 out of 2 people indicate communication to employees is getting lost or overlooked.

3 Over 45% of people report that employees' expectations have changed significantly.

Changes in Employees' Expectations

Employees' needs have changed; companies need to adapt to keep their workforce intact. Here are some tips to keep employees happy and engaged:



ENHANCE YOUR BENEFITS OFFERING

Try offering a pre-tax health account or two alongside your plan(s) to help employees offset the costs of their family's medical expenses. Make your healthcare plan even more attractive by ensuring your benefits offering addresses other growing needs, such as:

- The [growing cost](#) of child care
- Workplace [commuting](#) expenses
- Wellness/mental health
- The [unique needs](#) of remote workers

SUPPORT YOUR WORKERS

Why do employees leave jobs voluntarily? There are many reasons, but here are two HR-related challenges you may be able to control.

- **Bad management.** This is perhaps one of the most common reasons a disgruntled employee will cite. Take steps to ensure this doesn't happen by providing extensive leadership training to all levels of management: supervisors, mid-level managers, and the c-level management team. Additionally, know how to manage workplace conflict when it comes up. See [this Forbes article](#) for tips.
- **Burnout.** Learn how to [recognize the signs of burnout](#) and provide relief to employees experiencing it.



Strained Resources

Is your HR department feeling the strain from the Great Resignation? Or, are you feeling overwhelmed with the additional HR-related questions you have to answer relating to workforce planning, COVID-19 vaccine mandates, and ever-changing legislative updates?

It can help to outsource some of your HR duties to outside parties. Find a trusted third-party administrator who not only handles administering your benefits but keeps you updated on the latest in industry and legislative news.

EVALUATING POTENTIAL THIRD-PARTY ADMINISTRATORS



WHAT LEVEL OF SERVICE WILL YOU RECEIVE?

There are three key factors you'll want to look at: Responsiveness (how quickly they answer inquires and if they anticipate questions or concerns before you ask), ongoing education (if they have a mixture of educational resources for you and your employees such as flyers, videos, articles, or online resources), and communication (their approach should be proactive rather than reactive, be quick, and address both operational needs and industry changes).



HOW IS THIS TPA RATED BY INDUSTRY PEERS?

Seek feedback from other parties that interact with this TPA, including their long-standing clients, new clients, and/or current partners. Based on their experiences, you can put together a picture of how well they manage different components, from implementation to takeovers and day-to-day account management.



WHAT ARE THEIR FOCUS AREAS?

These focus areas should go beyond a list of differentiators, demonstrating that the TPA is dedicated in a few areas where it matters most, including industry trends and legislation, product expertise, and innovative technology solutions.



HOW ARE THEY PROTECTING YOUR DATA?

This will include having a secure way to manage sensitive details, like HIPAA-protected information such as PHI and PII, and SOC II compliance. The key areas of controls for SOC II include security, availability, processing integrity, confidentiality, and appropriate measures to protect private customer data.

Communication Problems



Communication has been one of the top HR challenges for decades. That's because effective communication is easier said than done. Typically, there are four types of communication challenges employers face:

1. **Things are getting lost.** It might be a case of [information overload](#) where there is too much coming at once, but the timing of communications and relevancy may also play a factor.
2. **Communications aren't being received.** Similar to being overlooked, some communications are just not being received. Email is the most common method used to communicate, but with email programs and spam filters getting smarter all the time, it is harder to hit the inbox. This leads to the next challenge.
3. **Employees receive communications in different ways.** This is the idea that you may need to reach employees through a variety of channels in order to really reach them.
4. **Employees don't understand their benefits and options.** If they don't have an [understanding](#) of their options, they probably won't enroll in them.

So, what can you do to solve this HR challenge?



PART THREE

The Trick to Succeeding in HR



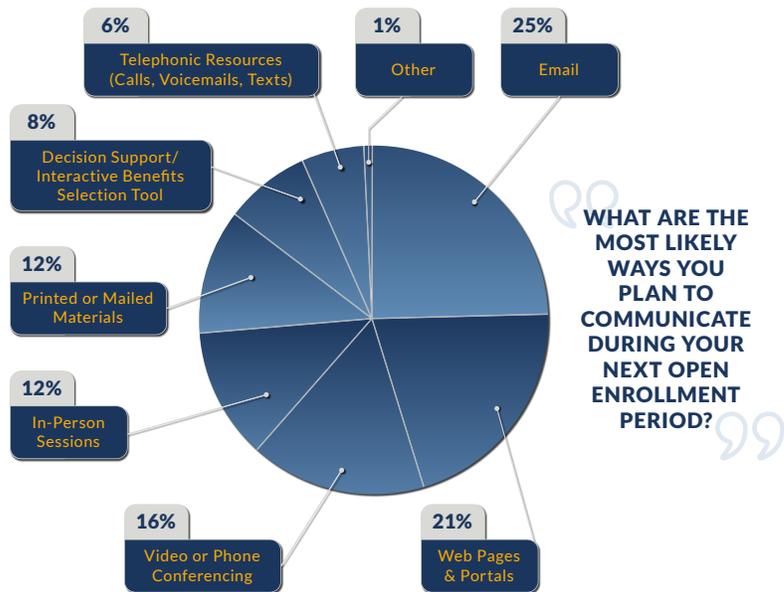
Survey Results

Communication is the key to success in any job and really boils down to these two skills: effective communication and time management.

Every encounter with a co-worker, manager, or even an external partner should be viewed as a chance to exchange information in a way that benefits both participants. If you're not communicating well with your colleagues, then your projects will suffer and so will your career path. In addition, you should also hone your ability to give and receive criticism.

Yes, it's true that no one likes to hear anything negative, but if you can't accept feedback from others or offer constructive criticism of your own to a colleague, then you will never be seen as an equal contributor.

HR professionals have a lot on their plates--managing a team of employees while planning events, attending meetings with senior leadership and other departments, writing reports and proposals--and there



are not enough hours in the day for everything. If you're able to prioritize your tasks effectively and efficiently multitask, when necessary, then you'll be well on your way towards being considered an indispensable member of the team.

While employee communication doesn't have a season, most HR professionals agree that one of the most important times to communicate is during Open Enrollment. There are multiple effective internal communication tools to consider. Here's what our survey results say about communication methods during Open Enrollment.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The best open enrollment communication uses different channels to ensure that each employee is reached with your intended message. The key is to integrate multiple communication channels and create multiple touch points with employees.

Open Enrollment Communication Tips



Use a decision support tool.

[Decision support](#) or benefits selection tools can be a pivotal engagement tool. When effectively leveraged, they promote proactive engagement, encourage personal interaction and benefits selection, and can raise the awareness of benefits an employee may otherwise overlook.

Create a communication calendar.

Send out communications throughout the year to promote your benefits outside of Open Enrollment. Take a look at our [Sample Marketing & Communication Plan](#) for assistance.

Use smaller, more frequent communications.

Focus on a singular topic for each one.

Think digital first.

Videos are great at engaging people and helping them absorb information better. Check out some of ours here.

Encourage participation with gifts, drawings, and games.

Options you likely already have available to you include web conferencing tools, online forms, and email senders. Also, investigate other tools like Kahoot, Aha, Quizizz, and SurveyMonkey.

Leverage internal champions/influencers.

A recommendation from a trusted source will do more to get people to pay attention.



VISIT THE BRI RESOURCE CENTER

Go to [BenefitResource.com](https://www.benefitresource.com) and search through our interactive database of videos, flyers, calculators, FAQs, tutorials, and other tools to help maximize your BRI experience. Materials are available in both English and Spanish.

Conclusion

A photograph of a weathered, rusted metal construction barrier. The barrier is A-frame shaped and has a wooden board across the top with a red and white striped pattern. On top of the barrier is a yellow rectangular box with a red circular light on top. The background is a light, hazy sky.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our world, but it's not the end of life as we know it. The future of HR and benefits in this post-pandemic world is uncertain, but organizations have many opportunities to position themselves well. Use this as an opportunity to rethink what you do and how your teams are communicating while reevaluating your benefit models to best position yourselves going forward.

This eBook has given some great tips that we hope will help you succeed as an HR professional; however, there's always room for new challenges! If you want to learn more about how BRI can help simplify your benefits offerings, visit our website to request a proposal.



READY TO GET STARTED? **CONTACT US TODAY!**

Contact the BRI team member in your city today to schedule a free personal consultation.
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