



UBA
HR Elements

Ideas and information for human resource professionals



MOOCs: Free, Ivy-League Education



The quote “once you stop learning, you start dying” is attributed to the great inventor Albert Einstein. The sentiment is a good reminder for those who put their educational pursuits on hold last year when the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

swept across the world. You may have been thinking about increasing your knowledge in any number of areas: human resources, project management or accounting. It is time to pick up where you left off and decide how to appropriate your 2021 training budget for quality education. One option to consider is a [Massive Open Online Course](#), referred to in shorthand as a MOOC. A MOOC is a cost-effective resource that offers online, university-grade education. You would be surprised what is available at your fingertips!

MOOCs [originated](#) with the idealistic view of making education available to all utilizing modern technology. In 2002, MIT was the first institution to make courses available via the internet. MOOCs didn’t gain public recognition until the course “Introduction to Artificial Intelligence” was co-taught by a professor at Stanford University and a research director at Google. Within just a few weeks of the class’s 2011 launch 160,000 participants had registered!

The most impressive aspect of MOOCs is that they are often taught by elite institutions and usually free of charge. While participants are not given college credit or certifications (though many MOOCs offer this benefit for an upcharge) attendees do gain top-notch education. This means that you and your colleagues can enroll in courses taught by professors from institutions like Harvard University and Columbia University, free of charge. Classes are offered weekly like a traditional course and include some sort of connectivity like a social forum or peer connection board to relate to your peers. MOOC courses are only offered for a limited time, so it is wise to sign up for an interesting class when it becomes available.

There are a number of platforms that host MOOCs. A few of the most popular sites to investigate include [Coursera](#), [edX](#), and [Future Learn](#). A perusal of highly ranked courses

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available early this year includes Introduction to Data Science through the University of Michigan, Fundamentals of Graphic Design by the California Institute of the Arts, and Stanford's Introduction to Food and Health. And courses are not just for those who want to increase their business knowledge – classes also address personal interests like Buddhism and songwriting, for example.

Whether you are assessing options for yourself or your company, there is no time like the present to take advantage of free courses offered by top institutions via MOOCs. Jump on the education bandwagon!

The Desk Edit



The “Home Edit” craze took over Instagram newsfeeds in recent months. Followers of this organizational powerhouse posted pictures of perfectly organized drawers and color-coded closets. But devotees are doing it for more than just some attention on the “gram.”

[Research shows](#) that decluttering your environment offers benefits ranging from increased concentration to decreased stress levels. But why stop with your sock drawer? Your workspace could also use a little tidying, whether at the office or a desk in your home. You have had quite the year and deserve the perks that come along with having an organized office. So, grab your color-coded folders and dust cloth - let's clean up your desk!

A part of that relief you feel when your workspace is clean comes from the fact that you will likely spend less time searching for information. From a purely logistics viewpoint, a tidy desk makes it easier to find material online or in person. In addition, straightening your workspace can lead to increased focus during the workday. Your brain mimics the space around you – so when surrounded by piles of papers or leftover lunch, your brain starts to feel muddled. Your visual cortex, responsible for processing visual information, has a hard time discerning which parts of your surroundings are meaningful to the task at hand. In turn, it takes a little bit longer to make connections which causes that foggy feeling you may have experienced.

A tidy space also contributes to [positive mental and physical health](#). Indiana University directed a study that connected an organized house with a higher level of physical activity and a healthier lifestyle. A 2009 research study found increased cortisol levels in participants who described their homes as messy. Increased cortisol over sustained periods of time can lead to mental health conditions like anxiety or depression. Individuals who suffer symptoms of mental exhaustion may find themselves in a frustrating catch-22. They feel overwhelmed so they don't straighten up, which leads to feeling more overwhelmed, resulting in a frustrating loop.

With all the benefits, what can you do to keep your desk or office clean? Some companies promote a “clean desk policy.” This is both for appearance and security purposes as leaving out private information can lead to a data breach. You can start with a small step like straightening your desk at the end of each day or creating a folder system to store your documents online. This will help avoid a pileup so tremendous that you avoid the task at hand completely.



Managing from Down Under



The days of waiting for your manager to provide play-by-play instruction have fallen by the wayside in favor of “managing up,” a term in corporate-speak that simply means “managing your manager.” [Dana Brownlee](#), renowned leadership influencer, defines “managing up” as an employee “customizing their work style/behaviors to better suit their manager” and “taking steps to make their manager’s job easier...” While this practice came into fashion as a technique to make your boss’s life easier and show your value as a proactive employee, the present-day impetus has more to do with what it offers the employee. An employee skilled at “managing up” exhibits executive level communications and strategic insight – two key skills necessary to build a leadership profile.

There is little doubt that your boss will appreciate your use of this career development method. An employee adept at managing their manager makes their superior look good. Employees who look below the surface find that this role gives them the opportunity to home in on their executive-level communications. A skillful employee asks, “What information is relevant to my manager and her direct superiors? How can I frame my report in a manner that makes it easy for my boss to re-use this information or pass along to relevant stakeholders with little to no edits?” A sample of this technique includes sending your boss an email draft that they can pass along to their superiors. This ghost-writing technique clearly makes your boss’s life easier and elevates your communications to a new level. It shows your ability to impart the right information at the right time.

Another benefit from “managing up” is the ability to influence strategic direction. With boots on the ground, employees are well versed in operational and client service data. Leaders, on the other hand, are likely not as close to the data and thus may not understand how decisions affect other parts of the organization. For example, what may appear to be a good strategy on paper may not be sound, based on client feedback. This is the opportunity for an employee to raise his or her hand and offer unique perspective in setting the strategy. Employees can color data with real stories in a way the executive team cannot. Employees skilled at managing up can share their point of view and recommendations so leaders can see the full picture. This translates into strategic planning experience before the employee is promoted to the leadership team.

“Managing up” is a valuable tool in the toolkit of employees with a desire to move into a more senior role. It offers opportunity to practice the very skills needed at the next level and enables employees to step into new roles with some experience under their belts. Additionally, it can strengthen the relationship with your manager. Unless your manager is like the lead in “The Devil Wears Prada,” this is likely a relationship you want to further develop!



The “Magical” HR Formula



The People team, Human Resources, Human Capital....no matter what you call the HR team, they are necessary to keep a business running smoothly. As firms add people to their headcount or new geographies to the map, a common question is whether the company has the “right” number of HR people. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) [reports](#) over half of small businesses manage their human resources internally without outside resources. What is the ideal ratio for proper HR employee support?

Most people love a trusty ratio they can rely upon to make headcount decisions. In start-ups and smaller businesses, owners often initially wear the HR hat. Many owners consider ten employees to be the tipping point at which they need to delegate HR so it can be given the time and care it deserves. At this size, HR is likely a part-time job for an employee who also manages other functions such as finance or marketing. Regardless of the incumbent, the HR lead needs to invest in continued education to manage this rapidly changing field.

As companies grow, the decision and timing in which to add new HR staff should be evaluated on an ongoing basis. A [much-disputed ratio](#) in the HR community is the number of HR employees needed to scale up. A rule of thumb is one full time HR person for every one hundred employees (1:100). But this figure is not bulletproof. Companies should consider a variety of factors unique to their organization. Performance goals and strategic plans should be taken into account. Reviewing company goals is more than just looking at growth plans. Evaluate the industry needs and maturity of the business. Additional considerations should also include major organization changes such as reorganizations, corporate layoffs, or office consolidations – change management practices where HR professionals are key for design and implementation. Culture plays into the ratio as well; countries with more compliant cultures may need less support.

Evaluate the needs of your employee base as well, which may run the gamut. A factor to review includes management expectations. How involved are managers in discussing career paths and providing coaching to their staff? A manager who doesn't provide spot coaching may lead to a team that requires more frequent HR support. It is also pertinent to consider the novel business environment. For example, the onset of the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis elevated HR needs in areas such as mental health and real estate. A stronger focus on employee wellbeing has been brought to light given the increase in workers juggling home and work in the same space.

It would be helpful if there were a formula to determine the right number of HR staff for your company. Truth be told, choosing the HR-to-employee ratio is a company-specific exercise. Stakeholders should be thoughtful of their employee needs and consider the unique challenges they face in the market. Rightsizing the number of your HR staff to meet the needs of your organization is one option. Other options include utilizing HR consultants or outsourcing firms to manage specific pieces of your HR strategy, a factor that may make sense before you hit a critical employee mass.



Employer Webinar

Group Health Plan Considerations for MEWAs and PEOs

Tuesday, April 13, 2021 • 2:00 p.m. Eastern

Whether an employer is participating in a multiple employer welfare arrangement (MEWA) and to what extent state laws will apply to the arrangement is often a source of confusion for employers. Employers often work with professional employer organizations (PEOs) without understanding the effect it can have on group health plan compliance. This webinar will help employers understand when a MEWA has been created and will provide an overview of important compliance considerations when a MEWA is created and when an employer is leaving a MEWA.

This webinar will:

- Describe what MEWAs are and why employers use MEWAs
- Provide an overview to determine when there is an ERISA plan at the MEWA level or participating employer level
- Provide an overview of association health plans (AHPs) including the difference between pathway one and pathway two AHPs
- Describe how an ERISA plan at the MEWA level or participating employer level affects compliance requirements (such as Form 5500/M-1 filing, COBRA, and the extent that state regulation will apply)
- Describe what PEOs are and how they can create an inadvertent MEWA with recipient employers
- Provide considerations and strategies for employers wanting to leave a PEO or MEWA arrangement

This 60-minute intermediate level webinar will provide employers with an overview of MEWAs and how they can be inadvertently created when working with a PEO. The webinar will also offer considerations and strategies for employers that are think of leaving a MEWA.

Registration

[Register here for the webinar](#). The presentation will be posted on the [UBA Website](#) the afternoon before the webinar.

Presenter

[Lorie Maring](#) is a partner in the Atlanta office and a member of the Employee Benefits Practice Group. She has extensive experience in all areas of employee benefits, including health and welfare programs, qualified and non-qualified retirement plans and executive compensation. She routinely advises employers, including non-profit and government employers, trade associations and employee benefit insurance and risk management consultants on the complex



compliance and day-to-day issues arising under ERISA and other state and federal laws governing employee benefit plans and programs.

Certification

This webinar has been submitted to the [Human Resource Certification Institute](#) and the [Society for Human Resource Management](#) to qualify for 1 recertification credit hour.