COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND CHALLENGES FOR HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract
On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a pandemic. When any unparalleled global health challenges and large-scale shocks strike, resilience is in great order of the situation. Importantly, it is needed by individuals, organizations, and society to survive and thrive in the face of the fight against the virus and the accompanying economic and societal tremors. In attempting a global health crisis, resilience requires not only psychological readiness but also organizational sustenance and system-level preparation. COVID-19 struck and started disrupting human routine, lifestyle, businesses and the global economy. The overall financial impact of the outbreak will outshine operations for years to come. However, in so much of disorder, one aspect that stood out was the ability of HRM functions across the globe to hold all ends together and fix gaps quickly to ensure continuity of their businesses. since COVID-19 crisis put the HRM function in the radar of importance, visibility, and influence in any organization.

In this COVID-19 situation, Human Resource Management challenges in the organizations are physical health and wellbeing, remote Work, issues related to jobs and work continuity, an urgent need for mental health, resilience, and dealing with uncertainty. In this paper, the author articulates the importance of HRM challenges facing by the Human Resource professionals in the situation of the fight against COVID-19 and sustainability of the business organization.

Keywords: COVID-19, Human Resource, Challenges, Organisation.

Introduction

The global Covid-19 pandemic has presented serious mental, physical and financial complications to people everywhere. Organizations now have to rely more than ever on their HR departments to ensure their workforce feel as safe as possible during this unprecedented and unpredictable time. Business houses are relying more than ever on their Human Resource departments to support their employees through the use of processes during these turbulent times. CEOs and managers should connect with their staff daily to reassure them that the business is reviewing government guidelines and how they plan to comply with them. They should also update employees on a weekly basis on how the business is performing and reassure staff that they are investigating all government assistance in order to protect employees. Finally, space should be provided for employees to chat as if in the office, such as a virtual coffee break. Talking things through with others will really help during this distressing time.

In these difficult times, many businesses are struggling to keep their doors open, and all must find ways to keep their employees safe, comfortable and productive. The days ahead will present some of the most important HR challenges of our time. Identifying and implementing effective employee policies and support may make or break businesses in the coming months of uncertainty. HR teams that rise to the occasion will be integral in leading businesses through the storm.

Literature Review

Human Resource Professionals roles and functions are a vital part to work out the whole organization. The HR practices that deal with people, performance, information, and work because they create healthy work culture and safety environment that affects employees, customers, stakeholder's effectiveness, and the overall performance of an organization. In current times, there is a significant impact due to the effect of corona virus on the country's industries and business houses such as manufacturing, services, tourism, hospitality, and tourism. Organizations around the world find themselves in different phases of managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gerdeman (2020) stated that the COVID-19 outbreak, a huge crisis, poses a challenge to senior management as well as a huge opportunity to develop a Trust-Based culture that requires trust and commitment. Gerdeman (2020) found that to cope with the pandemic situation organizations are revising and initializing new practices and seeking innovative leadership for executing new ideas to break the glass of barriers for survival. Forward-looking leadership is the biggest urge to focus on the collective wellbeing of each other in the present crisis. It will create conditions where employees and customers are becoming more helpful and productive. One of the functions of HRM is health and safety management that refers to all the activities involved in protecting and promoting physical and mental health of the employees so that they can perform jobs efficiently and effectively (Opatha, 2009). Promoting workplace safety and health is a critical HRM activity and the benefits of a safe and healthy work environment include (1) more productivity owing to fewer lost workdays, (2) increased efficiency and quality from a more committed workforce, (3) reduced medical and insurance costs, (4) lower workers' compensation rates and direct payments because of fewer claims being filled, (5) greater flexibility and adaptability in the workforce as a result of increased participation and an increased sense of ownership, and (6) better selection ratios because of the enhanced image of the organization (Jackson and Schuler, 2003). From the point of HRM, the latest challenge for business organizations is Coronavirus. From the point of HRM this is the most serious health hazard that the organization has to cope with in managing its people at work.

The current situation caused by COVID-19 is challenging for organizations all over the world. In this context, managers should work closely with human resource practitioners and health institutions in order to develop a safety and health plan which will prevent the risk of contagion and coronavirus spread within the organization. Organization's policies play an important role in this context in minimizing the spread of the virus. For this purpose, they need to follow the guidelines of health officials, of their country's government and of the World Health Organization (Benson & Dix, 2009). They need to educate and train their employees about prevention behaviours and to provide the required protection material for those who need to be present in the workplace (e.g., Masks, Sanitizers, social distancing…). They also need to post prevention guidelines (e.g. wash hands, avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth) (Ramesh *et al.*, 2020), and to allow telework if possible (Benson & Dix, 2009). Having clear preventive measures in the workplace will build trust which will help to reduce employees' level of stress. They will feel protected and supported by their employer (Brooks *et al.*, 2018).

Objectives
The present research paper focused on the following objectives
1. To investigate various challenges faced by HR professionals during the COVID-19.
2. To critically assess the HR strategies to mitigate the threat of COVI-19 in the organization.
3. To give some suggestions for sustaining business organization during the COVID-19.

Methodology
Data and information presented in this study are collected and reviewed from various secondary reports prepared by national and international agencies on COVID-19 pandemic. Data is collected from multiple authentic websites and magazines. Some journals and e-contents from Google Scholars and Pro-Quest relating to the impact of COVID-19 on the business organization system are reviewed and referred.

COVID-19 and Challenges for HR Professionals in Managing Human Resource
1. Mental Health and Wellbeing
The abrupt shift in work ethos took a toll on overall employee health and wellbeing. stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues have always been there, and it is no new story. Administrations have always been initiating wellness programs and providing employees with security, health benefits, and flexibility to help them overcome their health issues. But the sudden COVID-19 outbreak has brought the employees' mental problems in the front seat. In light of such strains, COVID-19 has contributed to a greater risk of employees encountering job burnout – a chronic stress syndrome, including permanent feelings of exhaustion and a distant attitude toward Work (Demerouti et al., 2010). There is a high potential for individuals with pre-existing mental illness to experience symptom exacerbations or impairment in functional status due to increased stress and fear around the outbreak

(Jiang et al., 2020). Moreover, the continuous exposure to COVID-19 media news fosters rumination – repetitively and passively focusing on symptoms of distress and the possible causes and consequences of these symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). It is anticipated that the COVID-19 outbreak will have an increasingly negative impact on mental health in communities (Lima et al., 2020)**.** When workers are working in an office work environment, HR manager at least understand their pulse and sensitivity, and that helps HR managers immensely to tackle the issues. However, employees going remote, communication routes have been significantly compromised, leaving the managers clueless or at least less conscious. In a recent COVID-19 pulse survey, HR professionals across the globe responded health and wellbeing of the workers to be a significant concern.

2. Managing Remote and flexible Work:
The changeover to remote work culture is not as seamless as it seems. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, less than 50% of companies had a remote work program. With the outbreak of COVID-19, flexible work arrangements have become the "new normal" (Rofcanin& Anand, 2020). Banks, regulated industries, and many financial services companies did not encourage remote working. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on changes in work arrangements, e.g., short-time Work, flexible location and hours for workers in a regular employment relationship, i.e., jobs with a fixed schedule, at the firm's place of business and with the mutual expectation of continued employment (Kalleberg, 2000). Now almost all of them rushing to build remote work tactics. This has led to many undiscovered problems. The drivers of burnout can be embedded in rigid and out-of-date policies. It is wise to promote flexible, family-friendly work environments that meet the needs of a diverse workforce (Drury et al.,2014). HR managers are trying to build unified routes and strategies to overcome the challenges that it brings. Strategies are no more designed periodically or in advance but in real-time. The focus on employee productivity and engagement has shifted to immediate responses and diagnosis. To provide employees with the right remote working tools and also gather real-time updates from them from time to time to untangle the intricacies and offer support.

3. Lack of Agility
One of the foremost reasons why HR teams are struggling is due to the lack of agility. Many HR teams are not designed for quickness. And this affecting the HR professional big time. In this crisis, it is perilous to respond fast and move quickly. But there are many approvals to take before taking action. This slows down the process of collecting data and take immediate measures that a crisis demands. It entails primarily working practices and methods that facilitate quick responses (Overby et al.,2006). To convert more agile in their style and re-prioritizing business goals and to have the right message and alignment among middle management and executives is the need of the hour of this pandemic situation.

4. Employee Communication
Communication is another major contest that is on the priority list.Most establishments are doing a good job of interactive challenges and relief related to COVID-19.Line managers and direct supervisors are then accountable for sharing those decisions with the employees (Ravazzani, S., 2015). Communication is a serious aspect that needs to be taken into justification whether or not the workforce is working remotely. Without the right communication channels, it becomes problematic to manage a workforce. The COVID-19 crisis had the HR professionals on toes and kept them looking for the right remote working tools that suit their culture. Though tools like Zoom or Slack are commonly used to meet the needs of the workforce, it certainly is not enough to get everyone on the same page of the screen.

5. Uncertainty
Uncertainty and ambiguity can paralyze anyone. The frightening feeling of not knowing what the future holds or what measures to take to endure organizational operations is a huge challenge. We all are more or less affected by uncertainty. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, any given situation of uncertainty may be made up of several of these factors, but equally, there are many forms of uncertainty. The current pandemic wave of COVID-19 has resulted in significant uncertainty for the general public. The socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 is uncertain; however, it is likely to be profound and long-lasting (Rettie et al., 2020). Employees are pretentious mentally, not

knowing what the future holds for them, and the HR teams are struggling to put everything in alignment. To respond to the crisis and develop effective measures and strategies for all.

6. Employee Engagement
The ultimate company goal is the productivity of its employees. It becomes thought-provoking to keep the employees engaged when they are working remotely and that too, in a crisis. The internal communication is compromised, and keeping everyone on the same page becomes tough. With remote working, it is tough to follow a routine and even except an efficient workflow. When the teams are cross-functional, you have little power to manage them. Not updating them regularly or not arranging meetings/ sessions can impact their morale to a great extent.

7. Hybrid teams and workstations:
Hybrid team structures will be the future with offices limiting capacity or having employees come into the office on specific days or for shifts. The employee may be offered autonomy to choose how, where, and when they work best. However, these hybrid teams won't be productive without the right resources, technology and support. A team of hybrid employees requires efficient messaging apps, video conferencing platforms, common cloud storage for files and documents along with a decent Wi-Fi/data connection.

8. Transcending geography for skilled talent
With site and geography becoming irrelevant in the era of remote working, digital nomads are choosing to work from their preferred locations – be it their hometowns, the beach-side haven or the quaint home in the hills, while efficiently meeting all deliverables as per set expectations. Occasional trips to the actual workplace, either limited to once a month or only for crucial meetings, will help sustain the human touch. Employers will look beyond geography and focus on skill-based talent scouting to get the Work done efficiently and effectively. This will also expand the canvas for sourcing talent, with the hunt for the right candidate transcending even national boundaries, and will have a huge impact on the quality of talent the organization can have access to, as well as the cost.

9. Emphasis on agile behaviour, adaptive mindset
HR teams will mine talent with the ability to change course basis, shifting consumer and market trends. The preference will be for candidates who are willing to experiment more and are quick to comprehend what is working or what is not while being frugal and adaptive. That apart, it has also become more critical than ever to reskill existing employees to enable them to do more in order to seamlessly move them from one business or project to another, should the need arise. Adaptivity enhances a government's capacity to deal with change while protecting society from instability (Janseen, M. &Voort, H.,2016). This could lead to another shift – working in small cross-functional autonomous teams. Response to change is key in both agile and adaptive governance. Agile governance is geared towards methods to respond to uncertainties. Adaptivity enhances a government's capacity to deal with change while protecting society from instability(Janssen & van der Voort, 2016) It is often in times of crisis that most innovation happens, and now workplaces will increasingly encourage employees to think, explore and innovate. In-office brainstorming sessions may be replaced by asynchronous brainstorming on a digital whiteboard.

10. Culture of empathy & trust
During times like these, empathy plays a crucial role, with not just the leadership but the entire workforce having a duty towards being inclusive, to accommodate and adjust to each other's needs and limitations. There will be a growing need to reach out to each other more often and initiate conversations to strengthen mutual bonds as well as keep feelings of isolation at bay, and HR professionals will have to find ways to encourage this conversation.

11. The Way Forward
Organizations thrive on a shared purpose and a cohesive work culture; these are the most important factors that drive the best out of employees. Going forward, senior leadership and HR professionals will need to invest mind-space and resources in recreating culture and ethos that is compatible with remote working. This shift will be

across the spectrum – right from the induction of new recruits, through the employee life-cycle. Organizations that efficiently negotiate potential road-blocks like compliance requirements, data security and client privacy issues, while investing in building a robust tech-driven employee engagement platform will stay ahead of the curve and yield the dividends of a future-ready workplace.

Conclusions

In order to move forward and continuing the business organizations, it is important to critically evaluate the currently existing policies and practices, and work to develop them in a way that allows both integrations of isolated efforts as well as foresight and development of sustainable solutions in the organization. Crisis Management is an integral part of an HR team's repertoire, and the ability to drive and support strong business decisions even during times of great turmoil will prove invaluable. Facing the HR challenges presented by COVID-19 is a tall task. But try to think of COVID-19 as an opportunity to show your company's empathy and demonstrate how it values its employees. In recent times, HR has evolved as a business enabler in many ways, be it in making the availability of workforce through the online hiring tools, resource onboarding, campus placement, facilitating role-based Internship to Interns, so that they do not miss out on the crucial experience of working on different projects. HR is also overseeing the completion of the performance appraisals with detailed face to face discussions and development plans for employees, encouraging the employees to enrol for Online Learning Modules during these times and conducting multiple webinars for their overall growth and development. The HR teams across companies have been working behind the scene for ensuring the right balance of the employee requirements and the needs of the businesses. With careful planning, empathy, and responsiveness, human resource professionals will be able to overcome the HR challenges presented by COVID-19 and leverage them to become a stronger company.

Implications

1. The HR department should ensure the implementation of government guidelines by prominently display posters illustrating respiratory etiquette (coughing, sneezing) and hand hygiene.
2. HR Professionals should acknowledge and assess the problem and update employees on a weekly basis on how they are investigating all government assistance in order to protect employees.
3. The HR department should promote flexibility and work-life integration and create guidelines and support networks for those working from home.
4. The HR department should prioritize the health and safety of its workers by maintaining a healthy and safe work environment in the organization.

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