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REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DURING PANDEMIC

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Abstract

‘Necessity is the mother of invention’ - this age old saying aptly captures the essence of the dilemma faced by today’s industrial sector and has caused the corporate leaders to review their work policies. In times where social distancing & employee health concerns are outpacing the basics of traditional Human Resource concerns like productivity & human relationships, it is becoming difficult to run an office floor packed with hundreds and thousands of employees. HRM technology and processes, which have witnessed a global digital disruption owing to the growing needs of millennials & digital technology, are now in a state of accelerated disruption. The industry is now hunting for innovative ideas to maintain balance between drastically changing workplaces and expected work results. Organizations feel that the employees have showcased commendable agility and resilience to adapt to the new ways of working. The new way of work may create a need for some new roles, render some roles redundant, or require upskilling of existing resources. This paper made an attempt to present the impact of pandemic on Human Resource Management and its practices. The paper is purely based on the contemporary secondary data available in books and websites.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Pandemic, Revolutionary Changes, Measures and Summary

INTRODUCTION

Workforce engagement of workforce is one of the crucial roles of HR. various studies prove that a highly engaged workforce is necessary for the survival and growth of the organization. Without that, the organization will incur huge costs and will eventually fall. The biggest change or trigger for change that the entire world is experiencing right now is the pandemic crisis. It has certainly affected the way we live and work. No organization has been left untouched by the impact of pandemic. Not only the organization, the entire sectors have been badly hit. The businesses are facing the wrath of the pandemic and HR cannot stay unaffected as an organization is an ecosystem and everything is interconnected and interdependent. In the situation of remote working, it becomes even more important for the HR to take care of the well- being of the employees. HR can devise new policies to take of the health, both mental and physical of the employees. There is now a great deal of discussion concerning the impact of pandemic on human resource management (HRM), much of the content and comment tends to be of a general nature, offering observations that seek to define what a ‘new normal’ might be.

Concept of the Study

Changing times require a drastic shift in work policies and processes. One of the foremost challenges that companies face is managing their employees. This challenge might become exponentially difficult when an employee’s work, efficiency measurements, and location become erratic owing to health priorities, economic uncertainties, and changing social norms.

These growing concerns in conjunction with the ongoing pandemic-forced disruptions, when carefully analysed, provide a bigger picture of the HR industry’s future curve. The most prominent goal for organizations is to strike a balance between office productivity and workforce morale. The HR team utilizes various means and strategies to achieve this goal consistently. However, there has been a steady shift towards a different direction of HR management, which focuses on employee health and wellness. The reason is the growing interest among employees to take care of their wellbeing owing to the increased awareness about hygiene, health management, and personal well-being as well as its direct impact on the productivity and growth of the organization. In order to smoothen the back-to-work transition, employers are looking for digital HR features that can help promote social distancing and contactless employee management.

Objectives of the Study:

- To provide the impact of pandemic on Human Resource management practices.
- To present the changes in the field of Human Resource Management during pandemic.

Impact of Pandemic on Human Resource Management:

The coronavirus pandemic has increased the emphasis on the ‘human connect’ aspect of the HR function. Amid a rapidly unfolding health crisis, HR functions geared up to provide critical communication on safety protocols, hygiene practices, emergency numbers,



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list of hospitals, guidelines for quarantining and isolating, and much more. Many organisations went the extra mile to help employees handle stress by setting up online classes for employee wellbeing and motivation.

Employee safety became the prime concern, and HR teams partnered with other functions to define ways of ensuring safety and social distancing compliance at factories and plants that continued to operate. Regular disinfection of premises, offices, buses, and colonies has become an essential component of keeping employees safe. The procurement of masks, handwashes, and sanitizers was critical even though supplies fell low in the market.

The coronavirus crisis has helped shine a spotlight on the value that HR delivers in keeping employees engaged, motivated, safe, and productive. However, the WFH concept and minimal staffing situation are likely to continue for some time. The very nature of the virus and its transmissibility have made it clear that social distancing is going to be the new normal for at least a year. This implies that the pandemic situation will impact HR practices like recruitment, on-boarding, and learning and development. Recruitment will focus on tech- savvy talent who can perform better in a predominantly digital workplace. Processes for on-boarding new hires will have to change to become fully digital. Training and skilling will reconfigure for an online-only mode.

Some of the changes are exciting in their potential for transformation. In the appreciable future, HR will play a key role in redefining, perhaps permanently, the nature of the workplace. For instance, standard attendance and leave policies will no longer work. Organisations will have to place a higher degree of trust in the integrity and commitment of employees working remotely. WFH may impact decision-making structures because of the constraints of video meeting platforms. Smaller teams may be able to collaborate better and take decisions faster. In some ways, WFH may even be a blessing in disguise. Being able to work from home may help people to balance professional and personal issues better. It may enable more women and people with disabilities to enter the workforce.

Larger remote workforces will push organisations to ramp up technology adoption and digitalization, enable dispersed operations, and collaborative functioning. As organisations get more comfortable with employees working remotely, the requirement for office space and fixed workstations may reduce drastically. Organisations may be able to leverage WFH concept to cut costs on real estate and brick-and-mortar infrastructure.

Many of these changes are already afoot, and organisations have been in a constant mode of reinventing practically every process and policy. The silver lining to this unprecedented health crisis is that organisations are finding new ways to become more productive with fewer resources. Doing more with less is the mantra in the post corona world. When the world changed practically overnight with the coronavirus pandemic, organisations did too. The industry is watching the reinvention of the workplace happening before our eyes.

Revolutionary Changes in Human Resource Management:

The word “disruption” has been a near-constant in HR circles since the COVID-19 pandemic started sweeping the nation this spring. From making remote work an overnight reality to redefining flexibility, HR leaders are working to keep up with the changes, relying on tech along the way.

The pandemic has indeed brought about some revolutionary changes for every business, putting HR at the centerstage. The future of HR and that of work required an utmost emphasis on worker prosperity. However, Covid-19 made it imperative for business leaders to connect with their teams beyond the work front and support them through tough situations.

Emergency is also an alarm for us to focus more on building the right skillset among employees (and potential hires). While organizations could still be some time away from full-scale hiring activity across sectors, HR leaders should search for the individuals who can adjust. Change, and learn at work. In other words, adaptability is the key for organisations to endure any future emergency.

Keeping in mind the safety and security of employees, advised them to work remotely way in advance at a time. Moreover, a flexible 'Work from Home' policy as a cultural shock. In order to ensure a positive work environment even at home, keeping employees connected in collaboration for work and improved efficiency.

For smooth business continuity, ensured uninterrupted connectivity amongst the team members. Specialists in the organisation and made sure that they were well connected with the teams. In order to bring everyone under one umbrella.



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Changed Workforce Managemem

Whilst some changes have been enforced, pandemic is also a catalyst to reinvent the future of work for managers who take the opportunity to make things better than they were.

New technologies are going to necessitate new roles, which is one reason to encourage new skills.

Employees benefited from being taught new mindsets, behaviours and values in the new quickly-changing workplace.

The world's response to pandemic has resulted in the most rapid transformation of the workplace. Working from home has become the new normal, and we've gone from digitizing the relationship between firm and customer to digitizing the relationship between employer and employee.

The quick adoption of new, advanced technology is the central catalyst and is likely to lead to an acceleration in the creation of new roles. Changes in workload during the pandemic have sometimes resulted in an imbalance of resource allocation. Reskilling and upskilling can help employees move from one part of the business to another.

The pandemic crisis sent shockwaves through industries and economies, but perhaps its greatest impact has been the human one, namely fear and uncertainty. A big part of this has been the fact have a totally new routine – one in which everyone who can must suddenly work from home. In tandem with honing digital skills and an improved infrastructure, it is necessary that corporate culture and leadership skills focus on empathy as transformation and disruptions become the new normal.

This period has required us all to be supportive of one another, as we all face uncertainty. Control has to some extent given way to trust. People are learning how to do work disparately and with far less oversight: they are learning “on the job” what works and what does not work at home, and holding virtual meetings that might have happened before but never to such an extent.

Many companies rebalanced their priorities, so that resilience becomes just as important to their strategic thinking as cost and efficiency.

It is unprecedented to have a large cohort of people, all over the world, start working remotely at once. The events as they have unfolded have shown how fast we can adapt though, and have demonstrated that we can move faster and act in more agile ways than we thought.

Business leaders now have, in some sense, been gifted with a better idea of what can and cannot be done outside their companies' traditional processes, and pandemic is forcing both the pace and scale of workplace innovation. Many are finding simpler, faster and less expensive ways to operate.

The organizations which were prepared for the work from home were better equipped to deal with the nationwide situation without any significant impact on productivity. The HR department of every organization has been in the frontline, leading the efforts to facilitate employees. In situations like these, HR, in addition to handling the business requirements, is also responsible for managing concerns and apprehensions of their employees.

As the initial chaos settles, HR has to step up and support their employees and prioritize their mental and emotional wellbeing. These unprecedented times can induce anxiety and raise the stress levels of a person, and the onus is on the employers to channel these emotions in order to keep their employees safe, motivated, and productive.

Prudent HR Measures during Pandemic:

The prudent HR measures being taken or envisaged by businesses in India as well as across the Globe:

Compensation Restructuring: Certain companies are planning to rationalize/reducing compensation on a temporary basis. Certain other companies are restructuring compensation in such a way to have lower fixed & higher variable package. The variable pay is linked to productivity and performance parameters. This measure reduces the fixed cost burden of the organizations and makes it possible to earn earlier compensation by achieving the desired productivity and targets.

Redeployment/Re-skilling: Companies are doing Competency mapping of their employees and exploring the possibility of transferring / re-skilling some of their employees to other divisions/ locations wherever there is a demand or likely to have demand in near future due to the economic impact of pandemic.

Deferment of Increment and Promotion: Most of the Indian companies are following the Financial Year i.e., April to March and also carrying out increments & promotions accordingly. Due to the expected economic downturn, the majority of companies are holding or deferring both the increments and promotions. This is the most acceptable solution for all stakeholders.



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Managing Temporary Employees: Temporary/contract employment, an effective tool used by companies, cuts across various segments of manpower. On one hand, we have low-skill or manual jobs and on the other, there is professional staffing for high skills jobs. Normally, temporary/contract employees tend to be axed first in an economic downturn. Many companies are planning to do exactly the same, however, there is another set of companies that think differently.

Holding Performance Pay/Bonus: Companies are also holding or deferring or totally cancelling performance pay and bonuses except for the statutory bonus which is mandated by the law.

Retrenchment and Termination: In the emerging scenario, this may unfortunately accelerate. Some businesses may like to close their non-core/ non-performing divisions and/or non-performing branches post lock-down, after evaluating the impact of the pandemic. Certain mid-sized companies with poor cash-flows or bleak economic outlook are already resorting to this means.

Temporary Shutdown/Suspension of Operations: Large companies have multiple manufacturing plants across the world. They may opt for this option for one or more plants to optimize their variable and manpower cost, subject to the local laws in the respective country.

Employee Communications: Human Resources play a pivotal role in every organization. Any of the decisions enlisted above may impact employee morale and must be well thought-over and executed. The morale of employees determines customer engagement which directly impacts the business results. People need to be taken into confidence otherwise, even a well-intended action may backfire. Hence, employee communication plays a very crucial role in this phase.

HR Policies and Procedure Manual: Companies are re-looking at their HR manual and assessing if there is a need to incorporate certain changes/ realign the policies to deal with such situations in the future. This will ensure not only the safety and security of the employees but the organization's health as well.

The Way Forward For HR

The on boarding practices for new employees need to be reviewed to align them to the organization's vision and goals while ensuring a seamless remote joining experience. The entire employee journey will have to be planned as the HR gets ready for the new challenges that come along with a distributed virtual atmosphere. This could mean the modification of recruitment practices, rewards and recognition policies, engagement initiatives, exit processes, and everything in between.

Future Organizations

- Working hours, locations, and even the work arrangements to become more fluid
- Remote working to be an integral part of every organization
- The popularity of contractual jobs and freelancers to grow
- Workforce to constantly upgrade and work on capability enhancement to remain competitive
- Focus on learning and development to increase to make employees future-ready

Summary

However, 2020 has brought about an HR-evolution of sorts and revolutionized the way an HR works, forever. People are the greatest resources in every organization. Attracting and retaining the right talent are some of the key management practices which contribute to the success of any organization. It takes a long time to build an employer brand. Every HR measure should be carefully thought out and analyzed. The role of HR has to be redefined from Hiring & Recruitment and Appraisals to New Working Models, Performance-Centric Compensation Restructuring, Managing Cost Optimization and Reduction exercises without damaging employer branding, and play a decisive role in the long-term survival of the business. Companies are at a crossroads: those that capitalize on post-pandemic opportunities to find themselves in a good position to retain their talent and attract people when the situation stabilizes.



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