

Emerging Role of Hr in the Scenario of Covid 19

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ABSTRACT:The aim of this paper is to investigate the new role(s) of Human Resource practitioners based on the repercussion of pandemics in general, and COVID-19 in particular. The research questions guiding this work are: What roles do human resource practitioners envision to support their organizations during and post times of crisis? To support this research question the author had reviewed various articles and interviews of HR leaders from various companies around the world published in HR magazines and HR websites.

Keywords: HR roles, Pandemic, HR business partner, C-suite, Person-environment fit

I. INTRODUCTION

Today's HR leaders face challenges at many turns: a competitive business environment, a changing economy downsizing, globalization, and wary consumers. This in turn creates new challenges for our leaders and employees. These challenges are not insurmountable, but they do demand the right mix of disciplines? (Gavin, Eva Sage, 2011). Generally, start-ups and small companies have little or no HR staff. Until a company has 50 to 75 employees, it hardly needs a full-time HR professional; a line manager can usually handle required basic HR activities. As the business grows, so does the HR workload. The business eventually hires someone to oversee HR; set basic policies and practices for hiring, training, and paying employees; and perhaps also run the office and administrative side of the business. This HR generalist will normally be part of the management team and will be consulted on organization needs and changes. As companies grow, HR departments and staffs grow as well. But as long as the organization remains primarily a single line of business, HR expertise most logically resides at corporate, establishing companywide policies, with HR generalists implementing these policies in the plants or divisions since there is no meaningful differentiation between the business and the corporation. HR departments are

increasingly expected to operate as a business within a business rather than as a disconnected and isolated set of HR practices. As such, like any business, HR departments (and other staff groups) must have a vision or strategy that defines where they are headed, a set of goals (objectives, outcomes, or deliverables) that focus the priorities for the work and investments essential to carrying out this vision, and an organization structure that allows HR to accomplish these goals (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). Bhattacharya (2007) denoted that HRM has transformed in response to different aspects such as economy, technological access, changes and formation new laws, political transformation, and socio-cultural diversity around the world which forms a sophisticated business environment and generates an effect on markets, organizations and individuals. 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. Baptiste (2008) explained that Innovation in HRM practices is time demanding requirement; bringing up new ideas to manage the employees effectively and efficiently to generate maximum productivity through ensuring employee satisfaction at the same time.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this paper is to identify the changing or emerging role of HR due to the break out of the global pandemic COVID 19. As the organization mainly depends on the people, it has been affected by the changes of purpose, principles, process, and performance of the organization. This study is a small attempt for

aligning the dynamism of HR role, challenges and survival strategies for a sustainable future.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology of this study is mainly qualitative or descriptive. The author adopted a systematic literature review from recent publications. This framework is based on evolving HR role focusing on the changes and strategies taken by the organization especially in this pandemic of COVID 19. The sources of information are assembled from different kinds of literature, recent articles, reports which are based on the prevailing pandemic situation.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 THE PANDEMIC AND ROLE OF HR

The challenge posed by the new strain of the coronavirus is - everything in people's lives have changed. COVID-19 has been growing exponentially. The pandemic started slowly, but the curve is shooting up—and disruption is following. This has a major impact on people and the economy. Companies all over the world are in crisis mode. No one can predict with any confidence how the economy will evolve over the medium term. It's not just a matter of reacting effectively; we must also accelerate up the learning curve and rapidly draw conclusions that will enable us to improve the business sector's resilience in the future.(Susanne Dyrchs ,Mar2020). The Corona virus has now been the dominant issue in most of our lives. We all have learned new terms i.e. social distancing, shelter in place, ventilator, pandemic, flatten the curve, experienced unprecedented lifestyle choices like no gathering for shopping, eating out, playing, or worshipping and felt inevitable personal fears and stresses. We want all this to be over. We are tired of being tired. But it is not over. Our lives today are NOT a "new normal" and we will eventually return to work, social engagements, and other activities we did before this crisis (Ulrich, Mar2020). In an article published in economics times in the month of march,2020 when the Covid 19 pandemic was at the peak in western countries had highlighted that how the companies were looking towards a hard-headed HR boss. The covid-19 pandemic brought a different challenge—and highlights the role of another corporate function, often unfairly dismissed as soft which was not there in 2007-09 when the financial crisis rocked the business world, then the boardrooms turned to corporate finance chiefs.

The Corona virus has significantly reshaped the economy and the work force. Since its rapid

spread around the globe, we have experienced immense shifts in how we work, where we work, and the technologies we use to stay connected. Such massive change is increasing the importance of HR's role within organizations. Employees are turning to their managers and their HR leaders for guidance on how to navigate their "new normal" — research indicates that 73% of employees depend on their employers for support in preparing for the future of work. Just as CFOs have greatly increased their scope since the 2008 financial crisis, CHRO's now have that same opportunity to become central C-suite players. Many believe that this is HR's moment to lead organizations in navigating the future. They have a tremendous opportunity, and responsibility, to provide employees with direction on the skills and capabilities they will need to be successful over the next decade as new roles continue to emerge. The need for remote working would grow the demand for automation and collaboration tools and increase the shift to cloud computing. It is imperative to keep employees motivated and enthused to achieve this future together. In these times, human resources (HR) department is tasked with ensuring adequate enablement and engagement of teams while also preparing for some hard decisions. 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. (Surender Jeet Raj,May2020). As economies reopen after forced shutdowns caused by COVID-19, managers around the world faced with a dual challenge: keep the workforce safe while preserving business feasibility in a growing and unpredictable market. A survey was conducted by Prof. Raffaella Sadun and her team members from Harvard Business School through interviews with more than 50 "resilient" businesses across a variety of countries and sectors. It was found that coronavirus pandemic has put traditional human resources management practices under extreme pressure. In companies that could move their operations online, face-to-face collaborations had to be rapidly replaced with e-mail and videoconferencing, forcing businesses to adopt an entirely new model of work within a matter of days. For companies that could not shift their workforce online, the challenge was to adapt production teams to new social

distancing requirements. Overall, a common theme emerging from these interviews is the attempt to deliver a highly individualized HR management approach to support employees as they adjusted to completely new work and personal situations, in part also to motivate them to adapt to new safety practices. Implementing this model of HR management requires new capabilities such as mapping employees' skills, cataloging competencies, supporting rapid reallocation of people across tasks, and revising schedules and team structures. More important, it requires the will to provide concrete support to employees' material and mental wellbeing. Organizations have to put together a lot of adjustments to their business plans and the way of working post-COVID-19. They need occupied employees more than ever to get through this challenging period. The employees might struggle with feelings of ambiguity, loneliness, not being in the know, and more. Thus, the Role of Change Agents that is of the HR professionals becomes crucial in this scenario. With social distancing being implemented and practiced, it is difficult to have standard methods of process, policies & engagements leading to a new challenge for HR professionals. Considering all these challenges into account, the human resources are going to be the lifeline of any organization and they need to handle this post-Covid situation with utmost care and meticulously. Above all, these challenges revolve mostly around People Aspect of this Global Pandemic and we can see a transformational shift in HR role post-Covid. An article published in BW People by Ashish Kumar Mishra VP & Head HR, and Ajit Kumar Kar IMFA had listed out few HR roles in this Pandemic situation. The new role of HR can include the following few activities, though, it can go manifolds looking at the impact of the Global Pandemic.

- a) Counseling and collaboration - To ensure communication efforts help engagement, HR Managers must have a two-way dialogue with employees. Offering proper counseling sessions with employees to help them offload their isolation anxiety, vent their fears, or just de-stress.
- b) Sense employees' need for support – Employees don't want to be viewed as faceless cogs in a larger machine—they want to be recognized for the unique value each brings to the company. This uniqueness is something employers are beginning to embrace too. HR professionals need to recognize this aspect and provide the required support and communication. To enable regular

conversations between the Line managers and employees, HR should provide managers with the necessary guidance on how best to approach sensitive subjects arising post-COVID-19 pandemic, including job security, alternative work models, impact to staffing, and prospects tension in the workplace.

- c) Reinforcing Organisational values - Work well-being has the greatest impact on feelings of psychological safety — an unpleasant employee experience can negatively impact psychological safety by up to 35%. To make matters worse, during periods of uncertainty, employee misconduct increases by as much as 33%. Apart from modeling the right behaviors, HR managers should encourage whistleblowers to call out unethical behaviors, remind staff of the channels for reporting misconduct, and highlight punitive measures for non-compliance, post-Covid.
- d) Recognizing employee efforts - As COVID-19 generates significant disruption, and undercuts employee engagement, HR managers need to redouble their recognition initiatives & efforts. Effective recognition motivates the recipient and the same time serves as a strong signal to other employees of behaviors they should emulate. Recognition can take many forms other than monetary rewards such as public acknowledgment, tokens of appreciation, development opportunities and low-cost perks. This reinforces the organization's commitment to the long-term success of the employee.
- e) Driving engagement through innovation – Present unprecedented time of change and disruption demands innovation and risk-taking becoming more important for employee engagement and organizational success. The disengaging effect of constraints on innovation and risk-taking are particularly severe for high-potential (HIPO) employees who can feel demotivated. Even when the organization has constraints on new investments, HR managers need to emphasize the need and provide opportunities for process improvements or incremental innovation.
- f) Educating and equipping the workforce - Educating and equipping the workforce with the right information on COVID-19, safety tips, nutrition information and so on are crucial and jobs for HR Professionals. The HR needs to communicate measures taken by the company during this situation. HR can create interesting posts about escalating events and topics around this issue on the activity feed.

- g) Focus on Employee Wellness - After understanding the anxiety and stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, HR will need to put more focus on the mental health and overall wellness of the employees. Holistic benefits are a common way of introducing wellness to a company. These benefits address all aspects of well-being, including mental health and financial security. While these plans will differ in offerings, the idea is to provide employees with benefits that help improve their well-being beyond standard health coverage.
- h) Employee up skilling - As the employee personalization trend illustrates, employees want to be appreciated on an individual level. One way employers are showing their appreciation is through up skilling, Learning and development initiatives. Not only does this help employees feel valued, but it also helps fill knowledge gaps within the company. According to a report by Deloitte, the “inability to learn and grow” is the top reason why employees leave their companies.
- i) Framing New Age Policies - Considering the business continuity plan to deal with such exigencies, Post COVID-19, organizations need to have system, procedure and policy in place. Organizations need to review policies on workplace flexibility, remote working & contractual staffing and should review and clarify policies around pay and benefits if an office or factory is closed or impacted.

While these initiatives have become the new roles of an HR Professional, all these might not necessarily work for every company. However, in a post-COVID-19 environment, where employees have had to adjust how they work, all the HR should shift towards a more human-focused approach.

Mohan Singh, Group Head - Human Resources at Sterling and Wilson has written an

article on how 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.

An article published in IRISH TIMES by Jack Byron who is an HR specialist and also country director for the French-owned industrial services company Elis. According to him HR departments have shouldered much of the burden of the coronavirus workload as they have been involved on multiple levels – from taking care of employee health and wellbeing to solving problems associated with the transition to working from home, to downsizing and return-to-work planning. In addition, HR departments that are still hiring staff have had to move their recruitment and on boarding online virtually overnight. At the extreme end of this phenomenon is Amazon, which remotely inducted 1,700 new recruits on a single day in mid-March.

According to Josh Bersin a world-known industry analyst, educator, and thought leader in all aspects of HR, leadership, and HR technology has suggested the experiences of employee before and after COVID-19, it is shown with the help of the chart given below -

Figure 1.1

Employee Experience (EX) Revisited

| | Before COVID-19 | After COVID-19 |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Focus | Productivity and engagement | Diagnosis and response |
| Moments | Major talent transitions (onboarding, move, promotion) | Immediate actions (infection, incidents, location) |
| Experiences | Designed in advance | Designed in real-time |
| Locale | Global then Local | Local then Global |
| HR Function | Domain-centered | Cross-domain |
| Pace | Periodic data analysis | Real-time data analysis |

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4.2 Hrm Challenges And Opportunities In The Era Of Covid-19

Possibly one of the most salient HRM challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic involves adjusting new and current employees to drastically altered work conditions, such as shifting to remote work environments or implementing new workplace policies and procedures to limit human contact. Such dramatic alterations in how and where employees do their work is likely to have important implications for employees' experiences of person-environment fit (P-E fit), or the level of congruence between the attributes they possess and those of the environment (Kristof, 1996). P-E fit theory posits that individuals are attracted to and selected by organizations whose work environments reflect the same values, cultures, and work features as their own important beliefs, values, and desires (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). Based upon these processes, employees who enter organizations where their P-E fit is maximized typically flourish and experience heightened levels of satisfaction, engagement, and overall well-being (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). However,

when the work environment that supports the fulfillment of these needs and desires is drastically altered – as is currently happening in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – the saliency of the growing chasm between an individual's needs and current work environment is likely to lead to experiences of misfit (Follmer, Talbot, Kristof - Brown, Astrove, & Billsberry, 2018).

According to a survey on what should be the priorities of HR team around the world, conducted by Josh Bersin Academy, the takeaways are as follows -

- Focus on people first, economics second.
- Develop rapid response teams that cross organizational boundaries.
- Distribute authority to remote HR professionals, and coordinate action quickly.
- Create real-time data collection to identify precisely where problems are occurring.
- Rapidly develop programs to educate, train, and empower people to work at home.
- Relax rules for hours, pay, and vacation to respond to fast-changing conditions.
- Quickly assess what jobs are going away and start to align people toward new roles quickly.

- Stay positive and communicate a positive growth spirit despite the uncertainty and change.

The challenges that were identified in the survey conducted on HR teams are –

- Difficulty coordinating response across teams, business units, and geographies
- Two way communication not as effective as it could be
- Not adjusting fast enough to help our customer
- Lack agility to respond to rapidly changing situations

HR practitioners have to support organizational leaders to spread a positive brand image of the organization by inspiring compassion, creativity, and kindness. Through a strategic and proactive approach, HR can help build individual and organizational resilience during a crisis. Here are five roles leaders can play and how HRD can support their endeavors in times of crisis – Sense maker, technology enabler, emotional stability and employee wellbeing, innovative communication, maintain financial health of the organization

Strategic HR can play a vital role to assist and develop leaders during this pandemic by, a) providing strong and reliable ground data; b) expanding their professional network; c) promoting innovation; d) ensuring employee's continued learning; e) facilitate regular meetings; and f) create a platform to celebrate employees. Leaders need to rely on HR now more than before, which can further the agenda of HR to secure a seat on the strategic table.

The best HR professionals are those who think like business leaders, not only HR leaders, to influence business strategy and develop programs that drive the whole company forward. (Patrick M. Wright, et al). Ulrich (1997) defined HR roles – Such as aligning HR and business strategy, re-engineering organization processes, providing resources to employees with the help of Increasing employee commitment and capability, and adapting the capacity to change.

V. FINDINGS & CONCLUSION –

- a) HR departments have shouldered much of the burden of the corona virus workload as they have been involved on multiple levels – from taking care of employee health and wellbeing to solving problems associated with the transition to working from home, to downsizing and return-to-work planning
- b) After understanding the anxiety and stress of the COVID-19 pandemic, HR will need to put more

focus on the mental health and overall wellness of the employees. Holistic benefits are a common way of introducing wellness to a company.

- c) CHRO's have the opportunity to become central C-suite players
- d) Human resources department is tasked with ensuring adequate enablement and engagement of teams while also preparing for some hard decisions.
- e) During periods of uncertainty, employee misconduct increases by as much as 33%.
- f) HR managers should encourage whistleblowers to call out unethical behaviors, remind staff of the channels for reporting misconduct, and highlight punitive measures for non-compliance, post-Covid.
- g) Smaller teams may be able to collaborate better and take decisions faster
- h) 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.
- i) Person-environment fit (P-E fit) theory posits that individuals are attracted to and selected by organizations whose work environments reflect the same values, cultures, and work features as their own important beliefs, values, and desires.
- j) HR practitioners have to support organizational leaders to spread a positive brand image of the organization by inspiring compassion, creativity, and kindness.

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