

Sustainable HR Strategies during COVID 19

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Abstract:

HR plays a key role in any organization. Recently, the COVID 19 pandemic has wreaked havoc across the organizations in various countries. This study was conducted with the aim of understanding the areas which have been affected by COVID 19 and also the role HR will play in the times to come. Sustainable practices and HR strategies together can play a critical role in maintaining legal, financial and emotional flexibility among the workforce thereby, skirting the issues of the pandemic and finding an equitable solution for all. HR will pave the way forward for the organizations by bridging the gaps through various sustainable strategies for maintaining sustainable business practices and in many cases saving businesses altogether.

Keywords: Sustainability, Human Resources, Strategies, COVID 19

Introduction:

Human resources play the most critical role within an organization. The processes through which they are selected, recruited, trained and retained play a major role in the success or failure of a company. Often HR can be considered as an overhead or expenditure for organizations. As organizations grow key people in key positions end up playing the final role in a sustained and bright future of any organization.

COVID 19 has wreaked havoc across the globe and is causing major upheavals across all the sectors in every country that has been affected by it. It has disturbed the normal processes and pushed managers to adapt to the current practices of organizations.

Social distancing practices along with changes in the work environment are the 'New Normal' for any organization. Companies across the board have switched over to a 'Work from Home' model at a scale that has never been recorded till date. Meetings have been replaced by video conferencing, conversations have been replaced by calls and many normal procedures which used to be part of our lives have now been replaced or eliminated from the basic expectations altogether.

Human resources earlier played the role of identifying key persons for key positions within an organization. Over time, the role matured and started encompassing various other responsibilities as well. Now, the employee health and well being (both physical and emotional) will also play a key role in the times to come. There is an increasing strain of documentation and providing support to the multitudes of workers who have had to be laid off or furloughed due to the pandemic. Also, as for those who are still on the job, HR managers would need to ensure that workers remain productive, motivated, engaged and connected—all factors that are moving targets in the new normal (Lewis, 2020).

Aim of the Study:

The COVID 19 pandemic is a problem that is not something that seems to have an end in sight for the near future. Thus, there must be a way through which one can learn to live with the virus and ramp up the familiar processes and procedure once again. The workplaces need to be filled up once more and employees need their jobs back on track for the various organizations to survive. There may be certain opportunities within the threat of the pandemic as well. The following study intends to analyze the various challenges HR will face due to the COVID 19 pandemic and also suggest certain strategies to tackle them.

Review of Literature:

The COVID 19 pandemic is testing organizations and people across the globe. However, the return to normalcy is necessary for the smooth functioning of nations, as well as, societies. Organizations i.e. employers play a key role in ensuring this smooth transition. Employees are the backbone of society and getting them to come back to work will play a major role in ensuring the improvement of productivity. As of now, the major concerns lie in certain specific areas such as payroll, remote work, communication, health and safety. Certain strategies across the globe for organizations within India and across the world have been presented below by People Matters Global (2020):

1. **Payment Restructuring:** Certain companies should rationalize/reduce compensation on a temporary basis. Restructuring compensation in such a way to have lower fixed & higher variable packages and linking it 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.
2. **Redeployment/Re-skilling:** Performing extensive competency mapping of the 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 COVID-19 can be a great game-changer.

3. **Deferral of Increment and Promotion:** Due to the expected economic downturn, the majority of companies are holding or deferring both the increments and promotions.
4. **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.
5. **Furlough Leave & Compensatory Working:** In furlough leave, companies inform employees to go on mandatory leave without pay, however, do not retrench them. Employees are brought back to payroll at a later date based on business viability.
6. **Holding Performance Pay/Bonus:** Companies are also holding or deferring or totally canceling performance pay and bonuses except for the statutory bonus which is mandated by the law.
7. **Retrenchment and Termination:** Organizations periodically rate their employees and grade them in various categories for the purpose of increments and promotions. The identified low performers/ non-performers are nudged for voluntary separation rather than termination. In the emerging scenario, this has unfortunately accelerated.
8. **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.
9. **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.

10. **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.

Bayern (2020), on the other hand, has suggests six ways which would enable employees to be productive and safe while performing their duties during the pandemic by suggesting the following six strategies for managing on-site employees:-

1. **Ensure employee safety**, both mental and physical, by steering them towards emotional support and screening employees at the workplace. They should also ensure that employees that are showing symptoms will come forward. An amendment of policies of sick leave should also be made to ensure employees don't lose their salaries.
2. **Ensure regular communication** with their employees. Employees should be clearly guided by the organization on its policies with respect to safety and work ethic during the pandemic.
3. **Ensure equitable policies** for employees that are coming to work and allow them equal access to health care offerings.
4. **Develop employee-support solutions** by providing support in numerous ways such as by dividing workers into teams that alternate work days etc.
5. **Feedback** can be used to drive employee investment decisions and learn how to better deal and manage the safety and experience of on-site workers.
6. **Rewarding and recognizing** across the board for their efforts and their commitment to the organization would play a vital role in keeping employees motivated and engaged.

The pandemic has forced the employers and employees to change. But during these trying times, the loyal workforce continues to perform and business leaders are repaying their loyalties by providing flexible work options. Certain capital and operational cost savings can also be certain opportunities that may be gained here. As the world starts to move towards the new normal, HR will be highly involved in the elaboration and management of the future of work that arrived rather quicker than most of us had predicted (NGA HR, 2020).

Research Methodology:

Research Design:

The following study is a literature review of experts and their views on the subject. It is a descriptive study.

Sampling Method:

The study employs a convenience sampling method for the purpose of conducting this analysis.

Sources of Data:

The study is based upon secondary data sources as are available across the gamut of the journal articles, internet website and blogs of eminent experts and organizations.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the literature available on the COVID 19 pandemic with respect to its effect on Human Resources.
2. To assess the strategies being employed by organizations for facing the challenges posed by COVID 19.
3. To suggest strategies that would be effective in tackling the menace of COVID 19 from a sustainable human resource perspective.

Discussion:

A model that was predicted for 2025 is now being realized earlier than expected. By identifying the key technological and policy gaps it is quite possible to ameliorate such issues. Also, there is a need to ensure that while this is happening, organizations do not lose sight that people are the greatest resource in every organization. By attracting and retaining the right talents, these organizations can face any upcoming challenges that COVID 19 may throw at them. Also, it would help develop and maintain an employer brand as well. An understanding of the application of new models of work along with maintaining the legal, financial as well as the emotional impact this pandemic can wreak upon the employees will pose the major challenges for the various organizations and HR. Thus, to ensure a sustainable model of moving forward to the 'New Normal' it will be necessary for HR to become more adept, flexible and sensitive in its approach towards employees. A key role of HR will now move towards the physical and emotional well-being of the employee as well. Only then would it be possible for the organizations to sustain in the long-run during this pandemic and move ahead in the Post-COVID 19 world.

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