



## Challenges for HR Professionals in the Post-COVID-19 Era

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### Abstract

Because of the unexpected changes in business practices tempted by the COVID-19 pandemic, human resource (HR) specialists are working hard to guide and help employees in adapting to the new way of working. On the other hand, HR managers must be prepared to cope with the issues that may occur as businesses adjust to the new normal. The goal of this article is to look at the issues of human resources in the post-COVID-19 era. The study identifies and defines some unique problems that any organization's HR department will confront following the pandemic. Secondary data for this narrative literature study was acquired from various sources, including published articles, reports, and websites. The study's findings are the result of a rigorous review of pertinent data. Remote working concerns, workforce engagement, maintenance, more flexibility, maintaining work-life balance, and raising employee morale were highlighted as long-term Human Resource Management (HRM) challenges in the COVID-19 new normal by this study. The importance of this research lies in the implications it has for businesses as they respond to change. HR professionals can use the study's findings to develop successful methods for adapting to the new reality created by the COVID-19 epidemic. This could assist HR leaders in being better prepared for the post-pandemic new business age.



### Article History

Received: 03 September 2021

Accepted: 19 January 2022

### Keywords

COVID-19;  
Employee;  
Human Resource  
Challenges;  
Human Resource  
Professionals;  
Post-Pandemic.

### Introduction


The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world drastically. It has adversely affected almost all businesses around the globe (Sulaiman *et al.*, 2020; Rahman *et al.*, 2021) and these unexpected changes have created extraordinary difficulties for the companies (Gigauri, 2020). However, human

resource profession has faced most hindrance resulting from the changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Morse, 2020). COVID-19 forced organizations to change or modify their traditional work method and reinforced online activities (Friedman 2020). Organizations allowed working-from-home, minimized work hours, canceled

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Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12944/JBSFM.04.01.02>

or postponed business tours, arranged online workshops or trainings etc. The pandemic has increased the employers' involvement in different aspects of their employees' life. The crisis has pushed the employers to be more concerned about their employees' financial, physical and mental well-being. Organizations have arranged supporting activities to maintain employee performance and bring up collaboration in remote work. These support includes prolong leave facilities, financial assistance, flexible working hours, child care facilities etc. (Baker, 2020). However, the role of HR is going to be even more crucial in the post-pandemic era.

Post the COVID-19 pandemic; there will be a great extent of uncertainty around the external environment, people's minds, and the future of businesses. It will not become easy to keep the business running smoothly after the pandemic, and the massive transformation caused by the pandemic will change the career path of employees uncertainly. In this phase of social change, employees are doubtful about their future and the HR teams are struggling to align everything back in the position. Most businesses are unsure about their next discreet plan of action for the near future, leaving both employers and employees in a state of ambiguity (Sulaiman *et al.*, 2020; Rahman *et al.*, 2021). In this condition, identifying necessary measures to sustain organizational activities is a significant challenge for human resource management (Roy, 2021). Thus, the HR innovation has become very crucial for organizations in the post pandemic new reality (Giurge and Bohns, 2020).

### **Background**

The COVID-19 pandemic has redesigned the work trends, so the HR leaders need to re-plan the workforce maintenance, performance management and other workplace policies (Morse 2020). Therefore, organizations have to prepare themselves for upcoming changes (Sheppard, 2020). The HR professionals has an important role in assisting the workforce to overcome the difficulties caused by the unexpected changes in their workplace as well as society (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). Workplaces have already started revamping their interiors in a way to ensure social distancing, even when physical interaction with the public is part of the job. Thus, ensuring employee safety and health security must be of utmost priority. As they will come up from an

intense period of trauma, it will also be essential to take care of their mental health and boost employee morale. Consequently, HRM must provide effort on employee engagement and maintenance coupled with resilience and empathy. Companies also need to develop their employees to improve their skills to raise productivity and better cope with the uncertainties. Additionally, increased flexibility, maintaining work-life balance, and taking care of employee needs are of greatest priority.

Companies that want to keep their competitive edge in the face of enormous changes created by the epidemic must respond and adapt to the changes caused by the pandemic (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). As a result, they must ensure that their human resources are well-versed in the most up-to-date procedures and technology to cope with the changes. To accomplish the intended results in the new world, both employers and employees should be prepared to meet and overcome the obstacles. The human resource professionals, as a result, must address the forthright demands of the new workplace. Currently, there is a lot of discussion (Rice, 2021; Morse, 2020; Roy, 2021; Singh, 2020) on the primary concerns for Human Resources in the post-COVID period. This article highlights the fundamental HR difficulties that need to be addressed in the post-pandemic 'new normal' situation, particularly for those interested in recovering and developing workplaces that are better prepared to deal with future emergencies.

### **Methodology**

This is an informative general literature study that tries to look at recent and relevant publications on the impact of COVID-19 on HRM and the post-COVID HRM challenges. After deciding the research characteristics and the study's objective, the researchers began searching for relevant publications in Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, DOAJ, JSTOR and other relevant websites using some keywords relating to COVID-19 management, HRM, post-pandemic, and HRM challenges. The researchers then narrow down the data sources to look for information closely linked to the topic. There are only very few researches that have looked into this effect. The researchers finally used 7 published research papers along with 11 articles from authentic blogs and also some book chapters to discuss the post-COVID-19 HR challenges. All of the articles cited in this study are

mentioned in the section titled 'References'. The researchers used the following steps in conducting the research-

- Determine the research topic
- Identify the data sources
- Collect relevant data
- Combine and compare available information
- Putting data together in a helpful way
- Discussions on the collected data
- Examine if all the issues have been addressed properly

### **Discussions on HR Challenges In the Post COVID-19 Era**

#### **Habituated with Remote Working as A Challenge**

A growing number of organization has shifted to the work-from-home method as a precaution against COVID-19 (Hasteer, 2020). While the companies are still struggling to manage operation through a remote environment, post the pandemic, it will create more challenges. These days, employees who worked remotely became used to the remote culture, and many are also finding they like it. These workers may be frustrated when they will call back into the office (Friedman, 2021). To meet the demand of a growing workforce, companies need to be more open to work-from-home methods. Leaders should look for ways to transfer current organizational positions to remote locations (Morse, 2020). However, many businesses who were able to shift to remote work environments may still not have remote workplace policies and procedures in place. Thus, it is essential for organizations to build remote work strategies that could become a major challenge for policymakers in the near future (Roy, 2021). Moreover, a distributed workforce will create many challenges for organizations; with so many employees working remotely from home, it will be difficult to administer HR, payroll, attendance, or leave management following the traditional way (NIU, 2021). The activities that requires paperwork and face-to-face interactions will no longer be done in the same way. Communication is another major hurdle for a remote work environment (Gaikwad, 2020). Here, the challenge for the HRM is to win the trust and confidence of all employees by using appropriate communication tools that are acceptable to all (Sulaiman *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, remote employees need to develop critical competencies to collaborate digitally, and the HR needs to establish

new way of setting performance goals and employee evaluation system which is suitable for remote working condition (Baker, 2020). These provisions should also be well communicated company-wide promptly. This means that the employees' full life cycle in the organization needs to be redesigned. Thus, this is the time for the HR leaders to decide what is acceptable for the future.

#### **Engaging Employees with Work as a Challenge**

Technology has its benefits, but it cannot replace the physical interaction and emotional bonding people experience at the workplace. Remote employees may even miss out on small things about their work environment that make individuals feel like a team, such as lunch with teammates, colleague's birthdays, celebrating occasions, etc. (Hasteer, 2020). The employees will be suffocated with the boundaries of home working along with the feeling of separation from trusted networks. In that case, organizations must monitor and acknowledge the employees risk of isolation. Additionally, HR professionals will encounter the challenges of keeping their people motivated and lined up to the mission of the company in a virtual setting. It is also problematic to follow a tight schedule and maintain a structured workflow with the remote work, especially when the teams are cross-functional (Roy, 2021). The workers may disconnect from the purpose of the company if they do not experience the same passion for chasing goals they would while being in a physical office setup. So, sustaining the existing organizational culture will be a major challenge for the HR professionals in the post pandemic world. Additionally, organizations are trying to save costs these days by reducing training and other programs. As employees could not be developed without training, this will have an influence on the motivation and retention of the workforce which in turn will affect the organizations effectiveness, and its success (Gigauri, 2020). In this situation, employers must ensure employee engagement by remaining flexible and keeping in touch with the employee preferences (Sanders, 2020). Regular updates, meetings, and learning sessions, as well as an enhanced employee engagement initiative, must be taken to sustain employee productivity post the pandemic. The leader needs to maintain collaboration with the distributed team and influence the team members to maintain organizational behaviors. Thus, HR needs to drive engagement through innovation and come up with

ways to re-instate the status quo in the near future (Gaikwad, 2020).

### **Boosting Employee Morale And embrace Empathy as Challenge**

The COVID-19 time has been tough- physically, financially, and mentally for everyone. Amidst the pandemic, many companies experienced huge turnover, layoffs, salary cuts, unpaid leaves, etc. which changed employee attitudes toward the organization. The high degree of mental stress, panic and job insecurity has decreased the loyalty of the workers (Gigauri, 2020). Here, the HR need to be kind to their workers and give them support to adjust with the new scenario of work. Boosting employee morale in the post-COVID-19 era is one of the major human resource challenges and on the highest of priorities (McNeill, 2021). Coming back to workplace, employee must be given the opportunities to rekindle the pre-pandemic work culture and workplace atmosphere. As the pandemic changed a lot, from individuals' perceptions to their wants, needs, and expectations, the employees would see the workplace differently (Rice, 2021). In this case, the HR teams should maintain effective communication with the workers (McNeill, 2021). It is of paramount importance to recognize how differently the individuals have experienced this pandemic and what they need for successful return to the work. Here, treating each employee individually is important because, some employee may experience the pandemic as little distraction from work while others may view it as having huge impact on their career plans and livelihood. For some employee the pandemic is an opportunity to spend time with the family members while for others it may have a great impact on their own health or the condition of their nearer ones (Hite and McDonald, 2020). Moreover, isolation from social networks while working from home will raise widespread mental health concerns among young people post the pandemic (Anjum, 2020). HR professionals need to develop relationship-oriented systems to minimize this risk among the individuals (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). Post the pandemic, empathy will be one of the most crucial skills; respect for individuals in different circumstances will essential in maintaining good relationship with co-workers. Thus, post the COVID-19, behavioral 'norms' within any given organization may need to be readdressed (Sanders, 2020).

### **Higher Flexibility and Maintaining Work-Life Balance as Challenge**

The COVID-19 changes in workplace demands more flexibility post the pandemic. For example, the companies who downsized or reduced staffs need to make adjustments to workers' schedules which will affect the payroll, leave, and other policies. Other firms that modified the entire product line to meet the changing market demands need to change their reporting relationship and employee administration process. To address remote work issues, organizations need to coordinate time schedules and payments across different locations (NIU, 2021). Thus, designing a more flexible and open organizational structure will be a major challenge for HR professionals post the pandemic. Companies must be willing to engage employees in redesigning of such policies to keep them motivated. Moreover, workplace flexibility has become the need and expectation of every worker during these days (Anjum and Zahan, 2021). It is a key element the employees want to make their work fit into their lives. These support from workplace will be highly valuable to the employees after the COVID-19 pandemic (Rice, 2021; Rahaman *et al.*, 2020). However, organizations should enable creativity and agility taking into account the employee needs to build a flexible culture (Donovan, 2019). Moreover, work and personal life mixture during remote working can be the core challenge HR need to manage in the new normal (Peasley *et al.*, 2020). The COVID-19 lockdown has changed the way employees used to manage their work and family responsibilities. The new demands have confused work and family roles which made it troublesome for individuals to maintain adequate work-life balance (Giurge and Bohns, 2020). Therefore, organizations need to give more support to their workers to keep balance between work and family responsibilities and implement appropriate approaches concerning leave facilities, job sharing, flexible working schedules, etc.

### **Changing Workforce Maintenance through Efficiency to Resilience as A Challenge**

Traditionally, organizations focus on employee efficiency, but in the post-COVID-19 world, resilience will take precedence. Over the past year, redundancies, restructuring, and furlough have left organizations with a lack of skilled workers. Therefore, HR must manage its existing workforce effectively so that they can begin to balance out

again. HR professionals have to play a significant role in recovering and sustaining employees' career post the pandemic. Building resilience will be the major HR function to recover individuals from COVID-19 shock (Hite & McDonald, 2020). Human resource department will need to ramp up training to fill in any skills and knowledge gaps so that employees could take on additional responsibility (Anjum, 2020) and be able to succeed in the new normal. In that case, HR professionals should shift their focus on skill-based hiring rather than traditional education-based hiring. Because training someone inexperienced could hinder business performance and will cost huge to the organization when they get back on the business (Anjum and Zahan, 2021). In the near future, while some job roles will become insignificant, the demand for new roles will also increase. HR professionals in that case, have to identify the ways to use existing talents to meet the new roles in a cross-functional way (Gaikwad, 2020). To respond to the post pandemic crisis, it is essential to develop concrete policies related to succession planning which helps an organization to meet future needs through employee development and talent management. As each employee is different from another, employers need to adopt different ways to motivate and retain them (Nasir, 2017). Perhaps, adjusting the existing workforce to a drastically altered working condition will become the most salient HR challenge post the COVID-19 pandemic (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Every organization needs to remain vigilant and adaptable to the unanticipated events that the COVID-19 pandemic has created. Human resource managements has made a significant contribution during the pandemic but the HR professionals have to run extra mile to meet the demands of the post-pandemic business world. This study tried to clarify the major HR challenges in the post pandemic world. All the issues identified in this study are very crucial for HR practitioners in upcoming days. Firstly, the shift from traditional to remote working environment is not so easy. Organizations need to develop new work policies related with working hours, leave facilities, remuneration, performance evaluation etc. based on online tools. Secondly, remote workforce is naturally less connected. Challenges with such a fragmented workforce includes establishing

teamwork, motivating and engaging workers. Thus, ensuring transparency, addressing employee concerns and work coordination must be given highest priority. Next, the increased stress due to COVID-19 has changed employees' perception of their workplace and life. So, organizations need to pay special attention to employee morale. The HR professional must listen and respond to the employees need with care to make them feel safe. Another major concern for HR professionals in retaining and motivating valued employees post the COVID-19 pandemic is flexible work arrangement with adequate work life balance. When businesses reopen, the possibility for employees' work and family life conflict will be greater than ever as the work and family boundaries has been removed during these days. The employees will demand more flexibility in the areas of working hours, work location or even choices in deciding their tasks. To deal with the negative outcomes of increased flexibility, companies must create a workplace that balances both employee and employer needs. Finally, organizations must give greatest priority in up-skilling and reskilling of their workforce. The HR managers need to identify the skills required for performing the job more efficiently when the employees get back to the office after this intense period of trauma. It is also essential to train the employees to cope with the changes caused by the pandemic and prepare for overall growth and career development. The COVID-19 crisis has acted as a catalyst for embracing change and to overcome the difficulties brought by the crisis, the HR leadership need to encourage the workers, engage them, keep them up-to-date and also consider their opinions. The worker who feel supported and secure in their job are more likely to provide better output and remain focused to the organizations' goal. Hence, the new HR policies should excite their employees to overcome uncertainty and commit wholeheartedly to professional and personal growth. This study identified some mentionable challenges for HR leaders in the near future. Therefore, the study has significant implications for HR practitioners and policymakers. It will help organizations in human resource management planning post the COVID-19 pandemic. The study's findings will also help the HR practitioners to make a bunch of strategies related to redesigning the work environment,

boosting employee motivation, ensuring employee engagement, redefining training programs, and employee maintenance in remote locations. It will also help the policymakers in the modifications of existing policies to meet the demands of the changing landscape of the business and to sustain in the competitive market. The study also contributes to the existing literature through identification of the emerging HR challenges in the post-pandemic new normal. However, the HR challenges are not only limited to these findings, further investigation may explore other important issues too.

#### Acknowledgment

We, the authors, are grateful to the editor, reviewers and editorial assistance for their all efforts to complete this publication process.

#### Funding

The authors did not receive any fund for this research paper.

#### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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