

POST PANDEMIC STRATEGIES IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

The COVID 19 pandemic has seriously affected human resource management practices, as it has in many other aspects of work and life, both internationally and domestically. Through this paper we do not propose to highlight the challenges that managers had to face when they decided to work from home, adopting innovative solutions, examining changes in workforce management and employee well-being. Employees need for flexibility was the driving force behind HR manager's decisions, as well as safety measures and maintaining employee motivation and productivity. Also, the one that can play an important role in addressing the challenges of human resource management during a pandemic is social responsibility, according to some research in the field. Human resource management practices in Europe show that organizations were somewhat prepared, but faced difficulties in facing the situation. At the same time, the US pandemic has forced management to consider alternative approaches to work and address disparities within the profession.

Keywords: COVID 19 pandemic, HRM, employees, disparities, motivation, productivity .

Classification JEL: M 12

1. INTRODUCTION

In economics, especially business, preparing for layoffs, deadlocks, reduced profits, and many other changes was not something managers were specifically trained for, or even considered. A remote management of human resources and workforce has been imposed, mandatorily calling on technological advances, so as to facilitate the rapid change of communication practices, managers being forced to find innovative solutions [19].

Through this work we will try to highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the management of human resources at the level of Europe and in Romania. We will also refer to how previous research practices in human resource management can guide managers and how they should respond to the challenges of a pandemic within an organization (Bailey & Breslin, 2021). The pandemic, by its specificity, brought to light the problem of inequalities in employment, especially for a specific segment of workers who experienced more significant difficulties due to the lockdown and atypical work environments (Butterick & Charlwood, 2020; Belser, 2020).

Managing human resources internationally presents far more significant challenges than performing the same tasks and facing similar challenges domestically. The emergence of a pandemic can worsen an already difficult situation. What could provide a basis for mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the workforce and the company (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020) is the review of previous HR research with implications for the future. With the onset of the pandemic, the focus of research is shifting towards individualistic approaches to workforce management (Cooke, Dickmann and Parry, 2020).

2. POST PANDEMIC STRATEGIES IN HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The emergence and spread of the COVID-19 virus has had a massive impact on various aspects, including national economies. The pandemic was like a crisis and companies felt its impact and had to face a real crisis for their companies. Under these conditions, human resource management has a vital and crucial role in the new era. And that's because it's human resource management that has to protect organizations to keep them safe and comfortable. There are many challenges that HR professionals have to face [29].

Therefore, a first issue that raises issues is how HR executes and manages home working policies and strategies. Theoretically, at least, we know that there is no employee that we cannot manage properly. Even under work-from-home conditions, employees still need to be managed so they don't get lost. Good communication between employees and the company requires that all employees know how to use the new technology (Tuti, 2020).

The second aspect that emerges is the prioritization of important programs owned and based on face-to-face collaboration (Yawson, 2020). In order to collaborate effectively, several things can be done, and one of them is the use of video calls. But this is not enough, other means are needed.

The third aspect is managing the fear and anxiety of all those involved, namely employees, management, customers. Thus, companies are considering developing new policies for employees who work in the office, namely: soap is available for washing hands at several points in the work area, mandatory wearing of a mask, etc. At the same time, companies need to develop policies for customers as well. Then there is learning and adjustment of existing policies (Hartigan, Ey, McCarthy, Capelin, & Lange, 2020) to the new crisis situation. When a new policy is issued to employees and other stakeholders, stakeholders can learn and adapt themselves. So when you work in an office the company policy may be for all employees to wear a mask, but there may also be employees who think they need to add an extra measure (eg a face shield) to feel safer. When more employees work from home, the company may perceive the employee as less engaged. This is why companies need to keep their employees engaged and make them feel accountable.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic there was a situation perceived as an old work habit. The office is the place where we can interact with other people without restrictions, we can touch the things around us at will, we don't wear masks, we don't give too many details paying attention to personal and environmental hygiene and others. But with the COVID-19 pandemic, all employees must improve their ability to use technology, so that a new habit of performance at work is formed. This new habit will lead to a new productivity determined by an increase in the use of technical and technological progress [29].

In ensuring and developing the sustainability of the company after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to develop a mature strategy to provide good results in the consolidation of human resources. One of these strategies that was implemented immediately after the pandemic is the application of policies that support business continuity, digitization and occupational health and safety. No less important is the fact that the strategic functions performed by human resources are necessary to have a systemic mind, taking into account the corporate culture and leadership to maintain the company's performance.

It is more than obvious that HR management practices and processes have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Change must be managed very well, otherwise it can lead to a significant loss or reduction in productivity. A human resource manager must be prepared for everything that may occur in the company's environment (Onwuegbuna, Nchuchuwe and Adeyi, 2021). For companies affected by the pandemic maintaining company operations to required standards while allowing employees to work from home was a real concern (Collings et al, 2021). Organizations were able to work digitally, some of them for the first time, requiring reskilling and specialization of people, which required a significant digital transformation. During the pandemic, HR managers urged affected employees to be more resilient and productive [23].

With the passing of the pandemic, HR managers faced a variety of difficulties, especially the inability to organize face-to-face meetings, remote evaluation of employees, alerting employees

about the emerging virus and its impact, personal hygiene and psychological well-being (Onwuegbuna et al, 2021). Before the pandemic, it was unthinkable for people to work from home. They had to organize and coordinate remote employees and balance work and family obligations, as many organizations were unfamiliar with the concept of managing employees without on-site supervision. In the wake of the pandemic, managers have been forced to reassess their work-life balance in order to survive.

In terms of how the pandemic affects companies, experts have highlighted the need for adaptability and resilience of employees and, in addition, the need for an acceleration of the transition to a new digital economy in light of the effect of the epidemic (PWC, 2021). Thus, the digital and automation revolutions were accelerated as a result of the economic crisis, which led to a large-scale redistribution of employees in different sectors (IMF, 2021). HR departments will have a new responsibility to restore organizational culture, while businesses, on the other hand, are struggling to adapt to the post-pandemic climate. As a result, it is expected that in the future the use of hybrid work models, which combine remote and on-site workforce, will expand (PWC, 2021), being appreciated the advantages that remote work has, more and more important than its minuses. Although this is increasingly seen as a beneficial development, there is a possibility that the transition will have a detrimental influence on the current organizational culture. Employee social dynamics will be affected by fewer face-to-face interactions and a more dispersed workforce (PWC, 2021). There are growing concerns about how upper-level managers will control lower-level employees following this development. HR professionals say that frequent check-ins that occur solely for the sake of social interaction or emotional support can be a beneficial technique for developing a balanced framework that is suitable for both managing a remote workforce and for supporting links. Top management and beyond must be aware of issues affecting their employees and must proceed with open communication and create direct lines of contact at the various levels of management and administration in the organization. The implementation and adaptation of policies that promote diversity, equality and inclusion can have the effect of strengthening the organizational culture, but also the development of characteristics such as unity, mutual respect, empathy and a sense of personal responsibility among employees (PWC, 2021).

Many organizations try to assess how well their past operating techniques will continue to serve them in the future (Deloitte, 2021). This new business climate is ideal for human resource management. Moreover, he must be the one who defines how firms recruit and develop staff, improve employee experiences and move away from outdated operating paradigms, and he must also take the initiative and take the lead (Deloitte, 2021). To be successful in the future we must learn from the failures of the past. The President of the European Central Bank, Christine Lagarde (2021) has made some claims, namely that hybrid type of work is inevitable. Remote working, office working and blended working are all examples of how this can be achieved. To find out what its staff think about the current situation, the European Central Bank (ECB) conducted a survey among its staff. As digitization has progressed at a rapid pace, automation technologies such as robots have progressed at a slower pace. Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond President Tom Barkin talks openly about the future of employment, as well as the hybrid model that combines remote and office work (2021).

Companies adopted these recommendations and the first step was for them to clearly establish what the value of work is in a person, to effectively convey that value to their employees. For this, companies must proceed to establish a pleasant work environment, where individuals can develop their talents and advance in their careers. This is essential. This is how people can be motivated, by instilling a sense of belonging, creativity and development, and then translating all this into the strategic goals and objectives of the company. To begin with, Barkin (2021) discusses the need to establish clear criteria so that employees know exactly how much time they have to spend working with themselves and what their obligations are before starting their work. Also, the integration of new employees should be rethought, because the fewer colleagues there are, the more

difficult it is to integrate new employees into the company's culture and way of working (Barkin, 2021).

3. POST-PANDEMIC HUMAN RESOURCES STRATEGY IN EUROPE

The financial crisis of 2008 was the first major crisis in recent human history, a crisis that left its mark on HR managers when they had to respond to substantial workforce reductions. And then they had to create innovative ways to continue doing business as normally as possible. Terms such as flexibility, hiring processes, and wage and workforce adjustments are just a few that have come to the fore during this crisis (Sparrow et al., 2011; Fragouli & Christoforidis, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic created similar challenges, being a crisis of a different nature, although at this point the lives and well-being of the workforce were often at stake. Once again, companies had to consider a flexible and varied work schedule, and the relatively new phenomenon of remote work for a large number of employees was implemented as something more than ordinary (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke and Zimmermann, 2020).

This caused immense stress and anxiety for some employees, as well as having to manage a family simultaneously (with childcare facilities closing) while working from home. The work schedule for many employees changed when childcare responsibilities demanded an employee's time during the day and employment-related tasks had to be completed late at night (Lobell, 2020). There were other imperative vital concepts to address at that time such as the need for employee safety and well-being and maintaining employee motivation, morale, and productivity (Wenham, Smith, & Morgan, 2020).

A case study in Portugal asked organizations about changing HR management practices and processes due to the pandemic. What changed the most, the study found, were processes related to activities that were either suspended, moved to be conducted online, or if they remained face-to-face, safety measures were implemented. There were also major changes in the way employee exits were handled, emergency plans were modified and internal communication intensified. The study highlighted that the most significant change occurred in the manifestation of remote work and indicated that more than 50% of the workforce in most companies worked remotely shortly after the state of emergency was declared. Regarding how well they feel prepared for the pandemic and how well they have adapted to the new situation after the pandemic, the organizations indicated that they are somewhat prepared, obtaining a score of 4 on a scale from 1 to 7. But in terms of regarding the ability to cope with the situation, a score of 6 was obtained (Goncalves, et al., 2021). Contrary to these results, Caligiuri et al. (2020), referring to a study carried out by Ernst and Young in 2020, found that only 20% of senior management felt prepared for the pandemic in terms of human resource management (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke and Zimmermann, 2020).

Being a crisis in itself, the pandemic, as well as the financial crisis, forces human resources management to make changes in the selection process and in the criteria for hiring and evaluating employees. Thus, employees with greater adaptability and stress coping mechanisms are more and more successful. forms of training and support for employees needed to adapt to online platforms and human resources to be managed remotely to ensure employee well-being. This was made possible by the application of stress and anxiety mitigation measures from a distance (Hamouche, 2020). It was very important and difficult to ensure that the work ethic and productivity of the employees remained constant despite the flexible working arrangements and the demands of virtual collaboration. The strategic leadership positions within the companies also took part in the changes, requiring them to be filled with leaders capable of adapting to ever-changing crisis situations, but also ensuring the co-optation of the best possible talents, i.e. resilient, adaptable and with an impeccable work ethic, even when they are not constantly supervised (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020).

A Spanish study (Garcia-Clemente & Congregardo, 2022) showed that those companies that subsidized employee wages for a short period of time during the pandemic demonstrated a higher survival rate than those that did not. Given that most organizations have shown that their level of

preparedness for a pandemic was quite low, perhaps HR (socially responsible) management should cover those areas related to employee well-being, especially when they arise in challenges such as a pandemic or a financial crisis. This would require increased social transparency and voluntary reporting by companies, following the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative or the United Nations Global Compact (Diaz-Carrion, Lopez-Fernandez, & Romero-Fernandez, 2017).

The World Economic Forum calls for the whole world to be managed beyond the pandemic and its consequences. At the same time, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations calls for the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and full and productive employment, as well as decent work for all (UN, 2022).

4. POST-PANDEMIC RESOURCE STRATEGY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In the US the pandemic has forced HR management to consider both alternative approaches to work schedules and an employee's daily life, but with the highlighting of fundamental inequalities in the HR profession (Butterick & Charwood, 2021). The causes of disparate treatment and unfair practices are being discovered in the aftermath of the pandemic, while many of the consequences the pandemic has had on US HR departments are still being researched. As work-life balance concerns have also been brought to the fore, HR departments face difficulties in deciding how to address the different perspectives on how work-life balance should be achieved professional and private life for employees. Work-life balance can be difficult to achieve and maintain. But in the US, work-life balance concerns were recognized before COVID-19. The pandemic came and changed the perception of professional life for many employees. Technological advances have allowed more options for various forms of work, but it has become increasingly difficult to balance work and personal life. Employees strive to adjust their work-life obligations while maintaining performance expectations (Hammer, 2021). Human resource management is looking for solutions to various human resource issues, including how to mitigate employee stress levels as effectively as possible, for internal discussions between telecommuting vs. office work that exists in many organizations in the US, as well as for employees to find a balance between their mental and physical well-being while remaining committed to the organization's performance goals and results (Noe, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a shift in priorities for many employees. Long-term health problems as well as deaths due to the pandemic have forced people to focus their time and efforts on family and loved ones. Organizations have found and implemented a number of strategic solutions to ensure the overall well-being of their employees. Thus, among these we find the granting of days off to ensure mental health, built-in breaks during the working day, increasingly flexible work schedules, as well as telecommuting options. These solutions have come to the aid of employees to help them improve their work-life balance. At the same time, HR professionals must also accommodate those employees who want to "return to normal," that is, work in a traditional office setting throughout the day. These employees often wonder why their colleagues aren't coming back to work from the office, believing they aren't working remotely as much and as effectively. As a result, some organizations and HR departments face all kinds of internal divisions between employees who prefer more flexibility and opt for work-life balance and those employees who prefer traditional work lives (Bailey & Rehman, 2022).

Decisions about employees' work lives further demand from HR managers the conflict resolution skills they must possess to avoid many harmful outcomes such as low productivity or absenteeism. Organizations that support flexible hours and additional options professional life definitely have competitive advantages in the recruitment and selection of human resources (McGuinness, 2023). Many candidates, especially younger ones, place a high value on work-life balance. Consequently, those candidates will turn away from working for companies that do not offer work-life flexibility options. Human resource management must take this into account when they have strategic initiatives for all functions of the organization (Francis, 2022).

Women and minority employees in nonprofit organizations have faced additional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women make up an overwhelming majority of the nonprofit workforce in the United States. They performed additional duties and had additional responsibilities during the pandemic related to childcare, in addition to an increase in workloads. Some women have had to change their career aspirations and goals due to the loss of childcare support, schools and kindergartens being closed. They had to give up career advancements and financial advantages as they took care of their children (Stewart & Keunzi, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the issues of unequal treatment of women in the workplace. But for women who want to hold executive management positions, organizations still have a lot of work to do to promote and apply equality with men, the latter still being preferred for various management positions.

Minorities, also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, face additional barriers to equity in the workplace. Statistics have shown that African Americans have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Artiga, Corallo, & Pham, 2020). Areas such as health, food security, representation in government, the medical profession were not accessible to minorities, especially African Americans. Disparities in participatory democracy and public engagement have also surfaced, systematically leading to the oppression of African Americans in the United States.

A shift towards the general digitization of employment practices and job offers is an ongoing trend, only being accelerated during the pandemic (Pisu et al., 2021). The use of e-commerce and the incorporation of technological innovation have thus created a shift towards digitization of business practices that continue to be used even after the pandemic (Martín-Rojas et al., 2023).

5. ASIA'S POST-PANDEMIC HR STRATEGY

As a result of the unprecedented economic growth in Asia, there have been various changes in business practices that also impact on daily life. Human resource management plays a specific role in changing the business culture of the region, reflecting on employee expectations due to societal changes related to a change in employability, compensation, but also family relationships. Thus, Rowley et al. (2016) in their studies found that previous HRM practices that were based on various cultural aspects, even in different regions of Asia, are either prevalent or at least exist in a hybrid form, even existing a certain convergence towards Western practices. This aspect demonstrates nothing more than the fact that present in most Asian countries are the aspects of paternalism, goodwill towards similar and shared expectations within a team, focus on long-term results, collaboration with the greatest efforts to avoid conflicts and to foster good relations in a place where employment is valued more than specific expertise. Ultimately, organizations expect each employee to take ownership of their work and contributions to their team as well as the company they work for.

Human resource management practices in the Asia Pacific region, particularly Korea, China, Taiwan, Vietnam and Indonesia have different approaches, being mainly based on long-standing historical and cultural paradigms. Korea still uses the yongo system, that paternalistic model that emphasizes seniority within the organization, as well as the informal attributes of human resource management. But as with other Western influences, the search for Western-inspired HRM best practices is also on the rise. On the other hand, globalization and human resource management practices are also changing, although each country and region seems to be at a different stage of this change (Rowley, Bae, Horak, & Bacouel-Kentjens, 2016).

Just as yongo is used in Korea, guanxi is used in China, although a number of convergences as well as divergences have been found in management practices, especially when it comes to the implementation of performance appraisals. Guanxi is a deep-rooted hierarchical system of relationships and rules of behavior that connect members of different levels of society (Fang Law et al., 2009). Recently, evaluations have been made using more quantitative and qualitative methods in the form of surveys and interviews. (Cook, Schuler, & Varma, 2020).

Businesses and employees in Taiwan, Vietnam and Indonesia often work in virtual teams given their geographic proximity. Some specialist studies have shown that the desire to share information within a group is often not sustained if leadership is inadequate, language barriers exist and interactions within a team are not sufficiently welded. As described in 2017, the Asia Pacific region is not a homogenous region. Specialists in the field have analyzed the use of Western academic publications that refer to human resource management (Cooke et al. 2020). They found that the publication of such articles has expanded dramatically over the past twenty-five years. As global firms have expanded into this region, there has been an inclination towards Western management practices, practices that emphasize employee well-being, green human resource management, employee voice, diversity and inclusion, and with the pandemic, an increase of the response to the crisis. Some scholars have studied the paradigm shift in human resource management practices in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China (Chen et al. 2018). As in other regions of Asia, the change could be attributed to more Western companies doing business in the area, and of course to the influence of general globalization and technological advances, where information could be more easily disseminated.

6. CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious that we are in the midst of a digital revolution. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that companies and individuals alike have been affected by the increase in working from home. Managers have tried to find new ways to ensure the survival of their organizations while protecting the lives of their employee members. The pandemic is over and a mix of working from home and in the office seems to be the future in the world of work. However, not all occupations can be performed remotely, and those that can require large investments in technology, infrastructure, and staff training to be successful. Remote work has its advantages, but the absence of face-to-face communication can put workers' safety at risk. In this post-pandemic period HR managers face several obstacles from the need to cope with this change and develop an ideal work paradigm that benefits both employees and their organizations at the same time.

The field of human resources management has been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, both internationally and domestically. It has required managers around the world to face unprecedented challenges in managing a remote workforce, adapting to rapid changes in communication practices, and addressing work inequalities generated by the pandemic.

Through this article we analyzed the effects of the pandemic on human resource management in Europe, Asia and the United States. Thus, in Europe organizations have implemented flexible work schedules, organized remote work and adopted safety measures to protect employees. The adoption of sustainable practices, guided by international standards, could improve human resource management strategies and mitigate the impact of crises on the workforce. At the same time, the Asian perspective highlighted the influence of cultural factors on human resource management practices. In some countries, traditional approaches, rooted in hierarchical structures and long-term outcomes, are still maintained. However, a gradual adoption of Western management practices is also observed. The pandemic crisis has accelerated the adoption of crisis response strategies, employee wellness initiatives, diversity and inclusion, and green human resource management practices in the region. There has also been a dissemination of new trends in human resource management as a result of the influence of Western companies and technological advances. In the United States, the pandemic has highlighted the inequities within the HR profession and underscored the importance of work-life balance.

HR departments made assessments of employee stress levels, the balance between remote work and in-office presence, and had to manage conflicts arising from different work-life preferences. Companies that have opted for flexibility and work-life options have gained a competitive advantage in recruitment and selection. Telecommuting has become a prominent practice, even post-pandemic, reshaping HRM strategies across sectors. There was a need to find innovative solutions and a re-evaluation of HRM practices worldwide. The pandemic has

highlighted the importance of employee wellbeing, adaptability and resilience during crises. HR professionals played an important role, a key role in supporting employees and implementing strategies to maintain productivity and performance. As organizations evolve, adopting sustainable practices and prioritizing work-life balance will be integral to effective HRM strategies in a rapidly changing world.

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