

## A New Face of Human Resources Emerges as People Management: Post Pandemic Experience and Behaviour

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### Abstract

Human resource departments that are ineffective contribute to the demise of businesses. These individuals are responsible for analysing job applicants, conducting interviews with the best candidates, and retaining the best staff once they have been employed. It's no secret that the "new normal" of the COVID-19 outbreak has compelled human resource departments to rethink their recruitment and retention methods. This study evaluates how human resources were, how they have changed, and how they will continue to be in the future. In any case, HR has long coveted a seat at the executive table, and COVID-19 looks to have added another seat for the CHRO. In 2008, HR's role in the current crisis was compared to that of a Chief Financial Officer. The shoulders on which our organisation will stand during this calamity". Following this pandemic, HR leaders who step up to the plate are unlikely to lose their seats. HR is tasked with guiding the organisation's response to and preparing for crises in the immediate and distant future. How the organisation responds to the next crisis will decide its existence.

**Key Words:** Remote Working, Workplace, Human Resources Management Organisational Response, Pandemic.

### 1. Introduction

Businesses have been harmed by the coronavirus outbreak and have been compelled to adapt to an unfamiliar work environment. As a result of the current COVID-19 outbreak, employers and employees are in a state of chaos and worry. Many human resources departments were in crisis mode in 2020 and the first half of 2021, working feverishly to enable remote work, expand mental and physical health assistance, and focus more than ever on C-level tactics to keep their organisations afloat.<sup>2</sup> Along with maintaining their employees' health and well-being, human resource professionals are now responsible for organising paperwork and giving support to millions of laid-off or furloughed workers. In the new normal, human resource managers are accountable for their employees' productivity, motivation, engagement, and connectivity, all of which contribute to achieving targeted performance. A fundamental shift in the human resources function has happened as organisations adjust to a new normal. HR has evolved into the CEO's right-hand man or woman, assisting him or her in resolving complex personnel issues.<sup>3</sup> While the human resources department is still accountable for the workforce's performance, productivity, and efficiency, the department's primary objective is to understand the difficulties our employees face in and out of the workplace. There is an opportunity for [HR] to define and develop new skills and procedures to ensure that a corporation's human capital is committed, inspired, and believing. Human resource managers have long been worried about their employees' physical and mental health, but the pandemic has prompted them to adopt a more aggressive posture.<sup>4</sup>

This means that new employees may never have met their boss or coworkers in person, necessitating the development of new mentorship programmes such as pairing newly hired employees with an established employee with whom they can communicate on a daily basis in order to become acquainted with the company's culture. As a result of the current pandemic, human resources are critical in determining how well people can perform in their new post-pandemic workplace. This requires both HR professionals and employees to be adaptable, creative, and flexible. Human capital may be critical in determining what worked successfully throughout the crisis and in applying this knowledge to develop competitive advantages.<sup>5</sup> For instance, a business may consolidate its headquarters and establish regional hubs in order to tap into new talent pools in the region. When constructing a network of hubs, a variety of factors must be considered. To accomplish this, technology and processes must be in place to support effective workflows and communications. It is necessary to comprehend both the cultural and operational components of the organisation's future operating model. Are managers equipped to appropriately oversee the human resources of remote workers? Because flexible employment creates new chances and challenges, human resources must find and develop fresh talent as well as develop and apply innovative strategies to assist them in succeeding. Returning employees to work has created a unique safety problem for human resource staff. Logistics is a true nightmare in terms of the possibility of employees contracting the virus in hospitality, retail, and tourism. As human resource professionals struggle to resolve difficulties and meet employee

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requirements, the safety and compliance landscape is rapidly changing. The current emphasis on employee safety by human resources is on staying current with public health guidelines and implementing them in the workplace. While immunisation may reduce some symptoms, people's impressions of how organisations respond to crises, the persistence of those efforts, and the evolution of the culture will have long-term implications. Employees in the majority, if not all, industries were obliged to alter their work practises and adapt to various organisational changes as a result of the epidemic (e.g. increased safety precautions, working from home, reduction of work hours, layoffs). As a result, it's predictable that this worldwide issue has drawn the attention of scholars in the adjacent subjects of human resource management (HRM), organisational behaviour, and industrial, work, and organisational psychology to the emerging field of HR and people management. This has resulted in the establishment of a new human resources function and strategy that place a focus on stability and growth. Based on our own conceptual and empirical work on the COVID-19 pandemic and employee experiences and behavior, and how the role of human resources changed due to crises, I took a step back and reflected on what we've learned about researching employee experiences and behaviour during times of crisis in the years 2020 and 2021. I begin by reviewing theoretical ways that have been (or may be) used to explain changes in employee experiences and behaviour during the COVID-19 epidemic, as well as theoretical approaches that could be used to analyse these phenomena in future crises.<sup>6</sup>

### The Paradigm Shift of HR Role

As a result of the COVID pandemic, human resources' overall function and day-to-day tasks have shifted dramatically.<sup>7</sup> With the rise of digital and distributed work settings, human resource professionals have been forced to acquire new skills in order to remain productive and successful in their own professions while working from home. Both have compelled human resource professionals to acquire new abilities in order to accomplish previously unqualified responsibilities. Simply put, human resources are becoming increasingly valuable. Furthermore, human resources have a direct influence on the creation of future strategic goals.<sup>8</sup> They are juggling more responsibilities than ever before, with executives and employees alike seeking advice on how to proceed and overcome current obstacles. To compensate, they are taking on jobs for which they were not initially qualified. Human resources professionals are increasingly aware of the connection between an employee's sense of belonging and organisational effectiveness. These businesses collaborate with human resources to improve interpersonal and emotional connections inside and across teams. This connection is critical for teams that are dispersed and working remotely. To work well as a team, members must trust one another, which is even more critical when informal check-ins are prohibited. Developing and sustaining a high-performance culture entails cultivating and sustaining an environment in which employees feel valued, trusted, and empathised with. Human resources views this as a critical point for rejuvenating personnel and ensuring workers' relevance through skill renewal. HR is now focused on career development rather than on preparing for a specific future position, encouraging individuals to develop critical abilities that may open up multiple opportunities for career advancement and providing additional career development assistance to individuals in critical roles who lack critical skills. HR has also been at the forefront of crisis and risk management during this time period.<sup>9</sup> As we enter the fourth quarter of the new year, the coronavirus outbreak continues to spread in a novel manner. How will the crisis affect human resource professionals in the long run? How will human resource management evolve in the future? What about the future, which is becoming increasingly unpredictable with each passing day? These and numerous more points will put HR, and HR as a profession, to the test. Regardless of these developments, human resource professionals should rest assured that putting people first and humanising the workplace will continue to yield dividends. By concentrating on people and their needs, a culture may be developed that will result in long-term increases in productivity and performance.<sup>10</sup>

### Where has Human Resources been Concentrating its efforts up to this point?

Over the last three decades, human resource management has transformed from a vocation focused on administration, employee welfare, and discipline to one that today holds a position of strategic importance. Nowadays, human resource professionals hold strategic and board-level positions, exerting influence on stakeholders and focusing on shareholder value and return preservation. The emphasis on strategic and operational excellence has shifted away from cost saving and toward responding to broader business and economic concerns over the last two years. As a result, communication between human resources and important corporate stakeholders has increased significantly. The expansion of procedures and bureaucracy has harmed HR's agility and responsiveness. Dave Ulrich, a human resources expert, notes that "the virus has altered the society in which we live," despite HR's recent emphasis on "social, economic, and technological revolutions—with a particular emphasis on the gig economy and artificial intelligence." Since the global epidemic is now driving business transformation, human resources experts have reimagined what human resources does and how it accomplishes it. Reintroducing the human element into human resources will have a massive long-term impact.

## Remote Teams Management

Remote working will continue to acquire acceptability as a result of the long-term influence of COVID-19 on how people work and how human resources are enhanced. Returning to pre-COVID working practises is improbable in the medium or long term, given extensive use of remote work, HR's use of video conferencing for mission-critical tasks, and telecommuting. While the regulatory framework for this platform and format evolved dramatically, HR and the rest of the workforce switched away from inefficient, protracted video meetings in favour of shorter, more focused sessions that give more context and information in less time. As a result of the usage of brief, in-person conference calls, employee monitoring, intrusive surveillance, and redundancy that falls well short of suggested practises have been eliminated. Remote employment in the form of organisations that offer flexible working hours and days is becoming the new norm. Additionally, flexible work hours are becoming the new norm. In addition to remote workforce management, human resources is increasingly examining and managing a more hybrid workforce that comprises remote, in-office, part-time, and flexi-time workers. The workplace witnessed a significant cultural shift. At the outbreak's inception, many human resource departments were unprepared to handle remote teams. Even those evaluating the advantages of a more remote workforce did not anticipate their time being unexpectedly stolen away. For many others, though, this is precisely what occurred. To ensure a smooth transition, they needed to learn how to manage distant workers in the absence of infrastructure and support mechanisms.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, because 80 percent of organisations anticipate allowing employees to work remotely for at least part of the time following the outbreak, human resource managers must learn how to manage those people.

## Navigating Virtual Recruiting

While some organisations had already begun using virtual recruiting, the outbreak prompted many more to act quickly. Complete virtualisation of the recruiting process, from planning and sourcing to analysis, selection, hiring, and onboarding, has become the industry standard for human resource organisations. HR teams have learned a great deal from virtual job fairs and hiring events, two components of virtual recruiting.<sup>12</sup> Supporting virtual recruiting events, promoting them to the appropriate audience, and developing techniques for human resource professionals have all been made possible via the use of new technology.<sup>13</sup> Remote onboarding is also a component of HR's increasingly virtual recruiting activities. Human resources professionals have had to enhance their technological, communication, and engagement abilities in order to interact with and complete paperwork electronically for new hires. This is especially challenging to maintain online.

## New Technologies: Learning and Implementing

Having a virtual job takes a significant amount of technology assistance. To assure continuity following the COVID-induced transition to virtual work, "watertight" solutions that can be accessed at any time and from any location are required. When it comes to new technological systems, human resources departments have typically been responsible for determining which systems to install, training employees on how to use and apply them, and collaborating more closely with information technology departments. Human resources is now tasked with the responsibility of comprehending new technology, connecting the virtual workplace, virtual teams, and managing across multiple locations.

## Regular Employee Surveys: Managing, Writing and Organising

As a result of the epidemic, employees who work from home face an additional challenge: how to keep them engaged, motivated, and communicative. Employee engagement expertise has become a requirement for human resource professionals. Given the population's dispersed nature, surveys are the most efficient and effective method of accomplishing this. HR uses quick surveys and feedback loops to determine where leaders should focus their efforts on checking in, encouraging, and retaining employees. As a result, human resource professionals have been forced to develop their survey writing skills.<sup>14</sup> To obtain the most candid input, they needed to learn how to ask the correct questions at the appropriate moment. With a remote workforce, human resource departments develop new survey abilities in order to perform more frequent surveys than previously. And it wasn't only opinions that were gathered. How were these infantile thoughts and experiences transformed into strategic strategy and subsequent intervention?

## Serving as Public Health Administrators

HR teams have been taken aback and challenged by the role of public health administrator. Returning employees have an expectation of and a right to a safe workplace. As a result of this necessity, human resource departments have been

expected to stay current on new rules and regulations relevant to worker safety. They needed to make adjustments to the workplace, including staggered work hours, moving staff workstations, tracing routes between offices, and creating mask policies.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, they are responsible for informing staff about these policies and conducting frequent compliance audits. Human resource leaders have taken on the job of not only explaining new rules on a regular basis, but also ensuring that they grasp the rapidly changing environment in order to ensure compliance with current laws. Even more problematic is the fact that standards are constantly changing, requiring HR managers to handle an additional ball in their ring, which the majority have adopted and managed according to their current needs.

## Managing Employee Privacy

As a result of the pandemic, many employees are concerned about their privacy. Employees think they may have to give up too much privacy as a result of the organisation's pandemic rules and regulations. As a result, human resource departments face growing pressure to guarantee that firms respect employees' privacy when collecting data for commercial and human resource decision-making objectives. While HR develops employees' trust and buy-in through ethical standards for the use of employee data, at this point in time, this has resulted in more employees viewing HR as a partner during times of crisis rather than a functional department. While employee satisfaction was high, this was also reflected in the rapid growth of virtual work.

## The focus of HR- Post and Future Pandemic Times

Human resource management has evolved over the preceding five decades from a profession primarily concerned with administration, employee welfare, and discipline to one that now occupies a strategic position inside the organisation. Nowadays, human resource professionals hold strategic and board-level positions that give them influence over stakeholders and a commitment to safeguarding shareholder value and return. They are questioned and observed at the board level. Human resources are an asset, not a cost centre. This perspective has shifted across company houses, and HR has also demonstrated that it is a game changer during the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>16</sup> Nowadays, human resource directors work around the clock and make extraordinary efforts to ensure their employees' safety and the long-term success of their company. With the current emphasis shifting away from cost management and toward wider business and economic problems, the criticality of human resource strategic and operational excellence is expanding. As a result, the interaction between human resources and the major stakeholders in the organisation has been significantly enhanced. They appear to be coping with layoffs, furloughs, and budget cuts in full force at the moment. They've grown accustomed to working from home in recent years, and they've managed the workforce from anywhere.

Mr. Ulrich, a human resources specialist, says that "the virus has revolutionised the society in which we live," despite the recent focus on "social, economic, and technological revolutions—with a particular emphasis on the gig economy and artificial intelligence." With the virus's worldwide spread driving business transformation, human resource professionals now have an opportunity to reinvent their work and techniques. The reintroduction of the human element into human resource management will have a long-term impact. To thrive in the "new normal," human resource directors, we believe, must adopt a new basic capability: a complexity mentality. Some have developed, others must, and everyone will in the days ahead. This means that human resource leaders' relationships with employees at all levels will need to be strengthened. At this point, human interactions must take precedence over control, norms, and hierarchy at this point. Adopting a complexity mindset necessitates first acknowledging the reality of complexity and the necessity of rethinking how we account for it. How do you see the future of human resources? Prof. Ulrich responds, "I am an optimist about the value of human resources because they enable talent, organisation, and leadership to produce value for critical stakeholders both within and beyond the enterprise." This raises the standard for human resources, but only the very best human resources professionals who comprehend, grasp, and deliver the talents we've identified can contribute value.<sup>17</sup>

## The Culture Challenge

Human resources has historically been in charge of employee engagement and cohesion. However, under the present COVID-19 scenario, the impact of labour culture issues is predicted to increase while remaining stable. The pandemic's global reach has increased the importance of having an exclusive human resources head. When confronted with these cultural issues, successful organisations place a premium on people and culture. Everyone agrees that the only way to keep globally dispersed individuals and teams interested in the modern world is to embrace an agile work culture. The capacity to adapt and respond to new difficulties is far superior to the rigidity of a traditional work environment. Additionally, agile cultures provide a more precise measurement of productivity, which is crucial in dispersed and remote organisations to maintain employee engagement regardless of their physical location. Human resources' current task is to discover how to transform the culture if it hasn't worked previously. Or, if the ongoing pandemic has impacted the organisation's culture,

how can it be restored? While a company's culture cannot be totally altered overnight, it can be encouraged to evolve gradually over time, with human resources accountable for facilitating this evolution. In a nutshell, culture refers to the way an organisation operates. When it comes to establishing a company's culture, it is vital that both employees and management participate.

### Putting the Human back into Human Resources

Almost definitely, the coronavirus will have a long-term effect. Thousands of people have been killed by COVID-19, which has wreaked havoc on public health, food systems, and global supply chains. Additionally, the ongoing impact is wreaking havoc on the economy and the way firms operate. Businesses have been obliged to make swift adjustments to their operations to address issues ranging from mandatory shutdowns to employee furloughs. As a result of this collaboration, human resources and business operations have become more agile and technology-driven in their approach to innovation adoption, acceptance, and utilisation. However, the automation and digitisation of several business processes, including the successful implementation of cloud-based human resource management platforms for human resource procedures, has freed up time and space for human resource practitioners to focus on the employee experience.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of growing compliance requirements, human resource personnel have been isolated from administrative chores that frequently accumulate. Employee on-boarding, employee off-boarding, performance review preparation, payroll audit, notification of leave absence requests, shift scheduling, time-sheets, expenses, and recruitment are just a few of the critical human resource processes that can be managed effectively with automation and human resource management software. As a result of this, many procedures are effectively streamlined, requiring less input from human resources. Naturally, the benefit is that human resources directors and managers can now spend more time with their employees while also concentrating on more strategic employee needs-related tasks. In a nutshell, reintroduce the human element to human resources and make room for people strategy.

### Conclusion

Here are ten human resources trends organisations should be aware of as we approach 2022, as well as improvements they may make to stay current with the future of human resources.

1. Businesses must place a premium on diversity and inclusion programmes. Implement diversity and inclusion programmes to attract top talent and enhance the employee experience.
2. Human resource departments will rely on technology to automate human resource operations. In 2022, the usage of human resources technology to streamline recruiting and on-boarding processes will continue to grow. Thus, not a few, but all, have to be tech savvy.
3. Teams will become accustomed to the prospect of long-term remote work. Be willing to adapt to long-term remote work as a result of new technology and policies.
4. Employers will virtually preserve the business culture and involvement of their employees. You'll need to work to maintain engagement among your remote employees through vision alignment, virtual meetings, clear communication, and employee surveys.
5. Employers will prioritise their employees' health and well-being. An emphasis will be placed on talking with your staff about the best ways to promote their health and wellness.
6. Human resource departments will make changes to employee benefits. Employers must give employees the advantages they desire, such as expanded healthcare coverage, flexible work schedules, stress-free outcomes, and health and wellness initiatives. For example, perks such as free lunches and commuter advantages have become obsolete, as employees place a higher premium on healthcare and wellness programmes.
7. Employers will be required to provide paid sick leave and accommodation in accordance with COVID-19 or any such pandemic in the future. Businesses must ensure that they are up to speed on the latest rules and regulations governing their employees' entitlements under COVID-19-specific paid sick leave and accommodations.
8. Employers may mandate COVID-19 or other pandemic vaccinations for their employees in the future. Employers must take appropriate precautions if they need coronavirus immunisation. Mandating the COVID-19 or similar pandemic vaccine in the future for all employees will undoubtedly help to reduce the likelihood of on-the-job transmission and may help employers limit their liability for COVID-19-related workplace disease.
9. Compliance is putting a strain on human resource departments. Pay close attention to employee labour rules and make any adjustments to your human resource strategy. Human resources departments will be weighed down by a

variety of compliance responsibilities. Human resource managers will revise employee handbooks and re-evaluate rule sets that will require major revisions, such as harassment training, leave benefits, and drug testing.

10. "Make flexible work possible, whatever that means for the individual." Some parents with young children, for example, may need to combine daycare and work throughout the day, and being able to work in the evening instead may alleviate some of their stress. A critical element is that everyone has their own set of circumstances, and you must initiate those dialogues, listen, and take helpful actions.

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### Questionnaire used

1. Did the role of the HR function change? What, how, and what degree?
2. Is/was it possible for our organisation to function with 40% or more absenteeism?
3. Can our staff work from home? How was performance, productivity, and output measured?
4. What changes came in terms of the recruitment portfolio?
5. What was the approach to managing virtual teams/employees/work?

6. How was the engagement of employees during crises? How was it measured?
7. Can an at-home workforce be supported by existing infrastructure?
8. Travel to high-risk areas may be monitored, or possibly restricted by our firm.
9. What guarantees do you need to give them in order to feel secure?
10. What was the policy of supporting remote workers or employees?
11. How was privacy managed?
12. How was the onsite employee managed?
13. If an employee is sick, how will they be returned to their families? How was it planned?
14. How was the wellness of employees taken care of?
15. Do extra resources become available through escalation procedures?
16. How well trained and well-represented are the on-call members of the crisis management team? Do they know how to respond in the event of an emergency situation?
17. Did the company/HR prepare for a liquid workforce? How was it done?
18. What will be the reimagining in terms of work from home, hot design, social isolation, insurance?
19. How was the cultural readiness of employees in the changed workspace landscape?
20. What were the technology considerations and enablers in the HR process?