

# NEW ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN COVID-19 CRISIS

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## ABSTRACT

Crisis management has not been taken seriously by human resource development (HRD) even after crisis impact on both individuals and organization has been already well-identified in different researches. The role of HRD during the crisis was reborn due to the sudden impact of Covid-19 worldwide. The role of HRD during Covid-19 pandemic is in peak especially for the engaging workforce for remote work, social distancing at a workstation, employee well-being, employee engagement & retention, compensation & financial benefits, promotion, dependability on virtual world and technology etc. This paper is trying to identify the role of HRD in the context of Covid-19 crisis. The objective of this research is to identify the new role of HRD during the crisis and improve crisis management. Due to limitation of time, research data is considered from secondary sources like different websites publications, journals, research papers etc. Covid-19 is just a recent crisis and thus there is limited research on its impact and many scopes for future research with individual organizations for their HRD crisis management policy considering primary data.

**Keywords:** Crisis management, remote work, employee well-being, employee engagement & retention, dependability on the virtual world and technology

## **Introduction**

According to Andrianopoulos, crisis management may be subdivided into three major steps namely: pre- crisis, crisis, and post-crisis (Fahed-Sreih, 2018). A crisis is defined as any partial or total disruption of a business' key operations as a result of damage of property or equipment, harm to people, destroyed relationships, environmental destruction or stakeholder negative perception and influence among other factors (Vardarlier, 2016). HRD has to perform beyond the common roles to a complex role that directly influences the performance of the organization. Current Covid-19 played the role of the "Question paper" where HRD of all organization as a "Student" appeared in the exam. The result is as expected, some organization able to pass (i.e. survive successfully with Covid-19), some organization got compartmental (i.e. partially survive with many restrictions but tried to survive in post-Covid) and some organization failed (i.e. could not able to survive). The organization having best crisis management (CM) plan is like the student well prepared for an exam, an organization having CM plan but not implemented/tested is like a student having all study material but didn't study properly and the last category does not have CM plan i.e. student neither having textbook nor studied for the exam.

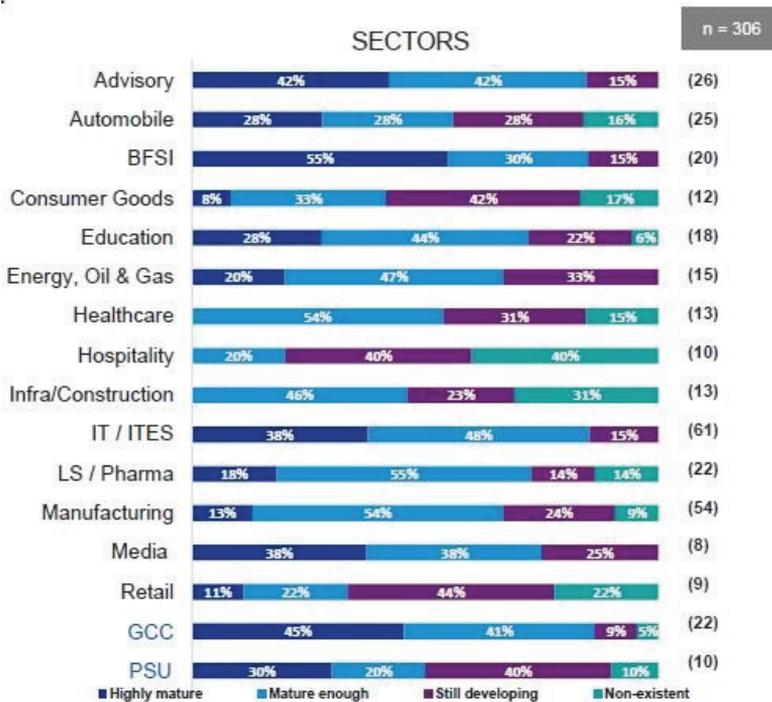
## **Objective**

Crisis management is among the areas of management in which the

HR is expected to participate in, with a view of ensuring that employee's needs, during and after a crisis, is considered during the development of crisis management plans (Mann, 2014). During Covid-19 crisis, HR role was most vital with specific knowledge and skills to ensure all kind of organizational needs are met accordingly. This paper is tried to identify the new role of HRD during Covid-19 crisis and improve crisis management.

## **Methodology**

Covid-19 created threads mainly in workforce safety, financial loss & reputation loss to the organization (The Ultimate COVID-19 Crisis Management Checklist for Employers, 2020). Many researchers are already working on Covid-19 impact and published many articles, blogs, analysis etc. Most of the serious researches still in progress and will take time to summarize the impact as Covid-19 still not ended and expected the second wave by many scientists. So, this paper is purely an empirical and descriptive form of study. Therefore, the study is used two data sources i.e. secondary data & tertiary data. Secondary sources included a literature review from publications i.e. books, journals, articles, and abstracts. Tertiary sources included indexes, bibliographies and internet sites. Paper is based on basic secondary data research findings and suggestions to identify the new role of HRD in the context of Covid-19 crisis.



### New responsibility for HR – Literature review

As coronavirus is affecting workplaces around the world, HRD needs to adopt a new strategy to safeguard the organization and its workforce as well as minimum damages from coronavirus. Covid-19 is new to the world and spread so fast that most organization had no or very little response time to handle the crisis. The Coronavirus is disrupting the workplace and HR forced to adopt new ways of working, ensuring employee's safety, remote communicating, interact with the virtual world etc.

### A. Support for work from home

Majority of employees are forced to work from home due to lockdown imposition. HRD must have to provide extended support to those remotely working employees to ascertain business continuity and employee welfare. As per KPMG covid-19 India HR survey report in May 2020, the maturity of employees in work from home is highlighted below:

To increase the number of highly mature & mature enough percentage, some practices adopted by organisations are:

- i) Technical support: Provision of

hotlines for the technical support related works (KPMG, 2020). Most of the employees used online social platforms like Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom meeting, WhatsApp etc. for meeting, conference, training, education etc. related works. The required Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software, laptops also provided in many organizations key persons so that works can be continued for the survival of the organization and their employees.

ii) Communication: Remote workers are required to communicate for managing their household priorities, Dos and Don'ts during Covid-19, manage their time & money effectively etc. (KPMG, 2020)

iii) Flexible working: It is difficult for those employees who are fully dependent on childcare centres and household support or medical caretaker. HRD managed for a flexible working period by alternating shifts, change in schedule, allowing day-offs etc. for the welfare of the employee (KPMG, 2020).

## B. Support at the workplace

Although majority organisations have enforced a remote work for the safety and well-being of their employees except for those organizations who are falls under essential & critical service segments. In the covid-19 scenario, the medical department and district administration including police forces played a vital role as front line workers. But behind the scene, some major

segments provided essential supports to these frontline workers and the nation by working 24X7 with reduced workforce e.g. power/electricity, FCI/ food supply, oil and gas, banking, media, water supply, waste disposal departments / municipality workers and so on.

These organisations are taking necessary measures for the on-site workers including:

i) Distribution of Covid-19 kit (Mask, sanitiser, oximeter, infrared thermometer etc.)

ii) Engagement of manpower in a shift to minimize employee gathering at a time.

iii) Continue engagement of same shift for many days to minimize contact with outsiders. iv) Covid-19 screening at the entry of the workplace.

v) Sanitization of the workplace after every shift including transport vehicles.

vi) Rearranging of sitting locations to maintain social distancing. vii) Counselling for Covid-19 does and don'ts.

viii) Provide immunity booster supplements.

ix) Provide immediate medical facility as per Covid-19 protocol.

## C. Employee well-being

**Psychological well-being:** During covid-19 crisis, HR-focused especially on psychological counselling to both work from home & workplace

employees including their family members for online Doctor's counselling, medication & yoga classes for minimizing stress and anxiety level. HR also assisted online platform for Dos & Don'ts in Covid-19 so that employees are mentally prepared, strong enough to fight with the crisis with confidence and morale-boosting.

**Physical well-being:** As per medical science, physical activity is a must for every human to get fit and active. It not only works physically but also helps reduce stress, increase mental strength, reduces different probable medical illness. During Covid-19, HR used online platform and focused on appointing different fitness, nutrition expert & yoga experts and providing guidance on health and fitness.

**Financial assistance:** Many organization distributed free sanitization kit, mask, medical kit (Covid-19 kit), and immunity booster supplements to their employees at free of cost to reduce financial stress on their employees. Some organization provided lump-sum financial assistance against Covid-19. Some organization provided a full salary to employees even employees are neither engaged in "Work at home" nor "Working at the workplace" due to countywide lockdown.

**Medical assistance:** Although Covid-19 treatment is fully free in India including isolation & quarantine. But many organizations provided medical treatment to their employees/dependant members in private hospitals

at free of cost or reimbursement of medical expenses so that he/she can get required medical care immediately. Moreover, HR in some organization took initiatives for free distribution of medical equipment like oximeter, thermometer, oxygen cylinder & kit as an emergency crisis management policy to their employees. The state police department also opened toll free number for providing medicine to older or alone peoples at their doorstep.

**D. Employee engagement & retention:** As per KPMG (May 2020) survey data, more than 75% of the organisations have redefined their employee engagement and organisation communication strategies to ensure high engagement of their workforce in COVID-19. It is natural that due to disconnection from the office environment, the employees get bored easily and not providing quality time during work from home. So, HR has taken care of those employees over telephone & video calling and provided them required assistance and feel them that they are the vital part of the organization and HR as well as organization is with them always during such crisis. HR also assured their employees about job security, financial security, organization financial position and future action plan for retention of the workforce.

**E. Compensation & financial benefits:** Due to covid-19, many organizations couldn't able to survive financially and closed down. Majority of the organization has differed

incentives, cutting down perks, dearness allowances etc. causing financial burden on their employees. It is also reported that some organization didn't pay the salaries to the employees during the period of a covid-19 lockdown or partially paid.

**F Promotion:** Due to covid-19 crisis, most of the organization has delayed promotion than schedule. This action has promoted demotivation among employees. Majority of the organization has not clearly mentioned the probable promotion schedule and about the promotion benefits that will be provided to their deprived employees.

**G. Dependability on the virtual world and technology:** Due to various restrictions of Covid-19, HR has adopted the virtual world i.e. internet platform as a prime weapon for communication, training, counselling and working purpose. Although HR has adopted teleconferencing, hotline communication also as effective communication media but the most dominant platform was the internet and social media like Zoom meeting, Microsoft team, google duo, google meet, WhatsApp etc. The transition of HR and organizational employees from conventional office culture to the virtual world (Except majority IT sector) was not easy. HR put tremendous effort into a swift transition of working culture so that organisation productivity and financial profit can sustain during the crisis also.

## Findings and recommendations

4 steps to smart HR crisis management (crisis-management-in-the-workplace-and-the-role-of-the-hr-team):

Step 1 – Develop a crisis preparedness plan which includes

- Emergency Response Plan consists of the main three alternatives i.e. evacuation, sheltering and lockdown.
- Crisis Communications Plan with a plan to efficiently communicate with employees, customers, the media and stakeholders.
- Business Continuity Plan, listing strategies to overcome the disruption of business.
- IT Plan, including the recovery of computer hardware, connectivity and data.

Step 2 – Establish a Crisis Management Team with the assignment of the respective role like

- The recommended roles within the crisis management team are:
- Team leader: Coordinates the activities which will be carried out during the crisis.
- HR manager: Works to resolve the human issues created by the crisis.
- Security director: Serves as primary information officer.
- Finance director: Is in charge of funds during the crisis.
- Lawyer: Provides legal counsel.
- Media director: Conveys well-vetted information to the media.

Step 3 – Focus on information and training include

- A special area on a company intranet.
- A special section of the HR help centre.
- Telephone hotline for employees.
- Daily bulletin board postings, or email updates.
- A password-protected Internet site with a discussion section strictly for managers.

Step 4 – Plan for the recovery phase

It is the most crucial time for HRD to get the answer “Now what?”. The stress that is associated with undergoing a traumatizing experience in lockdown has to be dealt with promptly and efficiently by HRD. The organization eventually has to rise from the ashes is another function of HR. So, proper planning for recovery must be applied.

There are various aspects of planning that the HR can adopt to take care of the employee and organization in a crisis. Here, HR must carry out a Crisis impact assessment and learn practical lessons in handling crisis. Through HR participation in planning and training, the performance of organizations can be enhanced, thus promoting the bottom-line and ability to deal with the future crisis (Athamneh, 2018).

Limitations: All the data provided in this paper is studied from different websites publications, journals, research papers etc. available online.

The whole study is limited to very preliminary analysis and from secondary data only in the context of the covid-19 situation in India.

Future scope: Depending on the nature of any given crisis, organizations will need to move quickly to adjust and adapt to maintain continuity (changing-role-human-resource-management-through-crisis- response-recovery). Covid-19 is just a recent crisis and thus there is limited research on its impact and many scopes for future research with individual organizations for their HRD crisis management policy considering primary data.

Conclusion: HR required developing and implementing effective and robust crisis management policy to support employees and the organization and ready them for the process of recovery. Must use of virtual world comprising of artificial intelligence and technologically based solutions to work with the flexible performance management system and, upgrading overall employee working culture. From the different literature review, online study, google search etc., it is explored that Covid-19 has spread so fast that no organization is prepared to handle this crisis. As it is a new form of crisis, organizational crisis management policy did not anticipate it earlier. It is also not confirmed from any source that whether India has exercised any mock drill to handle Covid-19 type crisis earlier or not. As a post-covid-19 scenario, HR already realized the importance of their technology up-gradation, use of cloud

platform, minimization of pen-paper work, digitalization of documents, training to all category employees on the use of information technology, use of artificial intelligence and at last proper crisis management planning with new working style “Happy

work from home” instead of simple “Work from home”. There will be much research required in this field and hope each organization will be fully prepared in future to confidently handle such a crisis.

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