



Emerging HR trends during and post COVID-19 scenario: A perspective

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ABSTRACT

The recent pandemic-Covid 19 has changed the way organisations function. The impact has been felt in all management areas be it production, marketing, sales or operations. But one area which saw a major disruption due to the pandemic was that of Human Resource Management. These times saw one of the greatest workplace transformations of our lifetime. In these turbulent times organisations are rediscovering their sense of purpose, innovating rapidly and getting closer to the communities. It is important for HR managers and leaders to evaluate the impact that these changing Trends will have on their workforce operations and strategic objectives. This paper presents a perspective on the major trends recently seen and likely to continue in the HR area in the post pandemic scenario.

Keywords: Pandemic, Transformation, HR area, Perspective

Introduction

Human resource management is the backbone of any organisation. It is well known that the coronavirus pandemic has impacted business world over and has altered the ways in which employees work and are managed by the organisation. Though many organizations have returned or are in the process of returning to normal offline work, there are quite a few who are still continuing to prefer the online mode. COVID-19 has certainly made an important and lasting impact on the future of work. It has led and accelerated one of the greatest workplace transformations of our lifetime. In these turbulent times organisations are rediscovering their sense of purpose, innovating rapidly and getting closer to the communities. It is important for HR managers and leaders to evaluate the impact that these changing Trends will have on their workforce operations and strategic objectives. During such times, mastering deep, meaningful and human connections with all stakeholders has become even more important for business leaders. Firms that invest in trust-building, emotional connect and kindness now, shall secure long-term loyalty and ethical allegiance of their employees. During and post Covid, there would be a new normal that will emerge, and organisations have to ensure that their people are ready and prepared proactively to fit in that new normal. HR leaders are presently facing the crushing duality of trying to keep their employees' lives safe while battling an economic crash wherein maintaining productivity and profitability is an uphill task. HR too is adapting to new ways of work and as suggested by One of the head HR of Service Now, there are certain issues as shown in the figure below which are on HR department's mind.

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Top Issues On HR Departments' Minds

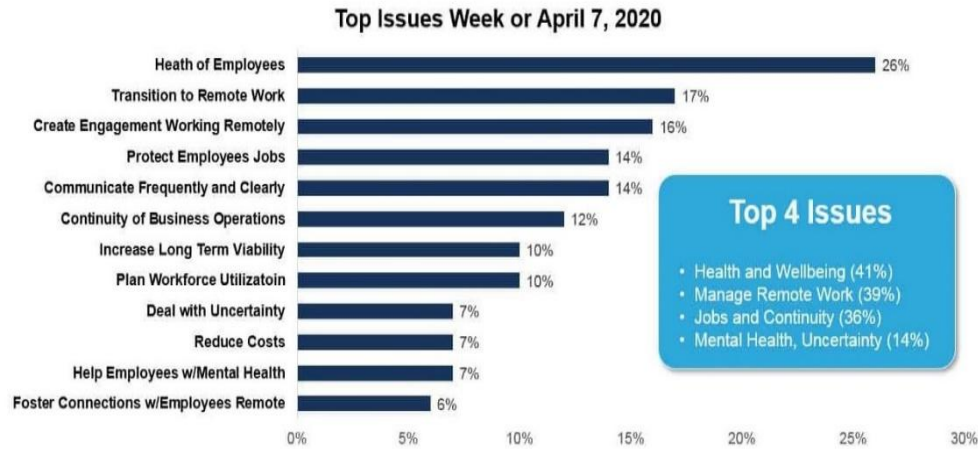


Fig 1: Source: Survey conducted by Service Now

Keeping in mind the above data, in this paper we will try to focus upon the various trends that are likely to emerge in the human resource management field owing to the pandemic & the subsequent complete or partial lockdown and the areas where the HR leaders will have to focus for getting the best results while optimally utilising and motivating their workforce.

1. Trends in the times to come: A discussion

During and Post the Covid-19 scenario, the focus of the organisations is likely to be on the following dimensions relating to the management of their human capital:

1.1 Focus on stress management: Needless to say, the covid-19 scenario has created unprecedented destructive stress for everyone. The modern lifestyle is stressful and covid-19 has only added to the woes of people. Both personal and professional stress has increased manifold and this is the time when organisations have to intervene and think of various measures to help their workforce manage this stress. The mental health of employees is suffering as people are facing extreme anxiety about their overall well-being and at the same time they are concerned about their professional security. The question of survival, both personal and professional, is creating tremendous mental pressure on employees and organisations should help to manage the pressure. Organisations should think about creating digital helpdesks for stressed employees and care should be taken to communicate regularly with those who are more vulnerable. These include those employees whose family members or they themselves are having covid-19 symptoms or those who are staying in containment zones or are quarantined.

Many organisations are also collaborating with yoga and meditation practitioners organise guided meditation sessions for their employees. This is a welcome move and should be continued in the times to come as meditation has always been a critical stress management strategy and is all the more useful in such a difficult time.

1.2 Emphasizing the need for Employee Work Life Balance: Maintaining the right work life balance has always been a priority for employees. Though it is being said that covid-19 has been a blessing in disguise because employees got/ are getting a chance to be at home and spend time with their family members, the reality also is that Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown further blurred the lines between work and leisure. Due to the social distancing norms people do not have outside help in any household work and the work from home requirements are not making life any easier. Having to handle both house and office work at the same time is taking a toll on many people, especially women.

It is important for the Human Resource Department to organise some sessions to make people realise the importance of differentiating between work and pleasure during these times. Neglecting any of the two is not advisable.

HR Managers need to facilitate employees to create separation between work and home life through various measures. One example can be by

providing employees the right tools, software and other equipment so that they can create a workspace within their home. If possible organisations can also think of going a step further and provide subsidies for office furniture, necessary equipment etc. It has to be understood that work from home and physical distancing will stay in the near future (even if the degrees of the same might change) and the key is to allow employees to create a workspace that is as separated as possible from their personal life so that work and home can be physically separated whenever possible. The basic idea should be that both the professional and personal aspects of the employees' life should be taken care of optimally.

2.3. Reinventing Leadership: Preparing for the post-2020 period will require a more flexible, open and streamlined hierarchical system to test and implement new methods and practices and integrate fresh managerial profiles. Leadership is also being completely transformed, and is reinventing itself to manage increasingly open, interactive and differentiated ecosystems in constant flux, which can no longer be managed legitimately by hierarchical authority alone. We have to redesign both their leadership style and the path required to execute it, though there is undeniably a great deal of uncertainty concerning the speed and completion of the major transformations required. These transformations are just beginning, and the final destination is difficult to perceive, much less the steps to get there. The new leadership must create a vision, set a heading and establish a vision, clarify the purpose and give it meaning with respect to the environment and desired contributions, by:

- The individual and collective initiatives of the new leadership will be focused on customers and must anticipate their behavior, particularly in light of the impact of technological trends.
- Being careful to integrate individual agility and disparities to optimize collective intelligence and performance.
- Encouraging calculated risk taking and recognizing the right to make mistakes within a clear and shared delegation framework.
- Inspiring people with unshakeable determination to face uncertainty, challenges and disparities in encountered situations.
- Integrating diverse employee profiles, skills and aspirations in line with the company values.

2.4. Building an Emotionally intelligent Work Force: Emotional intelligence is the ability to interact effectively with other humans. EQ has several components, such as awareness, perception, and regulation, but at its core, it's about whether you can lead through empathy, compassion, influence, and collaboration.

The good news is that emotional intelligence can be developed and fostered. Like all crises, the coronavirus pandemic has pressurized personal and professional life. In that context, the best leaders are those who act with composure and exceptional self-control. You may be a highly gifted and intelligent leader, but if you crumble under the stress and strain of a crisis, you can't lead anyone. Balance your thinking and feeling brain. Don't allow your emotions to hijack your behavior. A growing body of research confirms that emotional intelligence creates psychological safety in the organization, which, as a mediating variable, accelerates performance. View yourself as the lubricating oil of collaboration. Welcome dissent as it's your job to simultaneously increase intellectual friction and decrease social friction. You need diversity of thought, constructive dissent, and creative abrasion to solve problems and find solutions.

2.5. Strengthening the culture of care and nurturing values: While these are some fundamentals to have in place, leaders must not forget the importance of 'culture and values' in times like this. When defining the role of each individual in context to the organization's larger common purpose, it is important for the leader to offer clarity and adequate perspective by advocating a narrative of care that echoes the belief that every employee is making a considerable difference to the organization's overall efforts given the current times. These are times that make the culture and values of the organization much more significant than ever. How an organization conducts itself with its internal and external stakeholders' basis the cultures and values that it enshrines during these testing times demonstrates that these tenets are deeply ingrained into its DNA and are not just a part of the organization talk.

2.6. Fostering collaboration in Workplace: It is wise to leverage the strength of 'collective power' of a team by encouraging collaboration and crowd sourcing. Distributed ownership ensures higher vigilance and responsiveness. This enables the team is able to associate with the shared purpose more intimately than what they would otherwise. An ecosystem that bets big on this power of collaboration and empowers its leaders to make balanced calls keeps the organization dynamic and agile in the face of a global pandemic, thus allowing the workforce to keep things moving without being dependent on a central team. While we all are collectively searching for ways to renew ourselves during these unprecedented times, one should not forget that the power of collaboration coupled with empowerment can become the biggest enabler of navigating during these uncertain times.

2.7. Going digital by Introducing Artificial Intelligence for HR functions: Companies are following social distancing and thus corporates are shifting their few important functions like recruitment, training to virtual platforms and are now resorting to intelligent automated systems that offer virtual

screening environment and interviewing experience, instead of conducting in-person interviews. AI can successfully plan, organize, and coordinate training programs for all staff members. The AI-based interventions helps HR department to understand employee performance and preferences and also help in succession planning by developing a competency matrix. Retention-oriented AI technologies let HR teams prepare individually adapted feedback surveys, reward systems, and recognition programs that further engage employees. Thus, organizations are managing remote working over Zoom, Skype, Teams, Google meet. Though, few companies were already flexible with this option, however this has changed the mindset of traditional organizations. Many small sized companies are now ahead on the curve to have adopted technology successfully as a common form of networking and communication. Deloitte suggests that “most of the HR processes are suitable for having robotics applied to them”, as shown in the figure below.

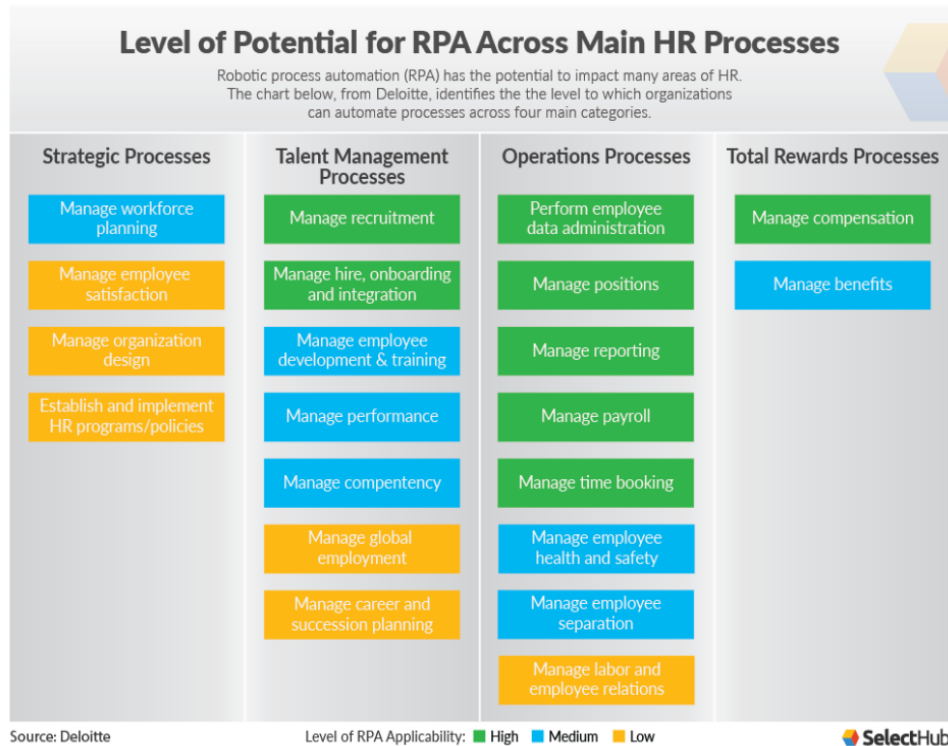


Fig 2: Source: Deloitte

This AI challenge is like a silver lining not only in HR function but its growing usage of AI across various functional areas has drastically surged the demand for individuals with relevant skill-sets.

2.8 Developing remote culture in dispersed workplaces : Organizations had well-defined strong culture during pre-covid times which has now become critical due to obvious reasons. Culture is now vulnerable as social distancing and remote working has changed employee behaviour. The question is how can organization adapt or change its culture to support such factors as culture is also vulnerable in times of crisis when decisions are being made on the fly and financial survival takes priority over almost everything else. So, what is going to work in the hour of crisis is employee engagement, constant communication and employee trust and commitment which are the tools that might work. It falls on a leader now to act as a role model for the type of remote worker that you want your employees to be. Therefore, organizations need to create a culture of ownership for each function or role. Leaders have to control their habit of micromanaging their employees and give them the flexibility to work on their key result areas. Organizations have to help employees' in this transition process of this new way of working and this may even include having more communication, more empathy, understanding and building emotional resilience.

2.9 Working on employees' upskilling and reskilling: In the pre-pandemic scenario, HR professionals were able to easily recruit and onboard skilled individuals to meet specific job requirements. If the job description changed, the employee could be replaced by a new employee. Experts opine that the future will rely more on expanding job sets for existing personnel and searching for adjacent skill sets with new personnel. As the business world changes more rapidly, it is important to ensure that employees display the ability to pivot and adjust to new job demands. Instead of becoming obsolete, the company can take advantage of new skills and retain a valued employee in a new capacity by focusing on upskilling or reskilling him/her. This requires analyzing and cataloging skills sets that can easily be accessed or activated as situations demand.

2. Conclusion

It can be said that role shift of HR will lead organizations to invest more thought and resources into branding and catering to employees' needs. There seems to be a paradigm shift towards greater diversity and inclusive leadership. The pandemic has increased the trend of employers playing an expanded role in their employees' financial, physical and mental well-being.

Brian Kropp, distinguished Vice President, Gartner succinctly puts it as "It's critical for business leaders to understand that large-scale shifts are changing how people work and how business gets done and HR leaders who respond effectively can ensure their organizations stand out from competitors." Organizations should be more flexible so as to build trust and commitment which will eventually serve as a key ingredients for higher productivity. Though it is true that this crisis situation has created unwarranted obstacles for the organisations throughout the world, it is also true that today's struggles and problems will force the organisations to think of new ways, better approaches and fresh perspectives to make working and managing people more effective. Post covid-19 scenario, we are likely see a new normal of working which will seemingly redefine the strategic role of Human Resource Management for organizational survival and development.

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