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A Reflection of the Best Fit and Best Practices Schools of Thought on Human Resource Management Practices and its Impact During COVID-19

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Abstract

Properly handled human resources have been associated with organisational triumph. However, this has never been the case during the pandemic. Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic has universally and considerably, *inter alia*, affected both the organizations and the human resource management (HRM) aspects. Numerous challenges have been observed and various responses have been attempted, some of which necessitated human resource flexibility in the context of HRM strategies and practices under crisis circumstances. There emerged more than demand for support from the employees especially with the uncertain future and high possibility of losing jobs or salary deduction. Certainly, this is when the HR department is expected to design the right HRM strategies to counteract the challenges of COVID-19. This review explores HRM practices reflecting the best fit and best practices schools of thought. A scoping review approach was used in both data collection and analysis involving 103 articles obtained from Google Scholar, AJOL, Pubmed, Embase, Medline, CINAHL Full text, Academic Search Premier, CAB abstract, Web of Science search engines, and databases. Keywords involved in the search query were: "human resource management", Best Fit School of Thought, Best Practices Schools of Thought resource management under COVID-19, workplaces and COVID-19; COVID-19 Pandemic and 'effects of COVID-19 at workplaces". The best fits and best practices included provision of employees' security, hiring the right quality people, effective and self-managed teams, fair and performance-based compensation, and training in relevant skills. Others were the creation of flat and egalitarian organizations, easing information accessibility to employees, creating emergency response teams, care for employee wellness and safety initiatives together with implementation of remote work strategies. It has been observed that Human Resources departments did their best to keep organizations moving during COVID-19. It is recommended that organisations should sustainably promote these best fits and best practices in case of any pandemic.

Keywords: HRM, COVID-19, Best Fit, Best Practices, pandemic, human resource flexibility

1.0 Background Information

Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) has been observed to have profusely confused humans and what surrounds their lives, almost leaving no single sphere untouched, including the socio-economic, and political aspects (Oluyase, *et al.*, 2021; Akat & Karataş, 2020; Burgess, & Sievertsen, 2020; Cao *et al.*, 2020; Kang, *et al.*, 2020; Ansell *et al.*, 2021; Ngwakwe, 2020; UNDP, 2020; Di Fusco *et al.*, 2021; Gedik 2020; Kesale, *et al.*, 2022). At the center of these frustrations, the world of working has been very visible and vulnerable. This is where the world of working men and women has been immensely seen falling



into shambles as the pandemic shot various sectors (ILO 2020a, 2020b; Famiglietti, *et al.*,2020; Montenovo, *et al.*, 2020; IMF 2020; Besart, & Nayyar. 2020). Globally, in light of that, the pandemic has significantly been observed to affect generally the work organizations and the human resource management (HRM) aspects in work organisations (Kang, *et al.*, 2020; U.S. Department of Labour, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2020; Løkke & Wunderlich, 2023). Numerous challenges have been observed and various responses have been established (WHO, 2020; Nussbaumer-Streit *et al.*, 2020; The Council of Economic Advisors, 2020; Ho. *et al.* , 2020; Brooks, *et al.* 2020; Jain, 2020;). In an attempt to keep the community safe; lockdown and social distancing were part of such responses. Despite having potential for employee safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and social distancing have been seen in the light of disrupting the work arrangement and order. In this context, human resource flexibility was deemed important and hence had to go hand in hand with human resource strategy and practices under crisis circumstances facing employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Inter alia, during pandemics, employees need to be supported more than ever. It is during such times too that employees' futures seem to be blank and uncertain, and most likely with a high possibility of losing jobs or salary deductions. Certainly, this is when the Human Resource department is expected to design the right human resource strategies that could counteract challenges unfolding with the emergence of the pandemic.

Undeniably, human resources have a vital role to play in achieving goals and objectives in an organization; the failure to design the right strategies to contain any mishaps can result in negative effects on organizational performance (Waseem, *et al.*, 2013). This applies on the count that the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization in terms of achieving its goals and objectives rest to a great extent on how a particular organization has managed to have its business strategy forming the basis of human resource management strategies. In the face of a lockdown, some industries had to close for the sake of the safety of workers, leading to halted production. The question would be: Did the organizations continue to pay workers on lockdown? If not, what were the alternative arrangements? This is achieved, among others, through strategies and policies designed by human resources specialists that have been oriented towards obtaining value from the pool of the workforce which leads to the effectiveness of employees. This, if taken in the context of the fact that employees are the human capital, the lifeblood, and the most important resource in most organizations, what have been the best fit during the pandemic situation, and what have been the practices?

It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has manifested in a wide range of settings beyond healthcare. These incidents have imposed the need for introduction of policies to protect employees and for preventing further transmission of COVID-19 to the community. In the long run, such measures would result in the protection of national economies through the maintenance of open and safe workplaces (WHO & ILO, 2021). Nevertheless, there have been inconsistencies concerning both national and sub-national policy recommendations guiding workplaces on the best practices for the prevention and protection of workers from the transmission of COVID-19. In some countries and work organisations, lockdown was discouraged while in others encouraged. Instead of lockdown, there were incidences of simply identifying and isolating those workers who were found to be potentially infectious individuals to protect other workers, customers, and even visitors at worksites (OSHA, 2021; Nussbaumer-Streit *et al.*, 2020; The Council of Economic Advisors, 2020; Brooks *et al.* 2020).

Cognizant of the challenges brought forth by COVID-19 in the world of work and the need to effectively prevent and protect workers in the absence of universal policy recommendations best suited to different working contexts, this article analyses HRM-related practices designed in the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic reflecting the 'best fit' and 'best practices' schools of thought on how to manage people based on documented shreds of evidence. Work organizations ultimately need to achieve intended goals and objectives but on the same note attempting to keep the most valued assets – 'the workers'- safe as both lockdown and social distancing present a significant proportion of responses in combating COVID-19. It is against this background that this article reviews Best Fit and Best Practices Schools of Thought on Human Resource Management-related practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Best Fit School of Thought on People's Management

This school of thought claims that to add value to people's management, there is a need to align human resource policies with business strategies. This calls for the need to develop HRM policies that are reflective of business strategies. Ostensibly, this connotes the fact that there is a need for HRM to focus on the needs of the organization together with those of its employees (Vulpen, 2018). In this article, this school of thought was employed to reflect on how in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, work organisations struggled to advance both the needs of organisations and the employees through best-fit strategies in the context of the pandemic. Apparently, organizations have always been seen in the context of consistently wanting to attain their goals and objectives regardless of whatever. Employees have the desire to meet their basic needs by exchanging their skills and knowledge for pay, but at the same time, they remain safe. In the context of COVID-19, all these desires seem elusive. It is against this that the review establishes what organizations from the HRM point of managed to settle these scores in the context COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Best Practices School of Thought

It is argued by this school of thought that superior business performance normally results from a set of universal human resource processes (Redman & Wilkinson, 2009; Pfeffer, 1994; 1998). The proponents of the Best Practices School of Thought claim that there exist certain bundles of HR activities that normally boost the likelihood of companies attaining a competitive advantage notwithstanding the organizational setting or industry (Redman & Wilkinson, 2009). These are practices that usually have the potential to create a win-win situation for both the organization and the workers.

Pfeffer (1994; 1998) identifies seven HR best practices that can increase an organization's profit. It is when such best practices are combined (or bundled), that a profound impact can be registered. These best practices include the provision of employee security, hiring the right quality of people, and the creation of effective teams that are self-managed and results-oriented. Other best practices are implementing compensation systems that are fair but also performance-based. Provision of training in skills that are relevant to the functioning of an organisation, creation of a "flat and egalitarian organization" and enabling easy accessibility to information when needed have been identified by Pfeffer (1994; 1998) among the best practices.

3.0 Methodology

This article employed a scoping review which involved a systematic search in several search engines and electronic bibliographic databases to capture appropriate peer-reviewed studies. The protocol for this scoping review on Human Resource Management Related Practices during the COVID-19 pandemic reflecting on Best Fit and Best Practices Schools of Thought similarly followed procedures detailed in studies by Arksey & O'Malley (2005); and Levac et al (2010).

The relevant publications for the review were those original peer-reviewed English language articles published between 2019 and 2022 that employed quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods research. The time covered (2019 to 2022) signifies the peak of COVID-19 spread globally. Another criterion considered was that such studies should be centred on COVID-19 and particularly on aspects of Human Resource Management Related Practices. The review included search queries with keywords such as "*human resource management*", "*Best Fit School of Thought*" *Best Practices Schools of Thought*" *human resource management under COVID-19, workplaces and COVID-19; COVID-19 Pandemic, 'effects of COVID-19 at workplaces'*. The articles were reviewed by screening them for selection following eligibility criteria concerning screening of the titles and abstracts, then followed by full texts. The identification of articles was made through systematic searches of databases including AJOL, PubMed, CINAHL Plus with full text, MEDLINE (Embase), Academic Search Premier (EBSCO host), Google Scholar, CAB Abstract (ovid), and Web of Science. Data were extracted to record information such as "author(s) name, year of publication, where published, study purposes and design (e.g. mixed methods, quantitative, or qualitative), and key findings". Validation of the collected information was done to ensure accuracy

before quality appraising. The review used Wallace et al. (2004) criteria together with a modified rating system as suggested by Ohly et al., (2016) towards developing a checklist for the quality appraisal for the qualitative studies. This was followed by the preparation of a narrative account of the included studies to present patterns in Human Resource Management Related Practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic reflecting on Best Fit & Best Practices Schools of Thought. The literature search flow is summarised in Fig. 1.

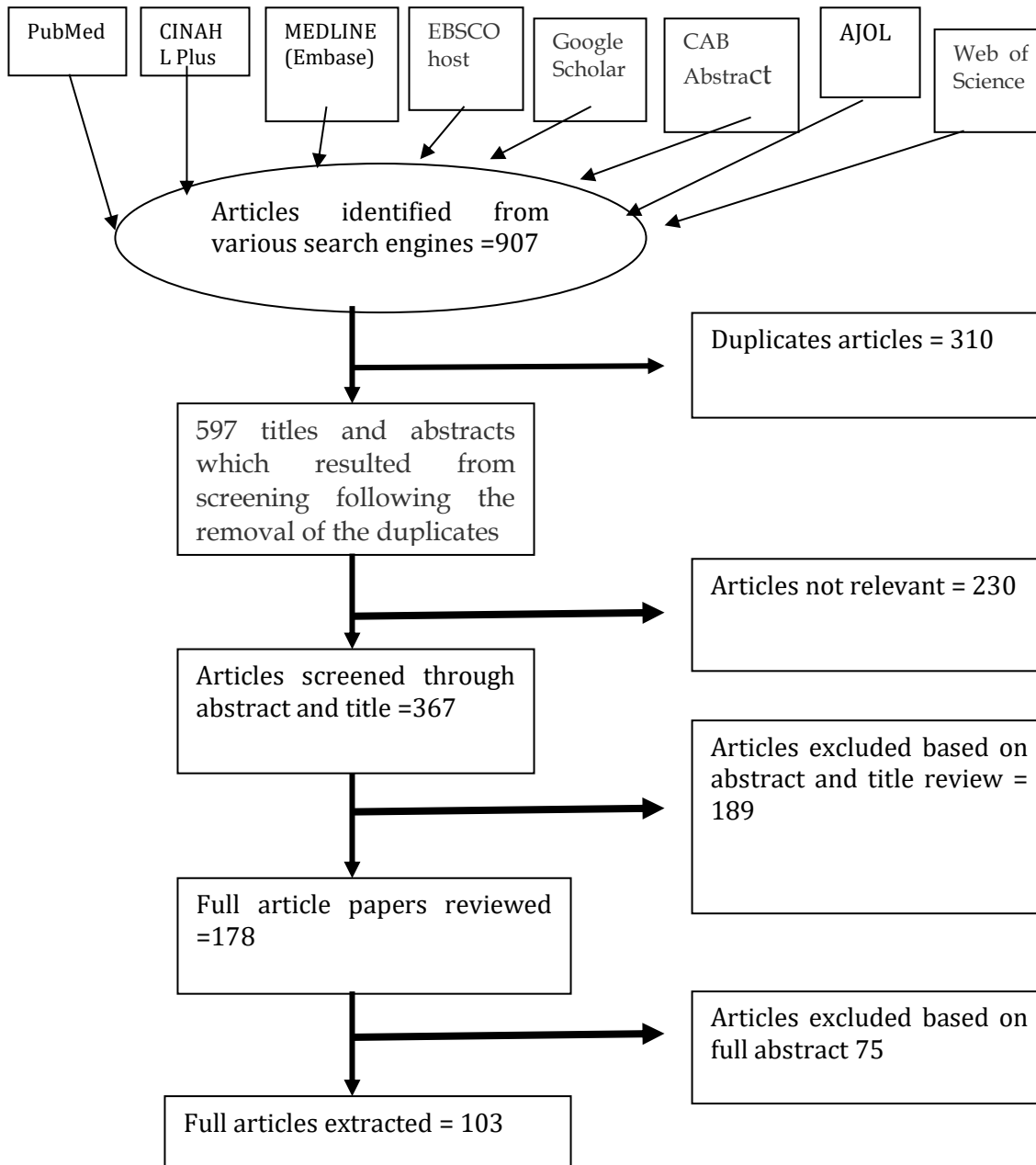


Figure 1: Literature search flow diagram

4.0 Results

Electronic databases searched brought 907 records (AJOL 187, Pubmed: 174, Embase: 191, Medline: 28, CINAHL Fulltext: 95, Academic search premier: 92, CAB abstract: 70, Web of Science: 70) that ended in 597 titles and abstracts which resulted from screening following the removal of the duplicates. A total of 173 full-text articles were retrieved from various sources. The full-text screening stage led to 103 potential articles relevant to the scoping review. Additional articles were excluded after full-text assessment for various reasons. A total of 103 articles were therefore included in the final data extraction, quality appraisal, and narrative account stages.

The themes generated from these articles include notable responses to COVID-19 from the world of work. The best fit and best practices during COVID-19 identified were a provision of employees' security, hiring the right quality people, effective and self-managed teams, fair and performance-based compensation, and training in relevant skills. Additionally, other themes were the creation of flat and egalitarian organization, making information easily accessible to employees, creating/activating an emergency response team, care for staff employee wellness and safety initiatives together with implementation of remote work strategies.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 COVID-19 and the World of Work: Some Notable Responses

Globally, to curb the COVID-19 pandemic countless responses were devised, including; border closure, lockdown, and social distancing, among others (Nussbaumer-Streit et al., 2020; The Council of Economic Advisors, 2020; Brooks et al. 2020). The implementation of these responses, in the context of workplaces, has been significantly seen to affect negatively the human resource management aspects, in innumerable ways (Løkke & Wunderlich, 2023).

Kniffin et al., (2021) identified the inestimable effects of COVID-19 on workers and workplaces globally. In this report, a broad review of previous research embedded in "work and organizational psychology, and related fields, for making sense of the implications for employees, teams, and work organizations" has been discussed. Kniffin *et al.*, (2021) specifically point out issues such as emerging changes in work-related practices, including, but not limited to working from home, and virtual teams. Others are economic and social-psychological impacts such as unemployment and devastated mental well-being.

5.2 HRM Best Fit and Best Practices during COVID-19

5.2.1 Provision of Employees' Security

It remains a fact that work is a stable factor which is critical to most people much as life is unpredictable. People go to work with an expectation that there is an employer who can enable them to provide for their families and themselves, thus that has always been a motive for people to work. Employment security has always been a position to enable employees to go home after accomplishing tasks in their respective work organisations to provide for their families and themselves (Dasgupta 2001;). In the context of COVID-19, employment security seems to be threatened, since some workplaces had to close due to lockdown (Aguiar-Quintana *et al.*, 2021; Bilal *et al.*, 2020). Also, other responses to contain COVID-19 were social distancing and discouraging gatherings in workplaces.

The COVID-19 pandemic placed flexible work arrangements, especially remote work, in the spotlight. With many countries issuing stay-at-home orders and allowing only essential businesses to keep their physical locations open, unprepared employers were forced to implement flexible work options. The literature (OECD, 2020) indicates that during COVID-19, employers did their best to ensure that workers' security is guaranteed

5.2.2 Hiring the right people

Hiring the right people enables an organization to bring in employees who add value. It is not possible just to hire anyone; the organization wants people who are fit for the job. Organizations do their utmost best to hire exceptional people because they add the most value to the business. Commonly used selection instruments are structured and unstructured interviews, IQ tests, personality assessments, work tests, peer assessments, and reference checks. These (pre-employment) assessments are used to uncover three key candidate characteristics (Redman & Wilkinson, 2009).

a) Ability

Issues to be taken into consideration include the ability of a person to do the job. This specifically includes the right technical and soft skills also the smartness of a person in doing a job.

b) Trainability

This takes into account the possibility of training a person to improve his/her skills, it includes the person's aptitude to learn and keep developing.

c) Commitment

This connotes the possibility of having workers committing themselves to their work and the organization; this is the ability to be able to retain this person once is up to speed and fully productive.

In times of COVID-19, recruitment activities were significantly put on hold in innumerable organizations, while few organizations were moderately involved in recruitment activities (Wunderlich & Moller, 2020; 2021). This could be regarded as a best-fit aspect since most organisations were at that time struggling to keep safe the existing workforces and even downsizing. It would have been difficult to significantly recruit at the same time. Any attempt to recruit could in some ways fail to attract candidates with key candidate characteristics towards hiring the right quality people as stipulated by Redman & Wilkinson (2009).

5.2.3 Effective and Self-managed teams

It is known that teamwork is crucial in achieving goals (Richter, *et al.*, 2011; Golonka, & Mojsa-Kaja, 2013; Gallie, *et al.*, 2012; Takizawa., *et al.* 2021; 2020). High-performance teams are crucial for any company when it comes to achieving success. Teams provide value as they consist of people who are and think differently but are working towards a common goal. This means that different ideas are generated to help achieve the goal.

During COVID-19, effective and self-managed teams were negatively affected since such teams normally require members to work in close physical proximity. Working closely as team members has been the best practice in work organisations since time immemorial, however, this aspect could not have been possible during COVID-19. The best fit and best practice was to adapt an online format to adhere to social distancing guidelines. The world has witnessed some work-related activities continue online and workers teaming up with respect to their mandated tasks resulting in self-managed teams (Brynjolfsson *et al.*, (2020; Tannenbaum *et al* 2021).

5.2.4 Fair and performance-based Compensation

It is obvious that when the right people are hired, the expectation is that they will be compensated above average. These are the people that will add the most value to the company so have to be retained and paid fairly. This is an example that shows how different best practices work together to provide more value than they would alone, in this case, selective hiring, contingent compensation, and employment security. Paying people above the norm also has several potential disadvantages.

5.2.5 Training in relevant skills

This HR best practice states that companies should invest heavily in training time and budget for their employees. After recruiting the best people, you need to ensure that they remain the frontrunners in the field. Thanks to the internet, everyone is connected and can learn anything, anytime, anywhere. In addition to formal learning, on-the-job learning also plays an important role.

It is indicated that during COVID-19, most organizations, conducted no training or less than 1 hour of training was provided to employees per week (Wunderlich, & Moller, 2020; 2021). Those few conducted made significant use of online platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, and the like to effect meetings. It is during COVID-19 that the world witnessed and appreciated the use of ICTs in work organisations.

5.2.6 Creating a Flat and egalitarian organization

This best practice in Human Resources is rooted in the egalitarian practices of Japanese management (Swaab & Galinsky, 2014). Although we just saw that some employees are more critical than others for the organization's success, this shouldn't be communicated in such a way. Every employee is a valuable member of the organization and should be treated as such. In Japanese organizations, this is expressed with common canteens, company uniforms, and similar sickness and holiday entitlement. Such an

egalitarian culture shows that everyone deserves equal respect and could help in promoting the sharing of ideas.

The COVID -19 pandemic seems to have accelerated the move to a “flatter” organizational structure. Instead of being called into the corner office of a boss, with all its trappings of power, this time our leaders are in their “home office”—the dining table, a corner of the living room or perhaps a spare bedroom—often with a cat or a kid running around in the background. And those same leaders have realized that they can trust and rely on employees to produce positive results, even remotely. Organizations that were embracing flatness pre-pandemic were perhaps best prepared for this shift to the new, virtual, decentralized way of working.

Obviously, some organisations which have been practising or employing this approach before the pandemic may have thought this as the ‘best practice’ for any reason, but to other organisations given the pandemic situation that can be considered as ‘the best fit’ since no other option existed.

5.2.7 Making information easily accessible to Employees

It should be noted that information sharing is essential for the attainment of organisational goals and objectives (Sener, *et al.* 2021; Wu, *et al.*, 2014; Wilkerson, 2017). This is an area where a lot of large organizations struggle. How does one keep track of who knows what, so one knows where to go with the questions? HR is often the conduit for much of the internal communication during a crisis. The role of HR in crisis management is to enhance preparedness among personnel and thus ensure effective disaster planning (Athamneh, 2018).

The best practices in the context of the pandemic included the aspects of executive communication during the crisis where it was found that Scandinavian HR did very well on this (Wunderlich, & Moller, 2020). Evidence from previous epidemics indicated that informational support could play a central role in human resource management in times of crisis. The open sharing of information about the situation and objective danger can make employees feel that they are important to the institution and have a role to play in coping with crisis situations, which in turn may affect the sense of security of employees in the workplace and can help in avoiding burn-out syndrome (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2013). In Florida, medical workers who had read the H1N1 influenza pandemic plan were much readier to work in further epidemiological danger than those who did not read it (Basta *et al.*, 2009).

Wunderlich & Løkke, (2020) report that in terms of communication, 65% of the organizations surveyed in Scandinavia indicate that they make rather extensive use of formal meetings systems (incl. Online meetings) to keep employees informed during covid-19. Similarly, there is a high level of communication between employees. More than 80% of organizations indicate that their employees communicate across departments to solve problems.

During COVID-19, noted best practice in most work organisation was to communicate how to report possible cases of COVID-19 exposure or diagnoses. This practice involved sharing with staff the status of identified cases (keeping confidentiality), how the organization is addressing them, and what the organization’s next steps are.

5.2.8 Creating/Activating an Emergency Response Team

Ensuring that HR is part of an Emergency Response Team has remained a very important initiative. It is in this context that the provision of input in the guidelines to the emergency Response team can be implemented, but also gathering and sharing staff and client’s questions and concerns. The HR can inform and share revised policies; provide strategies to manage remote workers; share risks related to the crisis, and make sure that values and equity are still at the center of decision-making. This team should have established meetings on a regularly scheduled basis to discuss updates, initiatives, and communication strategies.

5.2.9 Care for Employee Wellness and Safety Initiatives

Organisations have been keeping in constant communication with their employees on their physical and mental health (Wu, *et al.*, 2021). Staff have been hearing from leaders often and feel supported with respect to their health hence they feel cared. The employers have been practicing empathy and addressing concerns is a prompt matter which is also a sign of care for the employees. Safety is basic and essential, such care and safety have been focusing on hygiene and safety practices which in a way could some chances in combating COVID-19. The employees' wellness and safety initiatives included mitigating employee concerns and anxiety by proactively talking about organization's sanitary health practices, safety, and health equipment provision, also sharing the guidelines for basic precautions. The organizations have been encouraging social distancing by asking staff to not only limit travel and large group gatherings, but also avoid handshakes, hugs, and other physical interactions.

5.2.10 Implementation of Remote Work Strategies

Social distancing is key for helping slow down the spread of COVID-19. If working remotely is a possibility, Human Resources have been working with Information Technology to ensure a smooth transition to a remote work scenario. In this context, there was the creation and sharing of a quick guide for supervisors and employees with best practices for working remotely. This guide has been addressing efforts to encourage health and well-being, work engagement, boundaries, and the rhythm and pace of remote work. There emerged a need to set up a live meeting to share these practices. It is reported by KPMG International (2022) that about 89% of the companies have established a remote working policy and a significant number of others are working on it. Similarly, Deloitte (n.d) reports that the number of people working from home in Switzerland has doubled during the coronavirus crisis. The pandemic is likely to cause a permanent increase in remote working even after the crisis (Al-Habaibeh, 2021). However, it should be born in our minds that working from home existed before the COVID-19 pandemic but it was an optional measure, due to Covid-19 the same became a necessity (Aubrey *et al.*, 2018; de Graaff & Rietveld, 2007).

5.3. Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

5.3.1 Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic to the Organizations

The Coronavirus pandemic has disrupted life to an extent that was unprecedented by all. It has caused untold human suffering worldwide resulting in crises, on personal and professional fronts for the human race. The downfall of businesses has created an indelible impact on job cuts and the rise of insecurities in human life has been exponentially increasing (Saladino *et al.*, 2020; Kesale *et al.*, 2022; APS, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020; Duan, & Zhu, 2020; Garcia-Castrillo *et al.*, 2020; Miethke-Morais, 2021).

It has been essential for companies to accept remote work culture and work effectively (KPMG International, 2022). Business models had to be rethought and updated by those who were resistant to the distributed work culture. It can be observed that it is during COVID-19 that the remote work culture business model received a lot of attention. Worldwide, organizations have now allowed their employees to work from the comfort of their homes and thus take precautions to halt the spread of the coronavirus. The remote work culture may perhaps remain the 'Biggest Legacy of COVID-19' for the rest of the time to come.

Employees have been immobile owing to the digital transformation of work. While it is beneficial for many employees to be able to work from home, many corporations lack the infrastructure to offer the capability of the same whilst their business is not being affected. In this situation, it calls for interactive and engaging sessions with employees to keep them interested and enthusiastic during their work. These have been both best fits and best practices that companies had to put in place during COVID-19 in various parts of the world.

5.3.2 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Individuals

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems, and the world of work. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating. A significant proportion of the global workforce has been at risk of losing their livelihoods (REUTERS, 2021). Informal economy workers are particularly

vulnerable because the majority lack social protection and access to quality health care and have lost access to productive assets. Working is an important human resource management aspect without which earning an income during lockdowns would become difficult, without a proper arrangement for many would afford to feed themselves and their families. For most, no income means no food, or, at best, less food and less nutritious food. In this context, COVID-19 almost affected everyone at their places of work. Border closures, trade restrictions, and confinement measures have been preventing workers in some cases from attending to work thus disrupting the functions of the HR department including decimating job. As workers fall ill, and die, the entire work organisation is negatively affected. With low and irregular incomes and a lack of social support, many of them are spurred to continue working, often in unsafe conditions, thus exposing themselves and their families to additional risks. Further, when experiencing income losses, they may resort to negative coping strategies, such as the distress sale of assets, predatory loans, or child labor. Workers are particularly vulnerable as they face risks in their transport, working, and living conditions and struggle to access support measures put in place by governments. The human resource department has to guarantee the safety of all workers from primary producers to those involved in food processing, transport, and retail, including street food vendors. (Oluyase, *et al.*, 2021; Akat & Karataş, 2020; Burgess, & Sievertsen, 2020; Cao *et al.*, 2020; Kang, *et al.*, 2020; Ansell *et al.*, 2021). COVID-19 is reported to have substantially affected the economies of countless countries (Ngwakwe, 2020; Di Fusco *et al.*, 2021; Gedik, 2020; Li, *et al.*, 2020; Oluyase, *et al.* 2021; Kesale, *et al.*, 2022; Bilal *et al.*, 2020).

5.3.3 Human resource management role in crisis management

Crisis management in organizations focuses on operations, system reinforcement, infrastructure development, and public relations (Athamneh, 2018). All these activities are aimed at building the organization's resilience and hence promote sustainability. However, there is a notable tendency of concentrating on these aspects of crisis management, such that the human resource aspect is sidelined. Employees who are likely to be hurt, both physically and emotionally are often neglected during crisis management efforts, such that crisis management plans rarely provide adequate measures for the protection of employees.

Furthermore, employees are the main contributors to the recovery process and their welfare is critical in ensuring effective recovery (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2007; Gabčanová, 2011;). In contemporary times, however, it has become critical for organizations to place priority on the protection of their human resources, hence the increased focus on employee preparedness when it comes to crises. This is because, in a world where information and knowledge are increasingly thriving, organizations have become increasingly reliant on human capital in promoting competitive advantage as opposed to equipment, systems, and technology Employees are currently considered the most important assets within the organization, and hence there is a need for employers to safeguard the safety of their employees (Gabčanová, 2011; Fulmer, & Ployhart, 2014). Organizations are required to pay greater attention to the impact of crises on employees, relatives, and the community, in general, to successfully achieve effective crisis management. It is for this reason that the Human Resources has been vested the role of crisis management within the organization to ensure that employees are well-prepared and that they can survive and recover following unfortunate events. Human Resource has to ensure that staff are included in all business continuity and crisis management plans (Athamneh, 2018).

As the custodian of staff welfare, the Human Resource has an important role to play in ensuring that human capital within the organization is protected and that employees can continue to provide value for the organization beyond the crisis. The Human Resource Department is best positioned to offer disaster preparedness and crisis management training to employees to ensure that they are in a position to handle crises when they occur. Accordingly, the role of Human resources in managing crisis becomes extremely important for any organization that seeks to maintain brand reputation and stakeholder trust, and loyalty.

The Human Resource Department undertakes key roles in crisis management from the pre-crisis to the post-crisis stages. The Human Resource's role is to protect the welfare of employees while at the same time ensuring that they contribute to the organization's sustainability, through doing their part in times of disaster. The role of the Human Resource Department is to ensure that staff are adequately prepared for crises through training, effective leadership, and empowerment, ensuring that security and safety initiatives are taken to protect employees in the event of a crisis and developing communication plans necessary in promoting crisis management.

The roles of Human resources in crisis management are varied and can be classified into different themes as follows.

a) Crisis management planning

This is the process through which an organization makes plans on how to deal with crises, including crisis prevention, impact reduction, and crisis recovery. Crisis management planning enhances the company's ability to deal with crises and ensures faster recovery when an organization is faced with a crisis. Crisis management planning is an imperative process in crisis management because it provides guidelines on preventing or averting crises, dealing with crises, and the recovery process (Athamneh, 2018).

b) Training and talent development

An imperative role of Human Resources in crisis management, training ensures that employees can effectively implement the crisis management plan. Training and talent development provide employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to enhance the recovery process. The Human Resource is expected to lead or participate in training aimed at mentally preparing employees for possible crisis events. This involves the development of a training plan in which employees are provided with knowledge and skills on how to deal with crises. The training should also involve simulation exercises to provide a practical feel about how to deal with real crises. This is discussed in more detail under the topic "Training for crisis management" (Athamneh, 2018).

c) Vulnerabilities and threats communication

Human Resource has a key responsibility to ensure that employees are aware of vulnerabilities and potential threats. This involves identifying and communicating all possible threats within and outside the organization to the employees. Effective communication ensures that employees are physically, emotionally, and intellectually prepared, such that it becomes easier to handle the crisis. Besides providing such information, the Human Resource is expected to develop a crisis communication plan that should be shared among employees to help them in identifying channels of communication in the face of a crisis. It has been noted that the Human Resource is a strategic partner when it comes to human resource management and should therefore understand the crisis management language, enough to lead preparedness and recovery (Athamneh, 2018).

d) Promoting employee involvement

The Human Resource has a key role to play in crisis management and consequently promoting sustainability preparedness in an organization. Notably, disasters both within and outside the working environment are likely to impact the organization and its employees in a significant manner, such that there is a need to design preparedness measures to promote sustainability. COVID-19 has been the disaster recorded in the history of human kind. The role of the Human Resource is based on the premise that when employees are affected by a crisis, the organization becomes vulnerable. Surely, people within the organization are considered the solution to the challenges faced by the organization in the face of a crisis, such that preparing them for disaster is considered an imperative aspect of business management.

5.3.4 COVID-19 and the changing HRM Practices

The place and relevance of HRM pandemic has been further revealed in organizations and companies especially with the new challenges raised by Coronavirus. Employees need to be supported more than ever especially with the uncertain future and the high possibility of losing jobs or salary deduction. So, employers start depending more on their Human Resource department to obtain the right Human

Resource strategy which could face new Challenges. Therefore, the report spots light on the different problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemics such as the increasing unemployment rate, the salary deduction, the psychological impact of COVID-19 on employees, managing the remote work, the working hours, tensions between employees, and the social distance. The problem faced by Human Resource professionals is when applying a new Human Resource strategy to adapt to the different challenges caused by a coronavirus, the new practices are not fitting to all employees (Mala, 2020). For example, many families face big difficulties between staying with the kids at home during school shut down because of the pandemic of COVID- 19 and going to their work or managing the remote work while their kids are at home. So, the Human Resource strategy could not be ideal for them. Also, Mala's report shows the importance of the Human Resource flexibility in applying Human Resource strategy and practices especially with the different circumstances each employee may face because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Mala, 2020).

6.0 Conclusion

The world was not prepared to work remotely, this study concludes that good performance in any work organization during the COVID-19 crisis and even during other future pandemics can be achieved when there are best human resources management practices. The study recommends that all human resources aspects must be well embraced and adhered to including Training and development, compensation and rewards, performance management, recruitment and selection in the advent of such pandemics. There is a need to recognize that employees are organizations' most important assets. They should be provided with programs for personal and career development on how to face the challenges in case of a pandemic. Effective handling of human resources aspects during the pandemic can be achieved if organisations would go the extra mile to create guidelines with respect to how best to manage both remote employees and remote working too.

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