

IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON HR ISSUES IN ONLINE RETAIL SECTOR

Mrs. Shilpika Pandey

Abstract:

With manpower turnover rising among online retailers, businesses must closely benchmark pay as they look to replace workers and, in some cases, ramp up hiring plans. The study emphasizes on impact of covid-19 faced by Personnel management while managing employees in E-commerce Industry. Data for this study were drawn from a review of secondary sources highlighting Covid-19 challenges, suggesting appropriate solutions to resolve the issues of online retail, which should be addressed at the earliest to ensure successful retail operations avoiding unexpected economic threats created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19, has driven the entire world to come in the chains of quarantine commands. Timely, governmental guidelines to avoid physical contacts with other persons have created phobia among all humans. The novel Covid-19 has impacted every business sector around the globe. The retail sector alongside all other sectors is additionally adversely suffering from Covid-19. According to The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, countries about 1 in 12 workers are employed within the retail sector and this sector contribute almost 5% of GDP. However, due to Covid-19 threat, along with other sectors, the retail sector is also facing severe downfall. The Indian e-commerce market has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of the pandemic, as containment measures introduced millions to the convenience of online shopping, and prompted seasoned online shoppers to buy more.

The pandemic-induced lockdown and movement restrictions marked an inflection point for e-commerce in India, pushing demand to record highs, nudging new

buyers as well as sellers onto digital platforms, and holding out the promise of lasting growth for players.

Social distancing compulsions throughout the year, aggressive smart phone base and reliable broadband galvanized e-commerce uptake beyond metros, cities and towns, brought an element of 'trust in online businesses.

The thrust of pandemic necessitated the use of techno intensive and non-contact formats to meet the endless demand. Analysts said these shifts in consumer shopping traits are here to remain, post-pandemic.

The pandemic induced about a "structural shift" in shopping attitude with more and more customers and businesses relying on e-commerce. Players like Amazon and Flipkart as well as industry watchers identified that the need for physical distancing and prioritizing health & safety during the pandemic led to millions of people switching to e-commerce platforms this year.

From shift in category preferences to the emergence of "new essentials", and from the adoption of native languages to a surge in new-age sorts of payments -- the past year witnessed an array of unique consumer trends.

Amazon also saw similar trends as thousands of neighborhood Kirana stores and offline retailers also came onboard to leverage digital technology to succeed in customers' doorstep.

In this crisis, the retailers are in need of support from their employees quite ever before. Retailers can have

the tangible cooperation of employees, only when the human resource management involves completely manages retail personnel both online and offline. In service industries, particularly in retail services, commitment and motivation of employees is 'essential', because highly motivated and committed employees will surely provide outstanding service to the clientele.

As the covid started, since November-December, 2019, it has drastically changed global living. Currently, the world is experiencing an exceptional public health emergency. In this phase of social uncertainty, almost all businesses are under sales crunch. As per government data "With the COVID-19 pandemic limiting movement and disrupting economic activity, retail sales dropped 8.7% in March, but on an equivalent hand has cause drastic hike in e-commerce activities"

It is a known incontrovertible fact that an organized mercantile establishment provides employment to an outsized number. Therefore managing human resources in organized online stores, is more critical

METHODOLOGY

Data for research was collected from a review of secondary sources. The literature of this study is obtainable in two different parts, the first part explores the challenges faced by human resource management, in organized retail operations amid Covid-19 and in the second section, and fine solutions are presented to overcome these challenges faced by human resource management, in online retail operations.

Like any other business, e-commerce brands are experiencing a lot of issues when it comes to hiring, managing & training staff during a raging pandemic. Many talents are held up indoors, the economic recession has strained many professionals to change

careers, and meeting up with potential recruits for face-to-face interviews borders on impossible. The best part is that there are routes of solutions to eliminate these problems – once they are highlighted and clearly defined.

Here are four recruitment and training issues that online retail businesses face at the moment:

1. Challenges of moving employees: You will need to hire new workers whenever you expand your operations to a new country. While deploying your in-house workers to run operations for you abroad would prevent time and money because you won't get to retrain them, it comes with tons of HR management challenges. For starters, it might take tons of your time for your in-house employees to urge went to working abroad, mostly thanks to culture-related issues. The current COVID 19 travel restrictions, cessation of movement in some cities, and regional lockdowns make situation more struggling. There might be delays in shipping employees, which can impair your company's yield and make your business lag in an already aggressive market.

What can you do about this challenge? Rather than shipping your current staff, you'll partner with knowledgeable employer organization (PEO) to recruit the locals. Working with a payroll outsourcing service features a number of advantages, including shared risks and management of human resource duties.

2. Union intervention. Almost all professionals around the world are members of at least one workers' Association. From an employee's perspective, unions are great because they empower them to bargain for better pay and improved working conditions – something that's especially crucial during an epidemic. However, from an employer's perspective, unions put unnecessary barriers to what would rather be a smooth hiring process.

Thus, if you've got moved your e-commerce operations to countries where unions are vocal, you would like to trade carefully to avoid unwanted lawsuits and/or industrial action. To ensure that you simply don't find yourself on the incorrect side of the law, you would like to urge an attorney to assist you demystify the wants that unions want to be fulfilled before hiring employees in their country. When you suit their demands, there's a zero chance that a union will interfere together with your business endeavors.

3. Communication barrier. While you would possibly not experience any challenges with local recruits, your foreign ones may have a challenge working together with your e-commerce when it's not tailored to their primary language. To overcome this problem, your best bet is to only hire employees with a basic understanding of your language.

You may also prefer to educate your foreign staff members on a standard language for all of your brand's operations. You can achieve this by leveraging online language training programs, where recruits can master the language before they start working for you. Better still, you'll source translation services to professionally translate your e-commerce brand messages to the specified foreign language. The beauty of hiring translation services is that you simply will help your new staff to raise understand your brand culture, reputation, and, most significantly, mission and vision. It will even be easier for them to contribute to the expansion of your business, as long as they understand the requirements of potential customers or clients in their contexts.

4. Reduced personal contact. There are many advantages of sitting face to face with a job candidate or a client and understanding his mindset. For starters, you'll learn tons a few person's general character and attitude by studying their visual communication.

COVID 19 has eliminated that crucial hiring part and direct contact with the customers.

Given that it's tricky to know someone virtually during an interview, you'll do a radical background check on them before short listing them. The way to do this is by scanning their social media pages keenly to see what kind of content they post and how they interact with content from other users. You can also invite their CV, motivational letter, or professional portfolio, and request that these files get converted to PDF, in order that these documents don't change the format. The information you get will offer you an almost clear picture of the character of the person who you're meaning to hire.

Most of the recruitment challenges that online brands face today will survive the pandemic. To be on safe side, it is suggested that you simply amend your staffing policy to form it ready for a revolutionized post-COVID market. Doing this may be challenging initially, but it'll offer you a competitive edge up the end of the day.

Challenges of Employees' Health

According to the planet Health Organization (WHO: 2020), "COVID-19 spreads primarily through respiratory droplets or contact with contaminated surfaces. Exposure can occur at the workplace, while travelling to figure , during work-related visit a neighborhood with area people transmission, also as on the thanks to and from the workplace." Employees while performing their routine tasks in organizations are prone to get infected with the Covid-19 virus. Usually, in organizations the 'Health and Safety Section' which is that the special wing of human resource management is responsible to make sure health and safety of all employees. Prudently, employees are productive assets, their health and safety is utmost important for the success of any

organization. The challenge for human resource management is to form sure that each one employee remains healthy to perform their tasks effectively and efficiently.

Challenges of Uncertainty

In this pandemic situation, most of the companies are uncertain about their next prudent plan of action and every one stakeholders face uncertainty. The main stakeholders, facing uncertainty are both the employers and employees. The constraints which are associated with reducing working hours are the concerns of employers and therefore the possible job losses arising out of this are the concerns of employees. According to Michelle Bachelet, (OHCHR: 2020) UN diplomat for Human Rights,

As of 1 April 2020, the ILO's new global estimates indicate that working hours will decline by 6.7 per cent within the second quarter of 2020—equivalent to 195 million full-time jobs lost. It is important to note that the last word tally of annual job losses this year will depend on the evolution of the pandemic and thus the measures taken by governments and therefore the private sector, to mitigate its impact.

Essentially, whether it's a natural disaster or global health concerns like pandemic Covid-19, every business is sure to encounter some unexpected circumstances. It is not always easy to stay the business running smoothly during these trying times. In organized retail organization visibly, the challenge is more pertinent on a part of human resource management to make sure all retail employees remain motivated during this unprecedented pandemic situation (Cassady: 2020).

Challenges of Communication

Novel Covid-19 has imposed challenges not only to businesses, but also equally to government bodies altogether parts of the planet. Government bodies are worried to make sure safety and wellbeing of citizens and that they are arising with different measures including closure of companies to curb spreading of Covid-19. With specific regard to Sultanate of Oman, the Omani Supreme Committee issued number of orders to curb the spread of Covid-19, which incorporates banning all visit and from Oman, closer of schools, malls, shops, cinema etc. ordering private sector to reduce its workforce to the minimum required and allowing staff to work from home (Al Harthy&Wigley: 2020).

Obviously, to curb the spread of Covid-19, the respective governments of the planet are imposing governmental regulations. Conversely, these measures are imposing challenges to the organized retail stores management in winning the trust and confidence of employees. Therefore, during compulsory lockdown, to avoid confusion and overcome insecurity of all employees, the human resource managers should remain connected a minimum of remotely with employees. The challenge for the human resource management is to win the trust and confidence of all retail employees by using appropriate communication tools, as this might contribute to winning the trust of customers.

Challenges of On-line sales

Online sales are getting an enormous platform, growing at an unprecedented rate during the Covid-19 situation. In this pandemic crisis, customers' are avoiding physical shopping but choosing online shopping as an alternate. To ensure revenues are generated, brick and mortar retail businesses are adopting or depending excessively on 'online sales'.

However, handling online sales has its own challenges, particularly, for the brick and mortar retail stores, which basically serve physical shopping to customers, now resorting to online shopping, will have to experience many difficulties. Concerning the difficulties related to online sales to brick and mortar retail businesses, Lee Yohn (Denise: 2020) states “Even before the Covid-19 pandemic and depression, brick-and-mortar retailers had been fighting a fierce battle against Amazon and other e-commerce players. Those challenges have now accelerated at staggering speed.”

DISCUSSION

Solutions to Challenges - Overcoming the Covid-19 challenges faced by human resource management, in online retail operations

Emphasize on training front-line retail sales personnel

The pandemic situation is turning unsteady every day, every moment, because there is no tangible vaccine available in any part of the world. However, until the vaccine is available, to moderate the risk of spreading the menace-Covid-19, the human resource department can focus on training the staff on sterile matters. For the safety of customers and employees and every stakeholder, the human resource management must promote an ambiance of calm while getting engrossed into headship to act in response with timely, accurate, firm, clear and steady communiqué with all levels of organization.

Services of forefront workforce are too vital for any retail platform. For all retail firms, connections with clientele are highly dependent on the actions of front-line workforce, because they are more closely linked to clients than organization. Therefore, the human resource department must organize training sessions for employees particularly focusing on usage of sanitizers, wearing gloves, keeping the surroundings

hygienic, handling the edible products with extra care, in addition to all assisting staff in maintaining social distancing while delivering the orders to the customers. Focusing on imparting hygiene and allied training to sales staff is crucial; because if they are trained efficiently, only then they will serve customers professionally.

Developing substantial progression planning strategies in retail setup:

It is the accountability of human resource management to develop existing policies concerned succession planning. Progression planning increases the accessibility of proficient staff members, who are prepared to assume the role and bear the responsibility as and when the roles become available. Progression planning helps develop an organization to accomplish future needs that supports employee growth and capacity management (Ballaro & Polk: 2017, pp.3). Progression planning is projected to help the firms in managing and controlling the attrition of the internal talent. (Bolander et al.: 2017, pp.1523-1551; Ali & Mehreen: 2018, pp.41). The purpose of having solid progression planning is to help put up the career of the existing employees and ensure quick substitute of staff in retail businesses particularly, when the Covid-19 cases are at hike every day. According to Gordon and Overbey (Gordon & Overbey: 2018, pp.142) “A considerate progression planning accomplishment will make sure that organizations are more likely to endure, and to sustain leaders and followers”.

Apart from progression planning, depending upon the inevitability, the human resource management should also plan for layoffs with extreme rationalization, because many retail organizations are in phase of cash crunch predominantly the small and medium retailers.

With special reference to India, small and medium retailers in the country are facing cash crunch and are heading towards manpower validation. According to the analysis conducted by the retail trade body 'Retailers Association of India', small retailers are likely to lay off 30% of their employee strength, medium retailers are expected to cut 12% of their manpower and large retailers are expecting to reduce 5% of the workforce (Sandeep: 2020). Whether it is progression planning required for replacing employees or layoff because of downsizing, the human resource management should implement their duty with equity and justice, and shall ensure that the status of the retail stores is not at pledge.

Planning and execution exalting methodology to make sure happiness and yield of employees in e commerce industries

Though the human resource department is not directly in control of achieving employees' potency, usually human resource management choices embrace strengthening the output of staff. Human resource management is presently facing a very irreproducible challenge, thanks to this pandemic, each in achieving men productivity and making certain them job security. Human resource management has to start out varied enticement set ups that ar price effective to the management and can plan various psychological feature techniques within the least levels of retail organization. The human resource management professionals shall keep in mind that, the foremost normally used live of retail productivity is labor productivity i.e. the quantitative relation between a live of output (Frequent sales) and a live of labor (the variety of staff or man hours worked). However, it's essential that the retail organization ought to conjointly provide equal concern to alternative factors i.e. capital, land etc., aboard labor as a part of production (Higón et al.: 2010).

Directing the employees to stick to the health pointers

For retail staff to remain secured from Covid-19, the human resource management has to border health and safety rules by giving priority to government laws and suggestions, and can conjointly make sure that the principles ar diligently followed by all staff at business. Maintaining smart work hygiene is additionally vital. Between shifts, retailers will suspend operations at their distribution centers so as that improvement crews will sanitize instrumentality. Health screenings will quickly determine staff United Nations agency are unwell. And every one employees, whether or not long or temporary hires, ought to bear coaching in correct health measures and be the proper protecting tools. Necessarily, the human resource management ought to take the headache to direct front-line retail staff and each one alternative employees, to stay to the health pointers issued timely by the organization to restrain the unfold of Covid-19.

Arranging awareness sessions to beat uncertainty of retail employees

Human resource management ought to organize awareness sessions to show employees to prevent the transmission of the virus Covid-19. Uppal (Uppal: 2020) declarative the list of priorities, that the human resource management imagined to pursue throughout the pandemic Covid-19 occurrence that ar "managing versatile work arrangements, worker communications to extend awareness, addressing worker considerations on work policies, implementing preventive measures, and reviewing current welfare policies." The efforts of human resource management ought to be real enough to assist staff beat their anguish and ambiguity to assist staff recover their confidence.

Using telework tools to enhance communications

The Covid-19 crisis had forced the retailers to use adequately the information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as Zoom; Google meet; smartphones; laptops; and desktop computers and other allied telework tools. ILO defines “telework implies work achieved with the help of ICTs and conducted outside the employer’s locations”. Fernandez (Fernandez: 2020) reasoned the necessity of remote working amid Covid-19 according to him, “In the wake of a surge in Covid-19 cases in the United States, Apple is reworking its retail operations to let retail employees’ work from home”, this effort will help curb the spread of viruses. However, working from home with telework tools has its own challenges, but this challenge can be solved with the proper coordination among all departments of retail stores including human resource management. Once front-line employees understand the usage of the communication tools, then human resource management can communicate to them all matters concerning the health and the safety of employees and customers. When front-line employees understand the safety rules of the organization, this will provide them with adequate awareness to curb the spread of Covid-19, and their awareness will be the best means to ensure customers remain loyal with the stores.

Reskilling the retail workforce to assists in online sales

The special challenge for the human resource department is to reskill the workforce. For which the human resource department should assort/identify/recruit employees with e-business skills. Further the human resource department should identify the retail employees who do not have sufficient e-business skills and provide them training to ensure brick and mortar business do not face

interruptions while dealing with a new mode of sales platform i.e. online sales. The generic difficulty in handling ‘online sales’ may not be for the business which is exclusively dealing in ‘online sales’ for instance Amazon, an American multinational technology company. The concerns related with ‘online sales’ are with brick and mortar retail businesses, which many of these businesses had recently started depending heavily on the on-line transactions to reverse the decreasing number of footfalls caused of Covid-19. McGovern (McGovern: 2020) focusing on the importance of reskilling the workers, presents the statement given by DiarmuidMs Sweeny, CMO, Gym + Coffee, in the article “Reskilling Retail Employees”, according to the CMO, “We had to train our retail store associates to become omni-associates who could help customers with their online shopping experience, which helped us also prevent layoffs or furloughs,”. Apart from training the retail staff in ‘on-line sales’ transactions, the human resource management should insist the concerned department of the organized retail stores to develop customer friendly apps for the retail customers to experience pleasant and time-efficient ‘online sales’.

Revising health policy

Revising policies - another important task the human resource management is expected to execute amid Covid-19 is revising the health policy.

Human resource departments should convince the top management to ensure the appropriate health policies are operational in retail stores which not only safeguard employees’ health but also assures them job security. The retail giant Walmart introduced new Covid-19 policy to support the health of associates, in March, 2020, the essence of the new policy is, if employees are unable to report or uncomfortable at work they can choose to stay home. If any employee is

required to quarantine by a government agency or Walmart, they will receive two weeks of pay and absences will not be counted. If any employee is unable to return to work for a confirmed case of virus, additional pay replacement may be provided for up to 26 weeks for both full-time and part-time hourly associates (Furner: 2020). The efforts of the retail giant are to ensure employees remain confident at work.

Integrating marketing techniques in human resource decisions

The concepts of human resource and marketing are viewed as distantly related to each other. But today as many businesses are globally operating in different parts of the world, the commonality of the two functions are explored by businesses to achieve the organizational goals more innovatively, than compared to the past. According to Colombo and Harris, (OWIWI: 2016), "HR can learn from marketing how to segment talent and how to embrace technology in order to engage with employees and prospects. The latter is more than true as far as the usage of social media is concerned. On the other hand, marketing can learn from HR how to put people first and how to influence business behavior and strategy". The following is the area where the human resource management can adopt marketing techniques for the success and growth of retail organization:

Allocation of roles and responsibilities following marketing segmentation techniques: Market segmentation is the process of creating a subset of the target market to better understand the taste and preferences of customers. According to Sally & Lyndon (Sally & Lyndon:1996) "market segmentation helps companies to satisfy diverse customer needs while maintaining certain scale economics. The process begins by grouping together customers with similar requirements and buying characteristics".

Human resource departments can learn from the marketing department as to how employees can be engaged with technology and the aptitude of segmenting employees, to ensure the customers are satisfied with the services (Rajalakshmi& Srinivasan: 2017). The segmentation technique can be followed on front-line retail employees by categorizing them considering their demographics such as gender, locality, age, and education qualification; this will assist retailers in carrying out an effective training strategy (Raut&Pawar: 2016).

Human resource management should follow strategies which are exclusively followed by marketing personnel; this may assist assessing the staff as internal customers of the organization. Further, it will add value to the optimal utilization of human resources, subsequently developing every retail employee to remain loyal with the company (Liudmila & Maria: 2013).

CONCLUSION

Pandemic Covid-19 has created a fear of the unknown altogether individuals. All businesses around the globe including retail businesses are adversely affected because of lockdown and quarantine orders. To overcome the crisis, retailers are in need of support from their employees quite before, they will have the tangible support of employees, only with the cooperation of human resource management. Since organizations believe human resource management to disseminate the newest information associated with organization and employment, the role of human resource management becomes even tougher during the crisis situation. The study suggests that, the human resource management can overcome the challenges by providing hygienic training sessions to front-line employees, executing succession planning with equity and justice to make sure organization's reputation is not at stake, initiating incentive plans at all levels of

retail organization to motivate employees, directing all staff of retail organization to adhere to the health guidelines, assisting employees in overcoming their uncertainty, ensuring retail staff are familiar with the teleport tools for affective communication, coordinating and integrating with marketing department to assist retail organizations for exploring and achieving organizational goals innovatively.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a big impact on the retail workforce. The sector has rebounded sharply from retail unemployment peaking at 18.6% in April then falling to eight .8% in August[1], but the industry remains recovering from an unprecedented number of layoffs and furloughs shortly into the lockdown period this spring.

Many retail companies used furloughs and layoffs to deal with declining business early within the pandemic. The third edition of our COVID-19 Pulse Survey, conducted from April 28 to May 1, found 62% of retailers in North America had furloughed part of their workforce and 27% reported having laid off workers while 18% were actively considering doing so. The positive news is that in additional recent months, many retailers are planning on bringing their workforce back and stronger hiring practices have resumed. At the time of the fifth edition of our COVID-19 Pulse Survey, conducted from August 17-25, 70% of shops reported that they plan on bringing back a minimum of three quarters of their furloughed workforce within the next six months.

Because of the high proportion of hourly support workers, the retail sector has always had greater turnover compared to other industries. Typically, we see retail turnover rates at 1.4 times the speed of other industries, but we've seen this rate accelerate during the pandemic. Retail turnover is now 1.5 times

the general industry rate, according to our 2020 Salary Increase & Turnover Study – Second Edition.

While turnover is usually costly to a corporation through time spent recruiting and training employees and loss in productivity, a much bigger impact on costs might be whether turnover is driving up wages.

Another factor influencing retail sector wages is that the continued shift toward e-commerce, which has accelerated since the pandemic began. As of September 30, 2019, 17% of all retail new job postings were related to fulfillment and delivery roles. By September 30, 2020, the proportion of fulfillment and delivery jobs rose to 24% of all job postings. The median wages for fulfillment and delivery jobs is now 21% higher than store jobs.

While wages for store employees lag those for fulfillment and delivery roles, we found that median wages for all job roles are higher in regions with an outsized number of distribution and fulfillment centers. In other words, the info shows that where there's a degree of fulfillment and delivery jobs during a region (i.e., more e-commerce activity), there's not only greater pressure on wages for those roles, but it also causes mercantile establishment wages to rise also .

As the e-commerce business continues to grow, and a greater number of distribution centers create more fulfillment and delivery jobs, we expect a rise in offered wages for all kinds of retail jobs, including store roles. Organizations must continuously keep up of local market wage movements because the job marketplace for retail workers is quickly changing.

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