

Managing workforce during Covid 19 Scenario: A perspective

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Abstract - Covid-19 has changed the world in many ways. It has changed the ways in which organisations work and manage their workforce. Economies have been affected and workplace dynamics have changed. Organisations have to rapidly adjust the ways of working and think of ways in which they support their employees while maintaining their focus and overall productivity. This paper tries to present an overview of this changed scenario, discusses how this is a major setback for humanity but has some opportunities and advantages as well and mentions the author's perspective of the way forward for workforce management in organisations.

Key Words: Covid-19, workplace dynamics, support, opportunities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Covid-19, a word that shook the world in the year 2020, a disease that has changed the way we look at things. Our entire perspective of looking at people and relationships has changed. People have started thinking what really matters in life. Economies have been hit, the workplace norms have changed and rather than their fancy wants and desires, people are focusing on fulfillment of basic needs and learning survival tactics.

It can surely be said that the world has changed dramatically and drastically over the last few months. The corona virus pandemic has resulted in a massive loss to the global economy and at the same time the loss of human life has been unprecedented and tragic.

With the vaccine for the general public said to be at least an year away and a majority of residents of the world 'locked-down' in their own homes, it is necessary that we change our perspectives of looking at life and work and relook and rethink about our priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting situation has shaken human race, but what we need now is a judicious mix of optimism and caution and think of the way forward.

2. Impact on Economy

Businesses world over have been impacted adversely due to the covid-19 scenario. The outbreak of this pandemic has disturbed the political, social, economic, religious and financial structures of the entire world. The strongest economies of the world such as The USA, China, UK Germany, France, Italy and Japan are at the verge of collapse. The lockdowns all over the world have impacted all the businesses but certain businesses that have been the worst affected include tourism and travel related Industries, beauty services, hotel and restaurants, sports related organizations, consumer electronics, financial markets and transportation sectors where the business all over the world has come to an abrupt halt. Majority of countries are going through recession and economic structures

are collapsing world over. The Asian Development Bank estimates the Global economic cost of the virus to be a massive 2 to 4 trillion dollars.

Indian economy is also facing tough times. Recently a survey was conducted by FICCI and tax consultancy Dhruva Advisors which took responses from about 380 companies across different businesses sectors in India. The responses indicated that the businesses are facing tremendous uncertainty about their future. The survey indicated that covid-19 is having a deep impact on Indian businesses and there are likely to be a number of job cuts because firms are looking for reducing their manpower to cut costs. This crisis has resulted in the unprecedented collapse of economic activities over the last few weeks. The other notable findings the survey has given includes the impact that covid-19 has had on companies' expansion plans. Results show that in respect of approved expansion plans, 61% expect to defer such expansions for a period up to 6 or 12 months, while 33% percent expect to defer approved expansion plans for more than 12 months. Further, while 60% of the surveyed firms have deferred their fund-raising plans for the next 6-12 months, nearly 25% of the firms have shelved the same. According to KPMG too, the ongoing lockdown in India will have a huge impact on the Indian economy.

3. Major setback for humanity but with some needed advantages for humans

In India, Covid 19 resulted in a nationwide lockdown and social distancing becoming the norm for all citizens. Though this crisis scenario comes with major disadvantages, there is a silver lining as we can find a few good aspects or advantages which we realised during this phase. Some of those disadvantages and advantages can be discussed here.

The major disadvantage of this scenario faced by general public is that there is a major social cost involved. Not everything can be done effectively online and on phone. Being isolated from others can result in negative feelings and depression in some people (especially those who are away from families) as is being witnessed in many cases. A gentle hug or a reassuring touch cannot be substituted. Many of the people are concerned about their parents, relatives and friends but can't go and meet them even if they are in need of help. Moreover as discussed previously, there are obvious economic implications of the lockdown as well because the production, distribution and mobilization of resources becomes a challenging task in the absence of requisite manpower.

Despite all drawbacks, some positives which have emerged out of this scenario include:

- a) A major advantage is that the environmental benefits of countries being in lockdown across the world have caused many to rejoice. From clearer water in Venice to blue skies in India, the world is seeing a positive benefit on the environment as a result of the lockdown due to corona virus outbreak. Level of smog in countries that usually experience it have been

down because of lockdowns. Wildlife and Nature is reaping the benefits of decreased human interference. How long these benefits will last after this crisis is over is a matter of concern though.

- b) The second advantage which many of us would be experiencing is that we learn to enjoy our own company. Due to almost no events to attend and no one to meet, we can take a pause in life and spend some time with ourselves, introspecting and pondering over what really matters in life. We can rethink about our life goals and enjoy solitude, which is a luxury in the robotic lives we all are leading today.
- c) This phase gives us a chance to concentrate on our work. We can study and work without many external distractions. This distancing has also made us self dependant. With no house-helps around, we have to handle every household chore ourselves. No doubt we are tired, but we have learned to multi-task.

So we humans need to understand that this phase undoubtedly may seem to be depressing, but it can also be a time to nurture our relationships and let the nature recover.

4. Way Forward: Required measures for workforce management

It is very well understood that covid-19 has permanently changed our lifestyles and our workplaces are also a part of it. Both personal and professional ways of working will certainly be impacted after this crisis. We are already witnessing changes in our way of working and in the way in which workforce is being managed nowadays. During this period, while it is of utmost importance for the organizations to take appropriate measures for taking care of their human resources, they also need to keep reminding their employees that they should also take personal measures for their well being and stay away from stress and depression which are very easy to creep up during such times. Moreover, this crisis is not likely just vanish in a few days, it will take time to subside and precautions will have to be taken even after the world is declared corona free.

The major aspects on which an organization will have to focus while taking care of their Human Resources during and after this crisis are:

- a) **Managing remote workforce optimally:** Managing employees face to face and managing them remotely are two very different things. Due to this pandemic most of the employees in organisations are working remotely from their homes. Official communication regarding work has to be such that the productivity is not hampered in such a scenario. Instructions have to be clear, concise and complete while giving due consideration to deadlines. It's good and convenient to use applications such as zoom, Google meet etc. but the organisation has to ensure that employees are trained to use these applications first. All workers especially those whose nature of work is such that they have never worked from home may find it very difficult to use these technical applications. We have seen many such examples where people have committed blunders because they are not

very comfortable in using the audio, video or meeting features in applications such as zoom. Moreover there are security or cyber bullying concerns while using such technology. It is the organisation's responsibility to have online training sessions so that people find it easy to adapt to such new technologies of working. Remote working is here to stay, so it is worthwhile to make efforts in this direction. Similarly measures also have to be taken to monitor and enforce attendance and willing participation in such remote meetings.

- b) **Creating and maintaining a motivating organizational culture:** Creating a Motivating and engaging organizational culture is important all the time but during this Crisis this factor has become even more important. There are various dimensions of a healthy culture that have to be further strengthened during this crisis period. A very important aspect that can be discussed here is having a robust communication channel. The management should be very careful about what and how they communicate during such a period. Employees are managing working from home along with all the household chores and already feel stressed; therefore they need clear, precise and supportive communication from their organisation. Providing technical support is important during these times but emotional support is equally important. Organisations have to behave as one big family which has to stick together during these trying times. This period, if utilized properly, can be very important in strengthening the bonds and increasing collaborative teamwork among employees. Everyone is fighting a common enemy, the corona virus, which should bring people closer and nobody should feel that they are left alone in this battle. Proactive organisations have to ensure this if they want a nurturing and optimizing culture to be created. In fact this pandemic has given organisations an opportunity to rethink and rework on their culture and to ponder and discuss about practically enhancing employees' work life balance and Quality of work life. Designing employee centric stress relieving exercises and lectures, providing counseling facilities to the employees and their family members and having online support groups are some measures an organisation can take to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of its workforce.
- c) **Providing a sense of job security to enhance commitment:** Insecurity about their jobs is what majority of employees are facing today. Though the government has intervened and urged the organisations to protect the livelihood of their workers still the organisations are looking at salary cuts and layoffs in order to cut cost. In a survey conducted by Economic Times, many organizations told that they intend to reduce the temporary staff by 40 to 60% to rein in costs. Firing people at this point is the worst thing an organization can do as it can have a very bad

impact on the commitment levels of the surviving employees. Organisations have to deal with this situation sensitively. If organisations expect loyalty and commitment from their employees, they have to demonstrate commitment towards their job security and well being as well, and what better opportunity to prove this than this crisis. All proactive organisations are looking for ways and means to save jobs. Though there are many organizations which are deducting salary and perks to save jobs, there are some shining examples like Asian Paints which have gone ahead to give annual increments and increase the salary of their staff to help and motivate them in these trying times. Needless to say that the organisations which try to boost the moral and support their employees in the most trying times are the ones that stand to gain in the long run.

- d) **Extraordinary leadership for extraordinary times:** Needless to say, it's the leadership which makes or breaks an organisation. Extraordinary leadership is required to deal with an extraordinary crisis that we are facing today. It is easier said than done and this becomes all the more challenging in today's scenario because you have to lead your people remotely and not deal with them face to face. This is the time when a leader gets a chance to relate with his or her people and lead by example. A transformational leader during these times of crisis doesn't only preach but practices what he wants the others to do. This is the time to be honest and transparent with your people, to be empathetic and to support them wherever you can. Giving clarity about the Expectations, being available in the hour of need and having frequent audio and video interactions to maintain a connection are some of the things that a proactive leader can do. Being supportive and respecting the priorities of your employees is of utmost importance today. This is a chance for the leader to show that employees are the real assets of an organisation and they are valued as such. It is important to seek opinions while taking important official decisions. It is also important to take a continuous feedback about any changed policies, procedures or work related practices. Humanitarian and supportive leadership is the need of the hour and this pandemic and lockdown has given one opportunity to leaders to create more team cohesiveness and innovation in the face of adversity.
- e) **Being accountable for employee security:** With lockdown easing gradually and employees coming back to work the organisations have to ensure that they take up accountability for their employees' security. All employees who would be reporting in person should be screened before they enter the premises. The three golden rules of wearing masks, using hand sanitizers and maintaining social distancing should be followed at all times. The management should also ensure that they continue encouraging employees

suffering with any symptoms to stay at home and policies should be amended to ensure that sick employees can stay at home without worrying about losing their salary. For as long as possible, workforce should be encouraged to work from home and employees should be asked to report at work only if there is no alternative. Organisations should realize that employee safety should be their utmost priority in these times and safety and well being of employees and their immediate families is a responsibility that should be taken care of.

5. Conclusion:

The organisations have to understand that we are all living in testing times. People may be stressed, shocked or depressed in this scenario when they are confined to their homes most of the time. Organisations have to identify the current state of mind of their employees and think about various pragmatic approaches that can support them to come to terms and manage the current situation. The right guidance and counseling along with supportive policies and practices can go a long way in enhancing physical and mental well-being of employees in today's times. The focus has to be on caring for the employees and their families while at the same time trying to maintain focus and productivity during a time period when the working norms and practices are changing. Organisations have to help their workforce to embrace the new normal and focus on building skills for resilience while designing strategies to make out the best of the present situation. This pandemic scenario is asking us to change and is posing a huge challenge, but there are various opportunities hidden in this challenging situation which the organisations have to realize and work upon. This is the best time for the organisations to develop a constructive culture and rethink and rework on their leadership styles to create a motivated and productive workforce. No doubt we are in uncharted waters, yet leaders must take decisive actions to ensure their organizations are resilient and emerge stronger after this crisis.

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