

Innovations in HRM during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The radical changes caused by corona virus have uncommon implications on companies and on human resources as well. This has become challenge for the companies to handle their human resources and productivity under pressure during pandemic. So with this pandemic, it is necessary to study how human resources can be managed in different sectors. And it is also important to understand how companies manage to plan performance appraisal and about employee motivation during pandemic. The employees will be referred as human capital, the lifeblood. So to motivate employees during pandemic will be foremost task for company, specifically for HR and taking care of compensation, hike, promotion, etc. again which depends on performance appraisal should be done in the innovative ways. Companies are trying to bring innovations in HRM to motivate employees during pandemic for their career development programmes, implement reward systems, to conduct performance appraisal to motivate employees. Keeping in view of this, HR is evolving, with the focus of changing from the administrative tasks to the strategic plans to manage employees and make them to work to achieve productivity. To implement strategic plans, HR specialist from the companies should adapt the changing business environment to motivate employees as well to motivate themselves.

Keywords: Innovation, motivation, pandemic, productivity

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has made rapid differences in every one's life. Individuals, cities, economies, countries and continents have experienced the shock of lockdown and the concept of isolation. This lockdown has also effected on the companies and it has become the challenge across the world for companies to handle their employees. To handle this situation, managers should take innovative decision about how and where the people could be moved into digital space. It has become great challenge for managers to handle the employees, and operations of companies like employment, training & development, compensation, performance appraisal, and motivation of employees. To run these operations of companies, managers should bring some innovate ideas which will be more effective and employees should be motivated. This pandemic has transferred the HR roles. This pandemic crisis is forcing almost every sector's business to immediately develop, adapt or improve remote work policies and procedures as HR department is struggling to keep employees safe and informed. This has made working in HR both challenging and rewarding. Along with the innovations, it is also important and

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necessary to focus on principles, methods and technologies that are used to improve the productivity of organization. Different sectors have come up into different types of innovative ideas to make employee satisfaction to increase the productivity. Wherein IT sector employees are working from home since one year, education sector is managing with online classes where the teachers, lecturers, professors have learnt new technology and are assisting the students for learning. Banking sectors are providing online training to newly joined employees, telecom

sectors are effectively and efficiently assisting customers by resolving network issues and so on. Since one year, all the sectors mainly HR manager and HR department are trying their maximum to bring innovations as much as possible to motivate the employees and to keep increasing the productivity by focusing on several areas in human resources like recruiting, compensation, training, etc. [1].

MANAGING THE COVID-19 CRISIS IN SEVERAL AREAS

Recruitment Process

Businesses around the world make arrangements for their employees to be able to work remotely from home. The aim is to stop unnecessary movements.

Face-to-face Interaction

As a result, job interviews cannot take place at the office or cannot be interrupted. As businesses proceed to online interviews, they provide many benefits beyond security for recruiters and applicants. Moving the whole recruitment process completely online was a bigger challenge for almost all companies. However, some companies had to make some minor changes to their hiring process [2].

Companies that followed the former recruitment process as well as the face-to-face recruitment process, moving to a fully online recruiting process has been a nightmare. They were lost in a million Excel charts, e-mails, phone calls, and lack of proper tools to organize and streamline their hiring process.

On the other hand, companies that used a new recruiting methodology and recruiting software prior to COVID-19 were able to adapt quickly and easily, and their transition to fully virtual recruitment was a smooth veil. Most of these have just taken over in person interviews and live-video interviews while the remainder of their hiring process remained the same as prior to COVID-19 [3].

The companies which were following old method of recruitment needed to build up with existing strategies with a virtual component. This has affected the 3 keys changes in recruitment during the pandemic i.e. (1) Change in the hiring needs of the company, (2) Change in the way the company recruits, (3) Changes in the job market. So to continue with the process, the company has 2 options either to conduct interviews online live or use recorded videos interviews. Live interviews can be conducted by any online platforms like Zoom, G-suit, Skype, etc. Recorded interviews can be held with combination pre-recorded questions created by recruiter and answers recorded by jobs candidates. This is how companies are managing with online recruitment and meeting the fulfilments of recruitment of their companies [4].

Training

There is no doubt that employee training has been an increasing priority from the last few years. This trend is as simple as “giving the employees what they want”. In 2018, LinkedIn survey reveals that 94% of employees indicated that they would happily stay at a company for longer period and they will work with more enthusiastically for the company if the company invested in helping them to learn with new skills which are in the job market and employees want to upgrade themselves with this learning given that this survey was taken before the COVID-19 pandemic and that it focused on job-related training. Now during the pandemic, the company should focus like how they can provide learning opportunity for employees when most of the companies are running their operations virtually. HR department should focus how and what kind of innovations should be brought in the company for providing the skills and upgrading with job market to their employees to motivate them as before COVID-19. So, company has adopted virtual training method from experts to train employees with new skills which is related to their sectors as different sectors need different skills to upgrade with new job market and job expectations [5].

The company has started to train their employees through online sessions like lectures, webinars and online workshops regarding the new job expectations. Initially during the last year pandemic, it was a challenge for the companies to train their employees through online. But later on the companies have decided to train the employees on the new software and skills which is required for current market. Even the companies tried to collect the data from the employees like what kind of training the employees are expecting. Companies are trying to motivate employees by providing training to up skill in at least one or two new technology for every 6 months before this was optional but companies have made it mandatory. This is how companies are motivating employees by training them even in pandemic with innovative skills.

Companies are providing the training for newly joined employees through online. Even most of the companies have conducted orientation also through online. Companies have invited the experts as per their stream or sector and providing training to employees. Looking into the different sectors, banking sectors are providing training by inviting the experts in commerce industry, IT sectors, software experts, and so on. It is must to reflect about the innovations in education sector during the pandemic because highest online sessions are conducted by teachers, lecturers, and professors to train their students. Because looking before pandemic, education sector was into traditional method of training. Now including the senior-most of the students, all of them are well versed into technology. This pandemic has changed the concept of traditional method of training and has brought new technology; it can be said as revolution in the technology and has made everyone technology friendly [6].

Performance Appraisal

Managers are facing some very difficult decisions right now. They need to find a way to reward employees who are “stepping up” during this crisis. Finding a way to evaluate and reward employees fairly is difficult, even in the best of times. In this crisis, managers face difficult conditions that make the task even more difficult because they are likely to give rise to greater bias. Companies, which typically do performance reviews twice a year, stopped them during the pandemic. We believe this is often a pivotal moment for organizations to enhance their performance management processes [7].

Based on research, integrity remains the base for effective and successful performance management, driven by three important key factors. As companies head into the final weeks of the financial year and look to next year, it is foremost duty of the manager to conduct performance appraisal even during the pandemic. Let’s see how three key factors are bringing innovations in the performance appraisal.

Goal Setting

Many goals may no longer be relevant due to discontinued projects and fast-changing priorities during pandemic. Having year-end performance appraisal for employees without relevant or updated goals could result in poor outcomes. Managers and teams should update goals on a weekly or even real-time basis and discontinue ones that no longer apply. Performance appraisal becomes an ongoing alignment on what adds the most value and what are markers of success. Managers should move beyond annual KPIs (Key Performance Indicator) and introduce a more agile, quarterly rhythm. This will help avoid planning paralysis and more effectively manage distributed teams. Apart from this, previous behavioural goals or competencies may need to be reprioritized. Adjust and emphasize desired behaviours, such as staying close to customers, being entrepreneurial, or sustaining morale and culture [8].

Ongoing Development

Remote working means many managers feel they don’t have good visibility into employees’ performance. Employees may feel more worried often amid circumstances (e.g. caring duties) that might mean they cannot perform regular. Therefore, in addition to year-end appraisals, organizations

should also introduce new ways of working such as daily check-ins/-outs and regular performance. It may be tempting to deprioritize or stop feedback sessions altogether, but organizations should reinforce their importance and provide guidance on how to conduct them remotely. This is an opportunity to instil a more permanent feedback culture [9].

Total Rewards

In many organizations, total rewards may need to be revised to reflect both financial and non-financial benefits. Employees may be sensitive and interpret any changes as a step towards layoffs. As much as possible, organizations should send positive signals by continuing to reward and promote the highest performers. Also consider where non-financial benefits could be used to support employees. Emphasize that performance management is about development and growth and not a backdoor to justify headcount reductions.

Across all four conversations, we are already seeing the crisis accelerate movement towards more modern performance management practices. These include:

- Personalized, on-demand, data-driven performance feedback for all employees to “nudge” them towards different behaviours in real time.
- Stronger emphasis on team, instead of individual, performance as processes and deliverables increasingly depend upon cross-functional cooperation.

Yes, the pandemic is challenging, but several clients report a newfound clarity of purpose. If employees are burned out, hold more frequent feedback discussions to know the way to best support. If business is volatile, take that under consideration during appraisals. And if social turmoil has changed expectations, reflect on where bias could also be exposure as you update goals.

This crisis has not changed the basics of performance management. But it's accelerating the evolution towards an approach that's more data driven, flexible, continuous, and development oriented.

Employee Engagement Activities

The pandemic has presented both employers and employees with an entire new set of challenges to face up to, making employee engagement activities during COVID-19 an important tool.

- **Virtual Happy Time:** To be far away from anxious, sometimes the simplest employee engagement happens during a casual setting where employees can get to understand one another better outside of the parameters of their professional roles. Thereupon in mind, employees can gather as a gaggle using online video conferencing platform, like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, and luxuriate in refreshment together.
- **Online Team Building Activities:** The pandemic has had a significant impact on employee morale. Luckily, online team building activities are an excellent thanks to keep employees engaged, connected, and social while social distancing.
- **Virtual Group Training Programs:** In a time when employee morale is down across the planet, there's something to be said for investing in employee's personal and professional development. In such situation it's the duty of the corporate to point out their employees that company values them, company should support their growth within the organization, and are equipping them with tools to be even simpler in their role. The corporate should provide online training like Emotional Intelligence Training, Practical Time Management Training, Clear Communication Training and etc. to spice up the employee's morale.

Employee Motivation

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the entire world to its knees. Countries across the planet were suddenly forced to implement stay-at home-orders and social distancing policies. Thanks to these regulations, most companies had no choice but to transition to completely remote workforces to

stay their employees healthy and safe. To assist employees, company got to make their wellness a priority and embrace new engagement techniques to extend the motivation of employees who are performing from home or from foreign places. When there is no regular meeting of employees and employer during the pandemic, it becomes the duty of the employer to motivate the workers for productivity [10].

- **Communication is Tool:** When employees are performing from home, it's crucial to speak with them effectively and efficiently, especially during these challenging times. Company can found out daily 1:1 calls or weekly team meetings by utilizing teleconference tools to stay in-tuned with their employees on a daily base. By frequently checking in with them, company can see how their employees do and whether they're facing any difficulty to realize the task allocated to them. Since employees are still adjusting to remote work, consider giving them flexible working hours or extensions on deadlines to scale back their stress levels. Encourage the workers to return to employer if they're struggling and confirm employees know that company will always be there to support them. Asking employees to speak with company clearly also will help keep them motivated as they work from home.
- **Transparency:** COVID-19's impact on the economy across the planet, many companies have had to scale back the dimensions of their workforces. With this major change, employees might be feeling a way of instability. Because the companies are moving forward and began to rebuild their company, it's crucial to revive their employees' faith in their organization's future. To assist them to realize confidence again and stay motivated, still uphold the corporate values and be transparent with the workers. How is corporate doing, what areas are company struggling in, and what's company doing to enhance going forward? When company will keep these aspects as transparent ahead of the workers, the workers may give the suggestion and there'll be open discussion and company will make their employees as a neighbourhood of deciding the workers are going to be motivated and company are going to be beneficial
- **Stay Connected:** If employees are feeling isolated while working from home, chances are their motivation levels are at an all-time low. Luckily with technology, company can help their employees stay connected, no matter where employees are. From hosting virtual team lunches and happy hours to celebrating work anniversaries and birthdays, company can boost morale by giving their employees opportunities to motivate and interact with one another.
- **Employee Safety:** As offices begin to reopen, employers need to make employee safety their utmost priority. From spacing out desks to sanitizing workplaces and requiring employees to wear masks, there are several precautions companies need to follow to keep their employees safe. Additionally, to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the office in the case that an employee gets sick, some companies have created contact tracing policies. By maintaining a safe working environment, you'll ease the nerves of employees who return to the office so that they can focus on their work, and therefore, stay motivated.

This is how companies are trying to bring innovations and trying to keep their employees motivated by employee engagement and bringing the more productivity even in the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

Even during the pandemic, companies are trying to bring productivity even though employees are working from home or from remote places. Company is able to manage their employees and handling their employees during the pandemic in the innovative ways. The company will be productive when all areas will run smoothly and all areas of the company are dependent on each other—like, recruiting, selection, orientation, training, development, employee engagement, performance appraisal, compensation, and so on. When these operations will run successfully and effectively in the company, then only the employees will be motivated. Employee motivation is the key role in the company, because employees are the assets and lifeblood of the company. When employees will be satisfied then only the company can achieve maximum productivity. Employee motivation and employee satisfaction has become challenge for the companies during pandemic, that is why employer has tried

to come up innovations and make sure that those innovations will impact on the employees and they will be motivated even though they will be working from home or from remote places.

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APPENDIX

Teaching Notes

Target Group

The paper has written by targeting the employers, HR manager, employees of different sectors because in this pandemic, it was biggest challenge for employers and HR managers to bring out productivity from employees. This paper may also help the employees to understand how difficult it is for the company to manage them and bring productivity from employees.

Learning Objectives

1. To understand the problems faced by the executives to manage employees
2. To identify how to bring out the productivity from employees
3. To understand how to motivate employees bring productivity
4. To learn and understand adaption of virtual operations of the company

Questions for Discussion

1. Will employees be motivated through virtual training?
2. How employees can be managed virtually?
3. How efficiently operations (recruitment, training, employee engagement, etc.) of the company can be done virtually?

Possible Answers for the given Questions

1. Yes, we can say it is partially because motivation cannot be always 100% and it also depends on the perception of employees. Probably motivation can be measured after the virtual training and also through the productivity.
2. Employees can be measured virtually by training them into areas with their interests and making them to be active participator in meeting and discussion. And also through performance appraisal even during the pandemic.
3. Operations of the company can be done by adopting new software and contacting and handling the employees individually.

Relevant Theories for Discussion

For this paper Mckinsey 7s framework is suitable.

The model categorizes the seven elements as either “hard” or “soft”:

Hard elements	Soft elements
Strategy	Shared values
Structure	Skills
System	Style
	Staff

We can compare this model with above framework because this paper explains about how operations of the company are operating even during the pandemic. How company is facing challenges to manage the employees and operations through virtually. This theory will help us to understand the hard elements and soft elements that can be managed.

Hard Elements

Strategy

During pandemic, the company has to change the complete strategy of the company like recruitment, training and development, employee engagement, and other operations. Adopting new strategy during the pandemic when employees were working from remote places or work from home was like hard for the company.

Structure

Now it is like hard and challenging to the company to adopt the new structure because before pandemic, working structure was completely different and now it's absolutely different. Adoption of the new structure during the pandemic was quite difficult.

System

Now because of the pandemic, complete working and operating system has changed. Because employees should be managed virtually and even allocation of task and checking with productivity should also be managed virtually. Adoption of new system was again hard element to the companies.

Soft Elements

Shared values

It is about the core values of the organization; quite obviously, it is difficult for the company and the employees as well to follow the shared values of the company.

Skills

It has become difficult for the company to identify the actual skills and competencies of the new employees and also it is difficult to bring out the skills and competencies of the existing employees during pandemic.

Style

It's all about the leadership styles the company has adopted. Probably from the pandemic, the company has not focusing on the styles only it is been focusing on productivity and motivating employees during pandemic.

Staff

Staffs are like assets of the company. Managing them with productivity and all the operations is challenging to the company.

This paper is trying to explain that how these hard elements and soft elements of the Mckinsey 7s framework during pandemic has become challenge and also paper focuses on how to overcome those challenges.