CHALLENGES FOR HR PROFESSIONALS IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mr. SUJIT BABURAO CHAVAN
Assistant Professor
Ideal Institute of Management, Kondigre
Tal- Shirol, Dist- Kolhapur,
State- Maharashtra, India.

Abstract:

World certainly has a warning and alarming situation due to the global pandemic outbreak of COVID-19 pathogen since December 19 taking along human cost, mentally and physically with economic cost too. The spread of this contagion is deadly worldwide without any proven official medical treatment. Governments around the world are taking measures of country lockdown and stay at home for social distancing, leading to drastic increase in unemployment conditions, economic loss, poor job satisfaction, reduced motivation and workplace depression crisis among organization's employees with far reaching impacts. At this time of global critical waves, companies and organizations need their human resources officials to help the employees out of this badly driven health and economic crisis. The human resource representatives and their behaviors are the pillars of strength and biggest support center of companies to combat the unpredictable circumstances and to overcome the human depression among employees at plenty of work places around the globe. During the badly stricken circumstances and to face the challenges, leaders & Human resource managers are highly concerned about their work force from encouraging the employees to reduce the impacts on their personal as well as professional life by applying various leadership & behavioral aspects in these critically hit phase of COVID-19. This paper is based on secondary data. Human Resource in country are facing challenges such as Mental Health and Wellbeing, Managing Remote Work, Lack of Agility, Employee Communication, Uncertainty etc. While organizations are taking into account health and safety of their employees, an employee is equally responsible for keeping the business operational as far as possible.

Keywords: Human Resource, Covid-19, Challenges, Crisis, Workplace

Introduction:

While Businesses are learning to innovate and adapt to the ever changing work environments, pandemics and unforeseen calamities like Covid 19 pose an adverse impact to business continuity. These can be difficult times for all human beings as we hear about spread of COVID-19 from all over the world, through television, social media, newspapers, family and friends and other sources. The most common emotion faced by all is Fear. It makes us anxious, panicky and can even possibly make us think, say or do things that we might not consider appropriate under normal circumstances. Who on earth has ever thought of the challenges that 2020 would bring? HR professionals have certainly not imagined the challenges that COVID-19 has dawned on them. The uncertainty has crushed the economy, employees are in stressful situations, and HR professionals are trying their best to keep everything in perspective and aligned. But is it as easy as it sounds? The sudden shift in work culture has brought new challenges for HR. The top priority for HR professionals is now crisis response and how to keep the employees engaged, provide the right communication channels and tools for remote work, and more. Organizations are dealing this outbreak situation in various ways ,one of the fundamental qualities of leaders is behavioral science which is being followed by managers in this eclipsed time, it builds an understanding of how people react psychologically and respond behaviorally to environments & situations.

Objectives:

- To study challenges faced by HR professionals during Covid-19 pandemic.

- To study psychological effect on employees.

- To study importance of Internet technology during pandemic.

HR challenges that managers are facing due to the COVID-19 outbreak:

1. Mental Health and Wellbeing

The sudden shift in work culture took a toll on overall employee health and wellbeing. Stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues have always been there, and it is no new story. Organizations have always been initiating wellness programs and providing employees with security, health benefits, and flexibility to help them overcome their health issues. But the sudden COVID-19 outbreak has brought the employees' mental problems in the front seat. When you have your workers working in an office work environment, you at least understand their pulse and sensitivity, and that helps you immensely to tackle the issues. But employees going remote, communication routes have been significantly compromised, leaving the managers clueless or at least less conscious. In a recent COVID-19 pulse survey, HR professionals across the globe responded health and wellbeing of the workers to be a major concern.

2. Managing Remote Work

The transition to remote work culture is not as seamless as it seems. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, many companies had a remote work program. Banks, regulated industries, and many financial services companies did not encourage remote working. Now almost all of them rushing to build remote work strategies. This has led to many undiscovered problems. HR managers are trying to build seamless routes and strategies to overcome the challenges that it brings. Strategies are no more designed periodically or in advance but in real-time. The focus on employee productivity and engagement has shifted to immediate responses and diagnosis. To provide employees with the right remote working tools and also gathers real-time updates from them from time to time to untangle the intricacies and offer support.

3. Lack of Agility

One of the major reasons why HR teams are struggling is due to the lack of agility. Many HR teams are not designed for agility. And this affecting the HR professional big time. In this crisis, it is critical to respond fast and move quickly. But there are many approvals to take before taking action. This slows down the process of collecting data and takes immediate measures that a crisis demands. To become more agile in their approach and re-prioritizing company goals and to have the right communication and alignment among middle management and executives is the need of the hour now.

4. Employee Communication

Communication is another major challenge that is on the priority list. Communication, in itself, is a critical aspect that needs to be taken into account whether or not the workforce is working remotely. Without the right communication channels, it becomes difficult to manage a workforce. The COVID-19 crisis had the HR professionals on toes and kept them looking for the right remote working tools that suit their culture. Though tools like Zoom or Slack are commonly used to meet the needs of the workforce, it certainly is not enough to get everyone on the same page.

More or less the HR teams are doing their best by sharing-

- Updates regarding measures adopted by the organization,

- Updates from business leaders via email or video,

- Links to valuable external information sources,

- Ongoing communication on HR policies related to the crisis,

- And through health talks and training sessions.

5. Uncertainty

Uncertainty can paralyze anyone. The daunting feeling of not knowing what the future holds or what measures to take to sustain organizational

operations is a huge challenge. We all are more or less affected by uncertainty. Employees are affected mentally, not knowing what the future holds for them, and the HR teams are struggling to put everything in alignment. To respond to the crisis and develop effective measures and strategies for all.

6. Employee Engagement

The ultimate company goal is the productivity of its employees. It becomes challenging to keep the employees engaged when they are working remotely and that too, in a crisis. The internal communication is compromised, and keeping everyone on the same page becomes tough. With remote working, it is difficult to follow a routine and even except a systematic workflow. When the teams are cross-functional, you have little power to manage them. Not updating them regularly or not arranging meetings/ sessions can impact their morale to a great extent.

Possible Solutions for Challenges faced by HR:

There is need for all organizations to innovate and reinvent themselves and identify how they will change and adapt to the changing scenario due to Covid-19. Organizations need to approach their organizational challenges in pragmatic manner yet focus on being agile. A combination of individual and organizational approaches to workplace stress due to pandemic is the most effective, and important success factors are participation of employees in planning, implementation and evaluation of changes, and the role of management in supporting employees through effective communication. Psychological ill-health can be prevented/improved by interventions that combine personal stress management with organizational efforts to increase participation in decision-making and problem-solving, increase social support, and improved organizational communication. Key elements of successful workplace health promotion programmes include having clear goals and objectives, links to business objectives, strong management support, employee involvement at all stages, supportive environments, adapting the programme to social norms during pandemic.

Conclusion:

Human Resource in country are facing challenges such as Mental Health and Wellbeing, Managing Remote Work, Lack of Agility, Employee Communication, Uncertainty etc. due to pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has radically transformed ways of working in organizations across industries and geographies by creating precautionary impediments to physical collaboration. Flexible work options such as remote working and skeletal staffing are now the most viable options to ensure business continuity. To enable these interventions, there is a strong need to revamp policies and implement appropriate support measures. Specifically a strong focus should be given to health, wellbeing, safety, digital preparedness and active engagement of the workforce.

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