

# Redefining Human Resource policies post COVID-19 through 5R's: The road map ahead

<sup>1</sup>Komal Bhatia, <sup>2</sup>Pratibha Tripathi

<sup>1</sup> M.B.A, Ex-Lecturer, Department of Management, East Point College of Higher Education, Bengaluru

E-mail - komal\_bhatia1@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> M.B.A, Assistant Professor Department of Management, East Point College of Higher Education, Bengaluru

E-mail - pratsabak1206@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The COVID-19 pandemic has shut the economies of the world. Many countries around the world since March 2020 has announced complete or partial lockdown. This ongoing global crisis has changed the workplace dimensions and shifted from real collaboration to virtual collaboration. It has forced organizations to rethink their present structure and guidelines. The paper reveals the different strategies and policies that can be implemented across the organization to ensure business continuity, remote culture and employee wellbeing. In light of the same, the current article tries to emanate upon the challenges and responsibilities of the organizations in handling COVID-19 situation through 5R's. The current situation gives an opportunity to many companies to revisit their competencies. It is time to rise above adversities and challenges and create new opportunities. COVID can be defined as "Ceasing Opportunity Vividly in Disguise".*

**Key Words:** *COVID-19, Human Resource Management, Leadership competencies, Future strategies, Employee well-being, Remote work, HR policies, Up-skilling, Employee engagement, Talent management.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

We are witnessing a critical time and we all are part and parcel of one of the most unusual crises. Governments, communities, and organizations are in disaster mode and are looking for steerage from their leaders. The only way to overcome the crisis is to perform and look for new ways. The coronavirus pandemic has put exhausting demands on global leaders in business and beyond. Organizations need to act swiftly and move forward but, in the desire, to thrive and overcome the challenges, they need to take care of both the asset i.e. financial asset and non-financial asset. Global leaders are making ways to move forward with conspicuous ways to break through the crisis and emerge victoriously. The best leaders are not only connecting across the different organizations but within their organization also they are trying to keep people engaged and motivated. Organizations need to have a deeper and broader purpose during this unprecedented time along with being empathetic and execution. It is time to create a new ecosystem within the organizations which are more agile, purpose driven, result oriented and more focus on talent

In past also, the world has faced many but this time it is beyond the financial domain, it is actually a human crisis. It is a testing time for all of us as this crisis has impacted all spheres of life. It has brought the whole world at standstill, disrupting everything from education to tourism. The pandemic has deliberated the organizations to adopt new ways of working. Due to COVID-19 there have been unequal challenges to humans and mankind.

The Economist noted that just as the financial crisis in 2007–2009 highlighted the role of talented Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), the COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the role of Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs). They wrote: "When the financial crisis rocked the business world in 2007–2009, boardrooms turned to corporate finance chiefs. A good CFO could save a company; a bad one might bury it. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a different challenge – and highlights the role of another corporate function, often unfairly dismissed as soft. Never before have had more firms needed a hard-headed HR boss.

The duties of chief people officers, as human-resources heads are sometimes called, look critical right now. They must keep employees healthy; maintain their morale; oversee a vast remote-working experiment; and, as firms retrench, consider whether, when, and how to lay workers off. Their in-trays are bulging." (1)

While businesses continue to make tough decisions to stay afloat and minimize job losses, HR teams work in close collaboration with business heads, try to engage employees, and keep up the morale high. The two broad competencies that can help HR managers to develop effective HRM policies are

(1) Professional HRM Capabilities which are related to the delivery of traditional HRM like training, recruitment.

(2) Business-Related Capabilities reflected an understanding of the business and the implementation of a competitive strategy to gain business advantage (2).

In the present business scenario, HR managers are required to understand the demands of the stakeholders of the firm and to do value-addition to help an organization in sustaining the movement of change. It requires more understanding of the business strategies of the firm and designing HR strategies and HR systems to serve the value-chain of the business. (3)

## 2. OBJECTIVE:

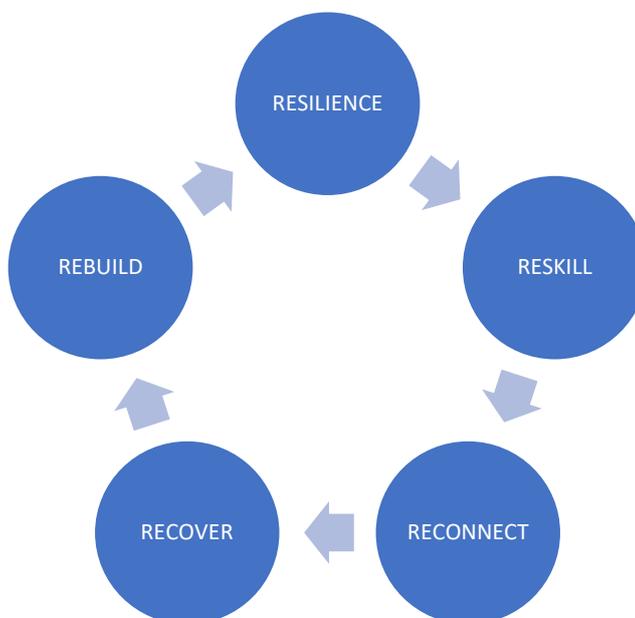
The objective of this paper to understand the current challenges being faced by HRM and how HRM need to formulate new organizational policies to overcome the crisis and various leadership competencies needed to stay the business going.

The research guiding questions are:

- How should organizations and leaders prepare to address their employees' current and future needs during this pandemic?
- Will the present strategies used at workplaces will be effective?
- What engagement strategy would work best in a remote work culture?

### Organizations need to work on 5R:

Presented below is a number of the prudent unit of time measures that can be taken:



- **RESILIENCE**

Uncertainty of this magnitude will leave some leaders lost in the fog. To avoid impulsive, incorrect, uncoordinated, and ineffective actions, companies must evaluate a broad set of policies and strategic responses to make themselves more flexible, aware, and resilient (4) Resilience is a way of doing things; it is a way of being. Flexible organizations move forward create a niche space for themselves.

Resilient crisis management focuses on:

- Raising awareness among employees
- Developing a set of strategies to overcome the crisis
- Guiding team members about new roles and responsibilities in a crisis.
- Developing proper communication and following chain of commands

A strong organization is the one that has transformed their beliefs and attitude have strong convictions, dexterity, and structures into its gene that empower it to recover to where it was, and can launch themselves forward—rapidly. Strong associations use their abilities and qualities to adapt and improve from issues and difficulties.

- **RESKILLING**

Companies are doing Skill mapping of their employees and exploring the possibility of transferring or re-skilling some of their employees to other divisions or locations wherever there is a demand or likely to have demand in near future due to the economic impact of COVID-19.

How organizations can reskill employees (5)

**Broad-Based Digital Training.** Many organizations are expanding remote training to address challenges, such as effective leadership of remote teams (a new skill set for most managers) and building personal resilience in difficult circumstances. Companies need to provide a series of training modules on remote working like how to collaborate with team members, how to increase efficiency while working remotely. Today digitalization is not a recommendation but a necessity

**Focused Upskilling:** Technology will alter many roles in forthcoming days. Organizations need to have focused on upskilling training modules. There is a surge in specialized skills like Data Analytics, Computing, Robotics, Computation, Creative thinking, Critical thinking, employee security. The young generation wants to work in decentralized workplaces focusing more on work than the workplace. It's time to unleash old skills and embrace new skills. Organizations need to reframe their Learning and development policies. Such practices will play a vital role in retaining and engaging employees and meeting ever-changing demands of the technological world.

**Leadership Development:** Leadership is the process of getting people to do their best to achieve a, employee security the desired result. It involves developing and communicating a vision for the future, motivating people, and gaining their engagement. (6) The ongoing crisis has led to a leapfrogged changed in the decision-making process of the organizations, from a slow pace to rapid decision-making process. In this crisis time, the leaders have to exhibit extra ordinary skills in conjunction with other key members to minimize potential risk and should work on creating a strong foundation for the future.

**Create value for Critical talent:** Companies need to connect in-house talent with future opportunities to create a vision for the most critical roles, whether it is in design, manufacturing, sales, or any other discipline. They can define those jobs with clarity to ensure that top performers with the appropriate skills fill the roles, and they can put plans in place for each one. The leaders at such companies understand that reallocating talent to the highest-value initiatives is as important as reallocating capital. For critical roles, it is necessary to identify the core skills and qualities needed in employees. It helps the organization to tremendously increase its performance, productivity, and also the revenues or profitability (7)

### 3. RECONNECT:

Here are the key factors organizations should consider reconnecting with employee's post COVID as deep introspection is needed to reconnect with employees on the following parameters.

**Communication:** During this pandemic time there is an increase in virtual teams and it is necessary to have the right communication strategy to enhance output. It is imperative to have a free flow of communication throughout the hierarchy It is important that organizations must give a clear narrative on the crisis. We have seen most global leaders stood out with transparent and emphatic regular communication with their employees. Without the proper communication process; it becomes difficult to manage an employee. Human resource plays a critical role in every organization. Hence, communication should be structured properly as it will add value across the organization.

The problem must be clearly defined and the context must be explained.

Inter-functional transparency must be created and maintained.

The information must be presented in a way that allows the recipient to recognize and integrate it into their work.

The communication must be free of distractions.

Address tough questions and challenging situation.

Encourage greater participation from employees.

Encourage informal communication among remote teams' member.

**Employee Engagement:** In normal time also to keep the team motivated and engaged is a tough task for an organization. Now with remote teams, it is more difficult to engage the team and get maximum productivity from them. With virtual teams it is necessary to create online engagement activities to keep the spirits high. They can take virtual coffee break, can play online games, happy hours, step challenges, talent shows like art and craft, painting and photography. Try to connect with employees as a whole helps them to cope up with anxiety, stress, and work life balance. Recognize their work sends messages on their achievement. Employee engagement will not be the same, as we will need different means of engaging the remote workforce. The future of work, driven by the use of more automation and technology in what has been described as the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution,' was always coming. COVID-19 has hastened the pace. (8)

**Employee Training:** It is not the workplace that matters now, it is work that matters now. Companies need to develop the right strategy for capacity and competence building during this time. As the companies are shifting focus towards work from home the need to collaborate digitally more and need to train employees. Virtual training should be concise and keep the learners engaged. The training content and delivery mode should be very effective in virtual training. Companies should find out what type of trainings is needed and should deliver the same. Apart from providing on job skills organizations should provide training on how to handle an ongoing crisis. As the whole is experiencing the same thing the shared stress, anxiety, and frustrations can create ties that further bind already collegial global teams. This shared experience will enhance cohesion going forward. (9)

**Employee safety and wellbeing:** This pandemic has shifted the course of HR policies. Employee health and wellbeing is the most important priority of organizations now. The time is to refocus on Maslow's needs of hierarchy. Organizations need to focus on basic needs like physiological and safety needs Many companies are following different policies like E-Commerce major: Flip kart said employee well-being is its prime focus area now and is organizing informal social connect session such as pasta live and chai break. Industrial and services conglomerate RPG has undertaken group-wide physical, psychological and emotional wellness drive, including online access to doctors, nutrition advice, zoom calls to ensure social connect, and online mindfulness sessions. (10)

**Coronavirus special leaves:** Companies need to incorporate special leaves during this time as many companies like TATA STEEL have changed its leave policy to include special leave provision for employees in the case, they need to quarantine themselves due to the virus exposure (11)

**Emergency Response Team for COVID-19:** Organizations can form an Emergency response team to help employees during a pandemic. The team can provide guidelines on various issues after due deliberation. It can help in forming new policies and procedures during the crisis. They can tie up with some local hospitals to assist employees and their family members if needed. (11)

#### 4. RECOVERY:

The crisis has begun and it is time to act innovative and to think out of the box. Pandemic has affected all corners of life. Global leaders have to think about how to come out of this crisis. In normal emergencies a routine set of guidelines need to be followed, but when under extreme crisis leaders have to follow a multi-directional approach. Organizations as a whole entity need to examine, evaluate the command strategies to identify the skills needed for crisis management. A forward-looking crisis leader should not provide their organization with routine emergency procedures but also develop strategies that enable them to adapt to extreme future events also. It is important to understand the recovery from COVID19 will be a gradual process from the old norm to the new norm. The organization needs a robust strategy and planning to overcome the crisis of this level.

**Be transparent with employees:** Organizations should remain transparent with their employees that will help reduce rumors that can create worry and distraction among them. Organizations need to keep sharing the current financial situation and business performance with their employees to keep them positive and engaged during the transition when they're not trying to guess what'll happen next.

**Establish new goals and new responsibilities:** Managers should make sure to continually emphasize why their jobs are critical to the organization's general objectives and targets. Reestablish each colleague's new objectives and obligations. Reveal to them where you see them fitting into the new group. When your employees have a clear picture of how they fit into the future of your company, they'll be less worried about losing their jobs and more engaged in their day-to-day work. It's typical for staff to feel frightful and blurred during the crisis.

**Have a vision and a plan:** With fewer employees, it's going to be difficult to function the same way you did before. You need to have a 30-60-90-day plan so you can smooth transition employees into their new roles and so, business initiatives don't fall behind. Here are some questions you should ask yourself as a leader:

- Do I have the right people doing the right tasks?
- Do team members have the tools, and resources they need to work efficiently and effectively?
- How does the plan tie into the organizational goals?

When possible, cross-train people, so that certain tasks and functions aren't disregarded when the employees who are responsible for them are let go. (12)

**Focus on the critical tasks:** Set benchmarks for employees to keep them focused. Allow team members to know what the benchmarks are and whether they're meeting expectations. Address what is measured consistently and provide real-time feedback. This will ensure team members are aligned and focused on the most important activities. Management needs to understand that engaged employees lead to more productivity and better results

## 5. REBUILD:

As many countries are relaxing lockdown and moving carefully to resume back to normal. To revive the economy back, governments across the world are taking prudent measures to bring the workforce back to offices. It is a difficult task as many short term and long-term changes are needed to start offices again. In absence of vaccine, it is more imperative to redesign and restructure workplaces to ensure the safety of employees, suppliers, and vendors. Companies need to adopt new strategies to evolve and grow. Strategic adaptation reflects the process of reconfiguring strategy by creating and recreating reasons for the company's continued existence by adding new sources of value for customers through the timely detection and pursuit of opportunities. (13)

Various changes which organization can incorporate to ensure employee safety are:

**Staggered workforce:** Organizations are planning to start offices with staggered workforce. It might become a new norm to have a staggered workforce to maintain social distancing. Organizations are capping at 20-30% employees in the starting. Organizations are redesigning their workplaces to maintain appropriate distance among the employees. Earlier cabins and separate cubicles were associated with the workplace privacy, but now it is considered as physical separation.

**Automated Office Space:** As directed by the government to conduct thermal screening at the entrance, companies should opt for automatic thermal screening with the help of advanced technology like artificial intelligence to avoid long queues at the entrance. Organizations need to imply contactless attendance tracker for employees and automatically generated visitor passes to reduce human intervention. Artificial Intelligence can detect people without masks and can send alerts to authorities. Advance technology can get real-time data on the number of people or visitors on the premises, or on the dedicated floor to maintain social distancing norm. (14)

**Sanitization of office:** As economies around the world are opening and companies are asking employees to resume offices. It is very important to maintain office cleanliness for the employee's well-being. It should ensure that all surfaces are cleaned and sanitized regularly to reduce the risks of transferring bacteria. With the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, employee's safety is the main concern. Be a small- or large-scale facility, proper cleaning is necessary it is crucial to take all precautionary measures to keep their workplaces clean and decontaminated.

**Performance management system in changing times:** Performance management is the continuous process of improving performance by setting individual and team goals that are aligned to the strategic goal of the organization, planning performance to achieve the goal, reviewing and assessing progress, and developing the knowledge, skills and abilities of people.(15) COVID-19 has proved to be the biggest game-changer and a disruptor across the global economy. It is required to have a robust performance management system in place, which manages and evaluates employee performance in a remote, and virtual working environment effectively. Performance management for work from home (WFH) will need extra thought to align with the current situation. Re-craft goals and Key performance indicator (KPIs) to meet a current needs realigning role and respective KPIs will be vital where employees can support cross-functionally. Moreover, employees will not be evaluated on their functional responsibilities alone. An adage but still relevant — SMART Goals nt. Poorly defined goals lead to confusion or misunderstanding and bad performance. It is, therefore, especially important that the goals at the organization and employee level are "Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, and Time-bound", i.e. SMART. These goals will bring in clarity, commitment, and will give employees a sense of responsibility. (16)

**Onboarding of new employees:** Managers and HR leaders need to set new pointers in onboarding and training processes for new hires who are joining their teams remotely. Earlier most of the on boarding process was done in the office with face to face interaction, but during ongoing crisis organizations are forced to move on remote onboarding. The question arises on how smooth transition can be done to facilitate easy joining in remote work culture for their better integration in the company and their new responsibility. Companies need a detailed plan for online onboarding, listed below are a few points.

- a.) Prepare their set-up early
- b.) Prepare onboarding materials for virtual learning:
- c.) Help new hires understand your departmental culture
- d.) Create a feedback loop. (17)

**Managing Gig Workers:** Most of the organizations might be shifting to an on-demand workforce, to save costs. Post-COVID many organizations will be moving towards gig workers and in long term freelancing structure will dominate. Many industries like software, education, training, digital marketing, and many more will hire gig workers. In the gig economy, the businesses have the flexibility to hire experts from various domains to accomplish the projects. The cost of hiring is also less than permanent employees. Organizations need to derive new policies and procedures to address the needs of gig workers. Organizations can create a pool of talented freelancers as per business requirements. Through Freelancer Management system they can keep track of the projects. Organizations can work on following the points to manage the gig workers effectively. The future of workplace will be defined by flexibility. Companies like Amazon are hiring employees on an hourly basis.

**Compensation Restructuring:** Certain companies are planning to restructure compensation temporarily. Some other companies are restructuring compensation in such a way to have lower fixed & higher variable package. The variable pay is linked to productivity and performance parameters. This measure reduces the fixed cost burden of the organizations and makes it possible to earn earlier compensation by achieving the desired productivity and targets. A salary restructuring - with a bigger allocation to the variable component - will give some breathing space to organizations to remain afloat in this crisis times, ensuring performing employees don't lose their jobs. (18)

**Cyber security:** Amid this COVID-19 situation, where most of the employees are working from home, there is a rapid increase in the number of cyber-attack cases. And organizations have been institutionalizing this problem by taking corrective measures to maintain business continuity and protect against new cyber threats. To manage business continuity, organizations setting up remote systems over virtual private networks (VPNs) to deal with cyber-crimes. There has been a continuous increase in cyber threats, phishing attacks, and social media cyber-crimes since the pandemic began.

Organizations are planning are to increase the budget on cyber security. Organizations can follow a few guidelines to safeguard their IT structure.

- Adopting cloud-based business solutions that are more robust and secure.
- To accelerate the rollout of virtual private networks (VPNs) to deal with cyber-crimes.
- Securing internet connectivity like ensuring Wi-Fi router is configured for secure passwords.
- Keeping confidential information safe by not using personal email IDs for sending across important documents.
- Ensuring the system is running the updated versions of all anti-virus and anti-malware and other security tools.
- Beware of mentioned malware, phishing scams and, hoax calls.
- Finding something suspicious about one's computer, laptop reporting it to relevant platforms and authorities remain critical.

## 6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data collection technique used for this paper is secondary research approach with systematic review of various texts, articles and published research papers.

## 7. SUGGESTIONS:

Covid-19 pandemic is a learning curve for organizations where conventional model of working is being replaced by new normal. Human resource department needs to shift his focus from traditional working culture to a learning organization where more focus is given to workforce re-integration. It is the time to create a trust factor between employees and employers. Organizations need to be more employee-centric now Organization needs to reframe their current policies makes some amendments as per current time. The organizations need new workplace and workforce strategies to manage continuity. Digitization, automation, employee wellbeing and virtual collaboration will be the main points in new HR policies.

## 8. CONCLUSION:

Given the complex and larger nature of the emergency no individual organization, industry, or government can overcome the crisis alone. Rather, it was essential for individuals from various spheres of society to come together to fight the disease. People are the greatest resources in every organization. While the crisis presented are unprecedented, they also open up unique opportunities for changing the system. A crisis like this is an opportunity for organizations to break the silos, the old ingrained working culture and move towards efficiency and effectiveness. The pressure to act made it possible to overcome red-tapism and limiting mindsets that might have held back these types of bold initiatives under more normal circumstances hence, it will convert challenges into opportunities. HR teams will have to work at the frontline and try to implement new policies and pointer at a breakneck speed. The current situation gives an

opportunity to many companies to revisit their competencies. Keeping your employees engaged and ensuring them the best experience is what every organization should focus on right now. Given the shifts in the business models, products, markets, efficiency programs, value agenda during the pandemic, organizations must reassess the roles to get through the crisis and get the business.

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