

ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

In this research article, the authors will discuss various problems faced by human resource managers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors see a solution of the same in the application of emotional intelligence. The strategic human resource management approach can help HR managers in applying emotional intelligence. SHRM is a proactive approach in comparison to traditional human resource management and it can help in formulating the policies effectively. The researchers have conducted online interviews to check the opinions of HR managers about the applicability of emotional intelligence.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, SHRM, COVID-19, Emotional Intelligence, WFH.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is proving to be one of the most devastating humanitarian crises. During this time, most organizations are facing a tough time in managing their employees. The human resource managers/leaders are the prime epicenter in managing the employees and crisis at the organizational level. They must respond to various challenges during this pandemic time and manage their own emotions. In this research paper, the authors are looking for an effective solution for human resource managers in the form of strategic human resource management to manage the crisis at the organizational level. The emotional intelligence of the human resource managers will also play an important role in managing the employees.

Various Challenges of Human Resource Managers

First and foremost, the challenge for human resource managers is that they need to follow government rules and regulations. Compliance with governmental regulations is necessary, and they also need to manage the pressure of top management. In this dynamic business, environment companies want to be competitive; they do not want to affect their daily work. Due to COVID-19, the human resource managers need to maintain the pressure of companies as well as governments.

Another challenge for human resource managers is to establish effective communication with the employees during the pandemic period.

It is true that many online meeting applications are available on Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Team, and Facebook, etc., but the flow of information is not that much smooth. Few sectors have shown enormous potential by using online meeting applications and conferences (Ayedee & Kumar, 2020), but many sectors are still facing problems. HR managers are receiving regular updates through government websites, official announcements, labor organizations, health authorities, and CEOs. It is their duty to effectively float the whole information to each employee because the communication is related to the health and well-being of employees. HR managers are finding it a challenge to float the information because most of the employees are working from home location.

Many of the organizations have switched towards remote working. The recruitment is still on for the organizations. It is challenging for HR managers to develop trust and faith in the new employees because they are operating in an online environment. In an online environment, the employees are not able to clear their doubts and emotional setback. Few employees are facing emotional pain on account of COVID-19 spread in their families. They are losing mental balance. In such a scenario, it is difficult for human resource managers to manage their emotional balance.

The human resource managers are also facing the pressure of rapid policy change during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is significant that COVID-19 had an adverse effect on both big multinational organizations and SMEs (Kumar et al., 2020a). Many of the SMEs are going cashless, and they are facing all types of survival challenges (Kumar & Ayedee, 2019a), and few of them are opting for technology (Kumar & Ayedee, 2021; Shaikh et al., 2021). The human resource managers are the face behind the policymaking in the organizations, either it is a big multinational or small organization. HR managers are accountable for the policies of the companies. In this pandemic time, they have more work to do on different policies and very little time in their hand. Policies are also dynamic in nature as those policies are changing continuously.

The pandemic time is the time of instability; in this time, the employees look towards organizational leaders and human resource managers for providing necessary direction, confidence, and resilience. The employees have a lot of questions in their minds, and they are looking for the answer to those questions. The questions are related to pay-cut, change in working hours and policies, health concerns, work-from-home guidelines, future, and promotion of employees. Many employees are facing uncertain feelings about their future. They are going through different types of emotions, and HR managers need to manage all such emotions.

The additional challenge presented by the COVID-19 pandemic in front of the HR managers is to keep workers safe. The human resource managers have the responsibility of training and developing the employees in the hygiene conditions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, HR managers need to provide a safe and healthy workplace to the employees. That workplace should be properly sanitized, and it should adhere to all the policies related to the COVID-19 guidelines. Human resource managers also need to educate their employees on various transmission risks. There are employees working at the middle level and lower level. The employees working at a lower level often have less education, through middle-level employees are expected to update themselves. If those employees do not get proper education, it will be hard to manage the transmission of the virus.

The human resource managers also have a tough task of attrition to perform. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations are looking to cut short their staff so that they can save expenses at the organizational level. The organizations are increasing their dependency on

technology (Kumar et al., 2020b) and online resources so that work will not affect. It is the responsibility of HR managers to communicate with employees about their exit from the organization during this period of instability. No one can understand the emotional dilemma of HR managers that they need to work in favor of the organization, and at the same time, they need to say Goodbye to employees as well. They do not want to fire employees, but they are helpless. They are the persons who need to design the strategy on the exit of employees.

Emotional Intelligence can help Hr Managers

Goleman argued about the concept of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the need of the hour and a mandatory requirement for global leaders. Seeing the current phase of COVID-19, emotional intelligence is also the requirement of human resource leaders too. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage your own emotions and the emotions of the people connected with you in a professional setup. Leaders who can understand the concept of emotional intelligence know about their own feelings and how to adjust their emotions. There are five key elements of emotional intelligence.

Self-awareness- Self-awareness is very necessary for modern-day leaders. If the leaders are self-aware about their own emotions, they have a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses. They know what can affect them. It is about controlling your own behavior.

Self-regulation- Self-regulation taught the leaders to be in control. Self-regulated leaders know their values, and they know how to be flexible while officiating. They hold themselves accountable and practice being calm.

Motivation- Self- motivated leaders are internally motivated towards their goals, and they set high standards for themselves. They are always optimistic and hopeful. They look for the best result and try to beat their own performance.

Empathy- Empathy is a key skill in leaders. The leaders with empathy try to understand the other person's emotions. They have this ability to put themselves in the shoes of other people and think about his/her opinion. They respond to the feelings and pay attention to the body language.

Social skills- The leaders with good social skills are good communicators too. They are open to both good news and bad news. They support their teams at the time of need. They are expert in conflict resolution and have the art of praising others two in Table 1.

S. No.	Authors	Review on emotional intelligence
1	Drigas & Papoutsis (2019)	Emotional intelligence will enhance leadership effectiveness and employees' effectiveness. It improves the productivity of employees and helps the organizational leaders in making the right decisions.
2	Cuéllar-Molina et al. (2019)	The different components of emotional intelligence help HR managers in improving their HRM practices and to be most successful in their roles as well.
3	Sabie et al. (2020)	Emotional intelligence is a must for HR leaders because it is a good predictor of performance in the workplace, measure positive attitude, resistance to stress, and career achievements. Emotional intelligence help HR managers in understanding themselves and the emotions of others as well.
4	Bingham (2020)	HR leaders need to change their roles and adapt themselves in this uncertain time. Emotional intelligence can help HR leaders in increasing their productivity and moving higher in the engagement levels.

5	King & Gardner (2006)	Emotional self-management will help the organizational leaders in understanding the work-related stress of the individuals.
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Strategic human resource management is the alignment of human resource practices with the strategic goals and business objectives of the organization. In comparison to normal human resource management, strategic human resource management can be seen as the alignment of HR strategies in such a manner that employees work towards the goals of the organization. Strategic human resource management can be seen as an integrated and proactive approach. It initiates change in the organization, and it has a long-term orientation. Caliskan (2010) stated that organizations are working in a competitive environment. Both HR leaders and employees are facing the pressure of competition and looking to improve their performances. The strategic human resource management system can provide a sustainable competitive advantage to the employees, and it can further help them in improving their competencies and capabilities. The proper planning of HR managers and usage of strategic management can help them in improving their organizational performances. Kumar & Ayedee (2019b) have also argued about the role of strategic human resource management in dealing with the issues of gender diversity. SHRM taught the human resource managers to align human resource practices with the strategic goals and objectives of the organization. Currently, the goals of the organizations are to grow and manage the losses that happened during COVID-19 times. Human resource managers need to be proactive in their roles. They need to align emotional intelligence in their strategy to deal with challenges and issues at the organizational level.

This is the time when HR managers need to recruit and train existing employees based on their emotional intelligence. Suppose the organizations have more people with high emotional intelligence than they can feel for each other and work cohesively during the pandemic time and post COVID. Poor emotional skills should be encountered.

HR managers need to be empathetic and innovative with the employees. The human resource managers have the responsibility of attrition of staff members. Those HR professionals need to be empathetic with employees. They need to communicate with the organizational leaders about the other side of the story. Communication with the employees is necessary to understand why they are not able to perform in a diligent manner (Nagalakshmi & Kumar, 2020). Every individual is facing different types of challenges; those challenges can only be encountered by proper communication. HR managers need to be innovative in choosing the appropriate technology which can facilitate remote working conditions.

HR managers need to work on changes in policies in accordance with the government policies. Work from home is new normal, so the global HR manager needs to take learnings from bigger organizations and make a permanent policy on work from home measures. Either they can work on a hybrid style of working or complete work from home policy (Gurchiek, 2021).

1. Google has extended its work from home policy through June 2021.
2. Amazon also communicated to its employees to continue working remotely.
3. Facebook has already started working on permanent remote workers.

In this pandemic time, the HR managers need to restructure their compensation policies and promotion policies based on online or remote working. They need to be proactive in nature. All the HR policies should be changed for work from the home condition. The HR managers need to brainstorm on the deductions in pay while working from home.

The deduction in pay should not be obvious because employees are working from home. Again, human resource managers need to show their emotional intelligence while designing the new payment policies.

In this scenario, communication is very important for HR managers. They should be ready that employees will come up with several new issues, different types of problems, and emotional setbacks. Emotional intelligence is one way that can help human resource managers to communicate effectively. Emotional intelligence can help the company HR managers in improving their creativity and power to encounter the employees' problems.

METHODOLOGY

Due to COVID-19 constraint, online interviews have been conducted to know the importance of emotional intelligence for modern-day human resource managers in dealing with employees' challenges in the current scenario.

The statement of the first interviewee mentioned below (W1)

“Emotional intelligence can be a game-changer because it will help HR managers in their proactive preparation on several issues.”

The statement of the second interviewee mentioned below (W2)

“HR managers need to be innovative rather than stagnant during this time. Emotional intelligence can provide the necessary impetus to become innovative”.

The statement of the third interviewee mentioned below (W3)

“The top company officials either Google or Facebook using emotional intelligence effectively so other companies should also learn from them”.

The statement of the fourth interviewee mentioned below (W4)

“HR managers should train the employees on their emotional intelligence quotient. This training is necessary because it will help them to understand each other”.

The statement of the fifth interviewee mentioned below (W5)

“In this pandemic time only, emotional intelligence can help HR managers in dealing with several challenges”.

The statement of the sixth interviewee mentioned below (W6)

“HR managers should think about not only emotional intelligence but also about the industry 4.0 and its several components in making work from home policy”.

DISCUSSION

The literature review and online interviews of the respondents are highlighting the fact that emotional intelligence is key for human resource managers to tackle the challenges that arise during COVID-19. Emotional intelligence will add the necessary empathy and motivation in the HR managers. During online interviews, one of the interviewees also emphasized the need for industry 4.0 for human resource managers. How industry 4.0 can help HR managers during this time? One can also see this phase as a transformation phase. For the last many years, HR managers focusing on shifting the employees towards technology adoption. This is the right time when HR managers can make policies for employees to shift them towards technology adoption.

It is the right time when HR managers can adopt digital tools and components of industry 4.0 in their operations.

They should also utilize this time to create a mindset of the employees and organizational leaders towards industry 4.0 adoption. Besides that, the literature review and interviews are justifying the fact that emotional intelligence can be a game-changer for human resource managers in dealing with different problems. Emotional intelligence can prepare HR managers in better shape to deal with several challenges, and it can also enhance smooth communication.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, if human resource managers effectively utilize emotional intelligence in recruitment, training, communication, policy formation, then they can help the organizations in the current challenges of COVID-19. A strategic human resource management approach is needed to align emotional intelligence as a key component for human resource managers.

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