Human Resource Management during Covid-19 Pandemic: An Insight onthe Challenges for Human Resource Practitioners

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Abstract
Organisations around the globe are currently experiencing significant decline in revenue, bankruptcy and job losses regardless of their size as a result of covid-19 pandemic. By implication, the travel bans, quarantine measures and boarder closures have also contributed immensely to the challenges of businesses. In order to sustain business operations, human resource managers need to embrace novel methods of operation to cope with the new challenges arising from the pandemic. Therefore, calculated and rapid responses in form of policies, combined with strong multidimensional leadership skills are required to control the effects of Covid-19 on human resources practices on employees and the organisation as a whole. The study provides an overview of the challenges of human resource professionals, especially managers face and their roles infilling the lacuna created by the covid-19 pandemic, as well as provided recommendations in order to create a suitable teleworking and sustainable working environment among the workforce and the organization during and after the corona virus pandemic in addition to combating the current challenges created by the pandemic.
Keywords: Human Resource Management; Employee well-being; Teleworking, Covid-19

I.   INTRODUCTION
One of the utmost priorities of HR managers during covid-19 era was to emphasize health and safety concerns in the organization (for employees and employers) and the rapid adoption of teleworking to cushion the effect of the pandemic for effective and efficient productivity. In particular, HR managers have positioned the workforce to respond to this imminent pandemic by engaging them to be more resilient and productive. In this respect, corona virus, the world new pandemic has created numerous challenges for human resources managers. HR challenges are diverse; these challenges were worsened with the advent of the covid-19 pandemic. HR practitioners now have to worry about the efficient and effective functionality of the organization towards the achievement of organizational goals despite the restrictions of movement, inability to hold physical meetings, appraise employees despite remote working, effective ways to sensitize employee on the corona virus and its effects, maintenance of personal hygiene, psychological state of employee to function effectively etc.

It is pertinent to note that certain business considered essential such as the food and pharmaceutical industries were not able to short down completely because of the significance of their businesses (Ahmad, 2020). This has necessitated the introduction of work from home policy which is now widely accepted as a norm by businesses who could not afford to shut down completely. However, with the lockdown gradually easing off and organisations gradually reopening, both the public and private organisations are now confronted with exceptional challenges especially in the area of increased workload accumulated during the covid-19 pandemic.

It is therefore the role of human resource managers to introduce new measures to safeguard the health of employees who are risk takers for the organisation (Ahmad, 2020). There is also need to be more innovative in response to the current challenges. Such measure may include educating employees the importance of observing social distancing, medical screening to identify employees who may have been exposed to the virus and measures for successful overall business operations despite the challenges.

This paper explores a number challenges faced by HR managers during the covid-19 pandemic and proffered various measures to address the challenges experienced by organisations during the COVID-19 era.

Objectives of the study

The study focused on identifying the challenges experienced by human resource managers in sustaining the HR experience in organizations during the covid-19 pandemic and provides remarkable insights on how to either mitigate these challenges as well as its effect on the general workforce. Apart from reviewing and applying previous research to unravel the crisis, the study aims at providing a general framework to guide imminent research on the COVID-19 challenges in the workplace.

Significance of the study

The efforts put in to this study is designed to aid researchers and organizations take significant steps to curb and alleviate the corona virus damaging impact on the activities of organisation as well as designing roadmap for the future. In addition, the contemporary issues discussed in this study would present a review of relevant literatures on HR challenges in the wake of COVID-19 for both researchers and practitioners. The study is organized in four sections: Introduction, conceptual clarification, literature review and probable solutions to identified problems.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resource Management

The concept of personnel management was first rebranded to human resource management in the 80s through the research of a renowned economist, Michael Porter, who attributes the success of every organisation to the employees (Porter, 1980). This rebranding was necessitated by the growing economic downturn and accelerated industrialization as well as technological changes on organisations (O'Riordan, 2017). Thus, the change from personnel management to human resource management implies that employees are now viewed as a major resource that contributes significantly to the success of the organisation. Kok et al. (2001) argued that HR Department in the past was saddled with the responsibility of providing support for the entire organisation, but recently business now understand that employees are the most important asset of the business, a knowledge not widely accepted decades ago. While personnel management is restricted to activities surrounding recruitment, placement and legal compliance, HRM is more encompassing; and includes strategic planning.

Obviously, the transition from personnel management to human resource management has improved organisational competitiveness and productivity (Flynn, 1997). As observed by Olasoji, (2019), the major responsibility of human resource unit is to optimize employees' effectiveness for organisational productivity. Thus, both public and private organisations are now considered as a group of individuals with coordinated efforts to achieve a specific goal. This is why many researchers have gained interest in the subject of human resource management towards the end of the 20th century (Michaels et al., 2001). Igalen&Roussel (1998) opines that human resource management covers every activity aimed at developing the collective effectiveness of employees working in an organisation. This is because effectiveness is the basis for measuring the level at which organisational goals are achieved. The role of HR managers in this respect would be to model HR development towards achieving organisational objectives. In support of this view, Byars& Rue, 2006 posits that Human resource management implies a range of organized actions and strategies that focus on successful managing of employees at all levels of an organisation in order to achieve organisational goals.

In support of the above assertion, a number of researchers have postulated that human resource management is synonymous with organisational effectiveness and increased productivity (Arthur, 1994; Jackson & Schuler, 1995; Huselid, 2011; Igwe et al, 2014). In line with these assertions, organisations have deemed it necessary to finance human capital to achieve optimal productivity in the organisation and in the global economy.

Corona Virus Pandemic

Coronavirus pandemic is described by the World Health Organisation (2020), as a contagious disease caused by a newly discovered virus known as covid-19. Primarily, the virus is transmitted through droplets of saliva and nasal discharge from an infected person. Covid-19 is described as a pandemic because it has a high rate transmission if not controlled. Corona virus was initially believed to have originated in a food market around Hubei province in Wuhan, China in December, 2019. Currently, it is unclear where the virus actually began. Organisational activities have been disrupted by Covid-19 pandemic. This has become a great challenge to the operations of human resource department. In a bid to control this virus, organisations have suddenly adopted remote working, email and video conferencing to replace on-site operations with all its implications (Lewis, 2020). With the gradual reopening of economic activities, HR professionals are faced with the challenge of hiring additional medical personnel to augment the existing one in order to curtail the spread of covid-19 and the adhere strictly to the isolation centre policy.

In addition, human resource experts have to battle with ensuring the well-being and sustaining the health of employees' during the pandemic. Most importantly, HR professionals are faced with the pressure of processing voluminous paperwork as more workers are being laid off with the corresponding pressure on the existing workforce. Also, as millions of workers are being laid off, HR managers would also have to provide consolation those affected. For those employees subjected to remote working, HR managers would have to motivate them in order to sustain emotional connection withtheir colleagues at work.

Table 1: Statistics of corona virus impact in the world as at December 20, 2020

Total Corona cases	76,901,568
Deaths	1,696,419
Recovered	53,944,518

Source: (world metre, 2020)

Table 2: Statistics of corona virus impact in Nigeria as at December 20, 2020

Total Corona cases	77,933
Deaths	1,218
Recovered	67,784

Source: (world metre, 2020)

Human Resources Management challenges during Covid-19 pandemic

Employees' motivation and well-being

In the past, many employees believe that remote working or working from home was an impossible task, but the pandemic and its subsequent effect necessitated the sudden shift to the "new normal" approach. Regrettably, the remote working approach was taken into consideration as a result of covid-19. More especially, the week preceding and during the covid-19 confinement posed a number of stress and anxiety for all business stakeholders including employers and employees as remote working and exceptional working conditions had to be introduced to ensure continuity of industries (Sigma, 2020). While some employees experienced the fear of losing their jobs, others were faced with the fear of increasing workload and reduced wages. At the same time, majority of the workforce suffered perplexity as a result of poor communication from supervisors, de-motivation and constant stress. Some were inadequately supported as a result of limited or no contact with other colleagues, with the agitation to be efficient and productive, supervisors and senior managers frequently demanded for deadlines to complete a specific work with online supervision (Ahmad, 2020). According to the 2020 American state of mind report on covid-19, employees are ominously affected mentally by the effect of the virus. The report showed that there was 21% increase in mental health since 16th of February, 2020 and the corresponding increase in the prescription of anti-anxiety medication in order to relief the effect of the virus. In this situation, Human resource managers can adopt some measures in order to ease off these challenges such as self-scheduling, a situation where employees set their own to help them balance work and family responsibilities using certain criteria and limits. In addition, senior managers can promote flexible working hourssuch as shift work for employees in order to improve morale, increase job satisfaction and motivate workers. More can also be achieved by encouraging stressed employees to proceed on advanced annual leave (Sigma, 2020).

Managing Teleworking and maintaining a balance between work and family

Prior to Teleworking is a term that describes a situation where an employee works from home using modern technology and telecommunications to remain in touch with their employer. Prior to covid-19 pandemic, organisations where not conversant with managing the workforce without on-site supervision, but with the onset of the pandemic, organisation had to go digital even though a number of jobs still requires physical attention. Besides, a number of staff was not equipped with modern technologies to cope with the sudden change. Organisations had to distribute technical equipment such as laptops and internet facilities to support them (Baska, 2020). Series of difficulties resulted to anxiety and stress, especially for staff with children and those working from home.

The ability to ensure adequate performance of employees who are remote-working as well as ensuring proper integration with on-site workers with work processes becomes a hard nut to crack for the HR managers. This is because managers would have to manage remote employees and teams which they have never managed in the pas (Gartner, 2020).The dramatic modification of work environment will inevitably have drastic effect on employees' ability to fit in work environment (Kristof, 1996). (Kristof-Brown &Guay, 2011), in analysing the theory of person-environment fit opined that employees tend to flourish and experience high level of satisfaction and general well-being when they are selected by organisations whose work environments reflects similar culture, values, and work features as their own important beliefs. On the contrary, when the job setting present a different environment that does not fulfil these needs, employees' desires are significantly altered and they may

not properly fit-in the work environment as in the case of the current pandemic – covid-19 (Carnevale&Hatak, 2020). Gartner survey on remote working during covid-19 pandemic posits that managers have well adapted to the new technological development especially in helping employees adapt socially and economically (Gartner, 2020). In this survey, new models of managing remote employees were introduced (the NEAR Model) as follows:

Normalize Self-Direction: Majority of the remote worker demand for self-directed work. Therefore managers should reduce supervision of remote workers but rather concentrate on their output.

Enable New Relationships: Since employees are not physically connected to colleagues, HR manager identify distressed staff and connect them to other colleagues. Bailey, K., &Breslin, D. (2020)

Emphasize the Positive: remote working personnel are almost twice as liable to get correction criticism – which centres on conduct that was not fruitful –To maintain a two-way communication, management need to put more effort in addressing the remote working employees openly and in a straight forward way. Management need to affirm noticeable advancement with explicit illustrations.

Refurbish Team Expectations: At times, managers expect that teleworking staff depend solely on personal ideas. However, Gartner investigation reveals that completely remote workers relate with at least 3-5 other teams while working. For leaders, it is necessary to set targets for each member and the whole group to guarantee effective individual commitment and team work. Leaders should lay emphasis on individual and group targets in their discussions.

Yu (2016) conducted a study on the Relationships between Different Types of Individual–Environment Fit and Job Satisfaction. The study maintained that during the process of enrolment and selection, individuals are usually fascinated about an organisation based on their essential need, culture, values, and work features and indeed existing also supports the notion that work relationships fulfil these fundamental desires. However, there is a sudden shift in the existing belief as organisation currently adapts employees to the current demand of covid-19 pandemic which basically limits physical contact in a way that the misfit arising from the current adjustment poses an impending catastrophe for employees' well-being and efficiency for organisations (Carnevale&Hatak, 2020). In this regard more research is needed to discover how the sudden shift to teleworking during the pandemic would influence employee's job search in the future. Further research could also be geared toward discovering the impact of remote working in employees' productivity.

Limited Number of Staff Working On-Site
Corona virus related absence at work environment has practically increased the level of teleworking as the workload has gradually doubled. Most employees now work from home while some are practically not available as a result of ill-health and the resulting increase in workload for those working on-site. In addition, covid-19 relatedcircumstances had drastically reduced the attendance of employees especially in sensitive positions. These issues pose some uncertainties for the human resource managers, whose responsibility is to ensure optimal utilization of manpower resources. In resolving this, management may increase the presence of employees at work place by introducing policies that encourage workers on-site to work for longer hours in order to accomplish greater tasks and cover up for staff who are not on ground (EP, 2003). In another way, overtime limit can be increased to allow more hours to reduce backlogs (sigma, 2020). Likewise, in order to protect the on-site working hours, overtime compensation may be introduced but restricted to teleworking hours.

Covid-19 Health Hazards within the Workplace
The workplace environment has been identified as a major risk factor that could accelerate the spread of Covid-19 disease. Organisations consist of both skilled and unskilled labours, which are mostly made up of employees from remote communities. These workforces most often contribute greatly to the spread of the disease (George& George, 2020).For instance, corona virus is mostly spread in heavy traffic arrears such as rest rooms, changing rooms canteens, corridors, exit points, elevators, and other shared areas (HSC, 2020). Hence, it is imperative for organisations to create a healthy work environment that is free workers from mental as well a physical health and wellbeing for business continuity and productivity. The strategy for containing the virus should also involve the acquisition of essential resources (financial, human and material) such as evaluating job risk and how to prioritise the requirements, development of project plans with precise procedures of accomplishment as well as consulting health and labour experts where necessary (George, 2020).In response to this, HR managers should take reasonable steps to protect and control employees and customers from contracting coronavirus. Based on the risk assessment conducted by the Health and Safety Executive, United Kingdom (2020); Travers (2020) and NCDC, (2020) corona virus can be alleviated using the following guidelines:

•   Maintain the health and safety guidance on cleaning, hygiene and hand sanitisation provided by health experts;

•   Preventive measures should be communicated through emails, videos, fliers and public announcements

•   Ensure guidelines on canteen hygiene and welfare are maintained. This can be achieved by monitoring and supervising areas with cameras ensure people are complying with measures put in place.

•   For hazards associated with employee's well-being and mental health as a result of isolation or coronavirus anxiety, organisations should conduct regular check or conversation with affected staff through e-mails, phone calls and meetings. Inaddition, managers should on a regular basis discuss the problem of fatigue and encourage them to observe breaks, leaves as well as ensuring employees do not put in long hours as work.

•   Put a control or outright prohibition of unnecessary travels and advise employees to self-isolate on arrival from every journey.

Rapid Policy Modifications

As situations are changing due to the corona virus pandemic, company policies and being affected and requires update in line with Covid-19 guidelines.HR Leaders would be held accountable for the implementation of these new policies and therefore have to work harder to meet up with demands. In this respect, HR departments should consider the importance of good communication. They can take advantage of new technologies such as webinars, video conferencing, emails and other communication medium to reach out the employees.

Research reveals that during the pandemic, organisations made quick shift in operational procedures by making drastic decisions such as staff layoff, shutting down of companies, cutting down supplies and so on to ensure safety and standards (Caliguiri et. al, 2020).

Managing Employees' Communication

Another challenge faced by HR managers during Covid-19 pandemic is managing communication among employees. Ordinarily, poor communication networks make it extremely difficult to manage the workforce. But during covid-19 pandemic, it became even more difficult for the HR leaders to identify effective communication methods that will suit each worker especially for remote working. Communication tools like zoom, video conferencing, e-mails and the like are being utilized to cushion communication challenges, even though some employees were not conversant with them.

1.1.4 **Empirical Review of Literature**

Author	Country	Objective	Methodology	Findings
J. B. Carnevalea,& I. Hatak (2020)	United States	To identify the extent of employees' adjustment and wellbeing in the period of COVID-19: implications for the HR management	Conceptual Review	In order to address the challenges of covid-19, establishments may likely embrace how business owners succeed in reducing physical and social interaction such as: appreciating autonomy, tolerance of uncertainty, addressing new circumstances openly and proactively
Chinmoy Kumar (2020)	India	Discussed the emerging human resource challenges in a pandemic world	Conceptual Review	In order to sustain businesses during the pandemic, Organisations should expand virtual working, Maintain essential HR/payroll operations and legal compliance, Maintain employee health at work
Gary N. Mclean (2020)	Thailand	Identified the roles of national Human Resource Development in an era of COVID-19	Review of Literature	Findings reveals that providing strong leadership by making innovative decisions, creating a new normal will improve employees well-being during and after the pandemic
M. F.	Northern	To examine how	Survey	The study shows that there is

Wunderlich& A. Løkke, (2020)	Europe	organisations respond to the COVID-19 crisis especially from a human perspective. This will enable organisations understand better how human resource manager can contribute to other crisis.	method	increasing support from management to human resource Unit during the COVID-19 pandemic.
V. De Leon (2020	United States	Explored the HR challenges facing the local public sector employers during the COVID-19 pandemic	Qualitative method using content analysis	The study revealed that several HRM issues emerged during the COVID19 pandemic in Sacramento County.
A. Elsafty& M. Ragheb (2020)	Egypt	To examine the contributions of Human Resources Management in the direction of employees, even up to reducing the scorching effect of Covid-19.	Descriptive Statistics and Correlation	The study found that the variables are positively connected to overcome the adverse effect of corona virus pandemic. Guidance and support from the workplace as well as access to ICT, with financial benefits are some elements that should be considered by organisations to maximize their expected income and values.
Agarwal, P. (2020)	India	To explore the HR methods implemented by hotels during the covid-19 and how it affected employees well-being.	Qualitative exploration	The research analysed possible HR approaches which organisations could adopt to manage employees effectively and efficiently during uncertain challenges. The study discovered that HR managers who exhibit great concern for employees always impact on their wellbeing.

Overcoming the challenges of Covid-19

This study concludes that organisations experience change at all times. Covid-19 has drastically changed the operations of Human resource management. When these changes are not properly managed, they create disorderliness and reduction in productivity. Therefore, it is imperative for HR managers to be well equipped in order to be able to handle the challenges as they emerge. It is on this premise and based on the above, that the following recommendations were made to handle challenges posed by corona virus:

1.   Change is constant; hence, the HR managers should be prepared for change at all times. The business world has been particularly characterised by its ever-changing nature, therefore keeping abreast of changes and its challengesshould be paramount for an HR professional. This is because any shortfall on their part will jeopardise the efforts of the organisation in achieving its goals.

2.   Human resource professionals should readily be able to sensitize (through an orientation programme) employees of the changes, its effects and implications on the activities of the organisation, as well as its employees and other stakeholders. The importance of a learning organisation cannot be over-emphasized. When stakeholders are aware of what is expected of them and the consequences of negligence on their part, it will help them develop strategies particularly as it pertains to core HR functions in the company to survive a situation where an outbreak that could wreaks havoc on company operations. Such strategies should be created in partnership with other departments, including risk management, finance and IT. (Mcllvaine, 2020)

3.   Human Resource professionals should focus on introducing policies and procedures that would allow easy access to the new challenges. Not only should there be policy introduction, there should also be careful collaborations with employees at all levels with focus on interpersonal relationship rather than control, standard and hierarchy (Bingham, 2020). This can be achieved by building trust on the well experienced employees and at the same time constantly supporting them.

4.   Human Resource professional should encourage leadership styles that are effective and efficient, yet flexible enough to accommodate sudden changes in the workforce, operation, business structure and environment. In this context, HRM flexibility refers to the degree to which they are adapt to a varying circumstances and the speed with which the practices are readjusted and redeployed to suit the new situation (Agarwal, 2020).

5.   The importance of imbibing the information management skills to filter information with the aim of identifying reliable information from fake news and disinformation should be emphasised. Identifying verifiable and accurate information will aid in the formulation of strategies and policies that will sustain the organisation through challenges.

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