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E-HRM TO OVERCOME HRM CHALLENGES IN THE PANDEMIC

Original
Research

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Abstract

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has severely affected the globe. The workplace transformed to be an online place. This work was led to examine the impact of COVID-19 on Human Resources Management (HRM) practices in a developing country (Jordan). This study examines, in particular, the impact of the COVID-19 on employee Recruitment, Training, and management of performance and compensation. The in-depth semi-structured interview method has been employed in this research. The study's purpose was to interview 30 Jordanian human resources practitioners who collected information through interactive online interviews. Because of the COVID-19 instructions, the researchers used video and voice calls to ask open-ended questions. The study found that COVID-19 significantly reduced the number of employee recruitment activities. To protect employees from contact with the disease prior to the outbreak, employee training programs have been cancelled. Only some organizations were able to use online training, which would be the best alternative, because of a lack of facilities. The participants were asked if e-learning would work as well as face-to-face training methods. Performance management has become more challenging. In the study, the staff was not able to achieve initial targets because of disease-related disruption. The monitoring of employee performance for organizations that chose to work from home has been difficult, and practice raised concerns about work-life balance problems. Concerning COVID-19, some of its financial obligations had not been carried out by organizations. In the study, e-HRM has been recommended to minimize physical interactions between individuals, as well as to engage employees in crisis-management strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The 2019 novel coronavirus has been reported for the first time in December of 2019. This viral virus is spreading from its source in Wuhan of China and is beginning to spread elsewhere (Singhal, 2020). About 80 million cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and two million deaths worldwide have been recorded as 01/01/2021 (WHO, 2021). When humans come into direct contact with respiratory droplets, the infection travels from one human to another. It may be released into the air by an infectious person when he coughs or sneezes (Baker, Wilson & Anglemeyer, 2020). An infected person's droplets will even fall on numerous surfaces and places in which anyone who touches those contaminated surfaces will be at a high risk of having the virus especially if he touches his or her face (ILO, 2020). Of the 10 million people, Jordan has recorded 300 thousand cases to date (Jordan Ministry of Health, 2020). Fortunately, so far, with no fatalities, children have been infrequently impacted.

Nevertheless, it is unclear regarding the possible path of this virus. A bird's eye view of this latest virus is provided in this research. Due to the awareness about this virus is evolving rapidly, human beings are encouraged to cope with the virus updates and progress periodically. National governments are taking numerous strategies and steps, including boundary bans, involuntary quarantines, travel limits, limitations on mass crowds, and lockdowns in towns or whole regions, resulting in dramatic improvements in daily life and business operations (ILO, 2020). COVID-19 has impacted almost all sectors on multiple scales. COVID-19 has influenced organizations' workplaces and processes. After the 1918 Great Influenza (Spanish flu), the COVID-19 pandemic is not only the most severe global health epidemic. Still, it is set to become one of the most economically expensive pandemics in modern history. Experience with previous epidemics gives some perspectives, both in the short and longer-term, into the multiple mechanisms from which economic costs may occur. Around the same time, in some significant respects, COVID-19 varies from the previous series. Therefore, due to lockdown procedures in cities and countries, travel bans, self-isolation, and discouragement of individuals' movement, many industries and companies struggle when consumers and workers face new modes of living. Organizations are still facing unusual modern procedures for which many were not trained and never saw it happening. Any organization has embraced home-based work that may not be as successful as conventional working practices.

Since Human Resources Management (HRM) is strongly linked to the people employed in the office, COVID-19 is supposed to have several implications on HRM. For instance, workforce recruitment is often performed. Simultaneously, there is a shortage of workers in organizations because, during the crisis, such as the COVID-19, business activities slow down severely. Instead of recruiting, businesses prefer to go through tactics like layoffs. It should be noted that social or physical distancing is advised to prevent the transmission of the disease. In the past, workforce recruiting and hiring allowed managers to consult with potential hires for appraisal. This may result in the transmission of the disease from one person to another. Organization departments are often more willing to communicate with clients physically. Also, physical interactions among organization employees are necessary to create the best workplace environment. All these are potential causes of the spread of COVID-19, which makes workplaces more susceptible to the disease. Working from home may be one of the most successful methods of helping workers prevent unwanted gestures and physical activities from minimizing the risks of catching the infection. It also can often be challenging concerning human resources (HR) in terms of management. Work-life balance is another problem that may emerge from this approach and make the accomplishment of personal and corporate objectives challenging. The literature review shows a few quantitative measurements about how COVID-19 has influenced HRM activities. This inspired the researchers to pursue this study using knowledge from a developing country like Jordan. The researcher selected workforce recruitment, employee training, performance management, and compensation management as four HRM practices to be analyzed. The research tried to figure out the impact of COVID-19 on HRM activities. The study aimed to evaluate the effects of COVID-19 on employee recruitment, training, performance management, and compensation management in different sectors in Jordan.

METHODOLOGY

When conducting research, different methods can be applied, many may seem reasonable, but not everything fits each research purpose. Some of the methods that are most common for qualitative research involves observations, focus groups, or interviews (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). The reason for the selection of in depth semi-structured interviews and not focus groups or observations is because interviews would provide specific industry insights into a personal

level, where it would be possible to reach out to gain additional information. Observations for this study would not have been influential because it is only based on spending more time looking at and taking notes of a process. The researchers decided to contact the practitioners, experts, and professionals directly through the interview method and asking them open-ended questions. Open-ended questions enables respondents to respond in an open text format so that they can respond on the basis of their full experience, emotions, and understanding. This implies that the solution to this question is not restricted to a collection of choices (Hannafin, 1994). This study collected qualitative data using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Since this study was conducted during the pandemic restricted procedures and social distancing, the researchers used only online video interviews. The study aims to interview 30 HR professionals from Jordan from different genders, workplaces, and sectors.

Moreover, the public sector had also been considered. An interview is a primary data collection method in which participants have been selected by research to answer open-ended questions about what the selected participants do, feel, and think. Under an interpretivist paradigm, interviews as a data collection method are appropriate. The purpose of the interviews is to test data on individuals' opinions, attitudes, feelings, and understandings (Khan, 2014). The researchers have developed questions for the interviewees in advance through semi-structured interviews. In Table 1 the researchers mentioned the questions and themes of the tackled interviews.

This study planned to interview 30 HR professionals from different sectors from Jordan. However, only 27 participated in the study. The other three HR Professionals have either apologized or did not accept this study's participation due to personal reasons. In Table 2, the researchers show the demographics of the semi-structured interview participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The latest global COVID-19 crisis and subsequent lockdown legislations have provided the organization with primary challenges and given leadership lessons in adjustment and adaptation (The Economist, 2020). HRM is known to be one of the most critical resources in the business sector. Organizational performance depends on how people are operated by HRM activities (Sheppeck & Militello, 2000). HRM was defined as the package of all management decisions and practices which influence or directly affect the persons or human resources working for the organization (Bondarouk & Fisher, 2020). Also, it is a

systematic and clear strategy for handling the most critical assets of a business. People who work there, personally and jointly, contribute to its goals (Armstrong, 2006). Thus, HRM is treated as a driver in every industry (Schultz, 1993). HRM is responsible for planning conducting job descriptions, planning labour needs, recruitment, training, building wages and salaries scales, appraising performance, communicating, and of course, building employee loyalty and commitment at its workplace. The organizations consist of individuals, and usually, workers would be substantially impacted in all conditions while a company is in crisis. Organizations strive to adapt diverse methods to ensure workers not to be negatively affected in a way that leads to corporate success simultaneously. The HR department must not damage the workers to continue to deliver and do their jobs in the best possible manner and respond to a stressful atmosphere. During a crisis, an organization can fire key workers or decide to quit the business due to their panic. This will change the consistency and quantity of the organization's output due to talent loss. Mitsakis (2014) study reveals that recruiting workers through emergencies is a big problem because businesses are reluctant to hire new personnel. On the other side, organizations will profit from the involvement of workers laid-off in the workforce by providing a wider pool of skilled potential candidates. Employers are now more capable of discussing wages regardless of the expanded workload.

When coping with COVID-19 crises, a distinction approach can be used from other forms of situations. For example, businesses have to frequently prepare their workers to conduct their work from home or using the Telework strategy (Favilukis, Lin, Sharifkhani & Zhao, 2020). Employees are advised to prevent face-to-face interaction as a means of shielding them from the infection. Companies are also having to transition to online preparation, which may be very costly for individual companies. Companies that cannot opt for online training programs are more willing to restrict the number of training programs or choose not to develop their staff at all (Greer & Payne, 2014).

One of the highest goals of any company is individual and organizational performance. Firms devise and put into action processes that ensure their attention effectively accomplishes personal and corporate objectives by performance management. If an effective performance management strategy is applied, it will assess and enhance employee and group performance against pre-defined business goals and objectives (Christopher, 2020). Performance management may be characterized as a structured method for improving organizational performance by

developing individuals and teams (Aboramadan, 2020). It achieves better outcomes by recognizing and monitoring success within an agreed system of planned targets, expectations, and competency criteria (Peiró, Bayona, Caballer & Di Fabio, 2020).

It can appear advantageous for individuals to skip performance assessments during the crisis, and people usually do not prefer to be assessed. (Hannah Wilken, 2020), However, it argues that abandoning assessments during COVID-19 could result in managers missing vital business performance facts when it is predicted that executives would make difficult choices about where to invest capital. Ultimately, as high-performing workers struggle to gain the appreciation and opportunities they merit, this may contribute to poor leadership decisions and a rise in disturbing turnover (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2020). It should be noted that a crisis will negatively impact employees' output due to the stress that it is capable of causing. This means that to sustain and enhance employee and organizational performance, performance management can be more rational during this period.

Crisis management is quite costly most of the time, primarily when it occurs by surprise. The crisis will disrupt the company's financial responsibilities, including compensation entitled to be earned by workers. THE severe SARS epidemic in 2003, in one of the latest COVID-19 crises, disrupted the cash flows of businesses and contributed to voluntary and compulsory salary cuts, and forced workers to resign without pay (Lee & Warner, 2006). Although it is a trend for companies to decrease compensation during emergency periods, incentives may also inspire workers to help do their work.

Jordan Case

In the Middle East is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Jordan is considered to have a population of 10.5 million among the world's relatively small populated countries (Worldometer, 2020). It is also classed as a middle-income region. However, its financial growth was impaired by a shortage of natural resources and the large influx of refugees from neighbouring regions (USAID, 2020). These factors shaped Jordan's economic growth and raised public debt to 94% of GDP. Besides, at the end of 2019, the unemployment rate was 19 percent. The country faces a Coronavirus COVID19 crisis that began in early 2020, threatening its stability and impacting economies with all these problematic conditions (Raouf, Elsabbagh & Wiebelt, 2020).

The response of Jordan to COVID-19 was consistent with the country's overall favourable by prioritizing human safety. It became one of the first countries to introduce a strict lockout after just a couple of infections. It also invested in inexpensive

and widespread research, provided residences with food and essential goods, and decreased the sales tax on crucial protective equipment. Consequently, they have one of the lowest per capita numbers of COVID-19 cases globally and have been willing to follow a steady reopening. However, years of slow growth and high unemployment have already hit Jordan. After two months of lockdown to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and to make it a priority to safe the health of Jordanians, Jordan and other countries in the globe should pay the bill for its socio-economic impacts. An effect influenced and formed by the effects of the spread of the virus in the broader economy and the design of the government's response—movement restrictions and other emergency measures—and the help of Jordan's leading development partners. A thorough understanding of who is affected, how and for what duration is essential to take practical preventive steps or change current emergency measures. Such knowledge is also crucial to successful action, which is necessary given Jordan's restricted fiscal region.

In a study conducted by (Blasco, Castellà & Raso, 2020) on the impact of COVID 19 on enterprises in Jordan, the findings were shocking. They stated that the vast majority of employees were unable to arrive at work because of the lockdown. Based on that, they received partial wages. Moreover, many organizations stated that they could not pay their employees and temporarily stop their work, some of which closed permanently. Almost all organizations were not interested in recruiting new employees during the study, but they decided to cut the costs and lay off employees. The researchers find it essential to study the impact of COVID 19 on HRM practices, especially in a developing country like Jordan.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVEIWS AND DATA OUTCOMES

Teleworking

Interviewees were asked if COVID-19 changed the overall work norms in their organizations. Most of the respondents stated that they moved to telework techniques. However, Teleworking cannot fit all types of sectors. In the Education sector, the interviewees answered that it was challenging at the beginning to start a new electronic style of education, especially for the first five grades at the school level. It was also hard for parents to cope with the new education method, in which they started to focus more on providing particular time to influence and participate in the teaching role for their kids. By mentioning the teleworking practices, it is imperative to point at the lack of trust between some managements and their staff, which will lead to challenges in the employees' performance and

evaluation. Some employees in the entertainment, hospitality, and tourism sectors have been affected the most since Teleworking was not compatible with the already locked down businesses.

Moreover, in some sectors, daily wage earners have been forced to stay at home during the lockdown with no payments or financial support. Generally, it has become apparent that many businesses have closed or are on the brink of closing. Many people have become unemployed for that reason, and overall, the population's purchasing power is falling.

Recruitment

The research aimed to understand the level to which COVID-19 influenced recruitment in organizations. Via the interviews conducted, it was found that organizations were no longer interested in recruiting new workers to prevent excessive spending. The main explanation for this was that organizations' operations slowed down and, therefore, ordinary activities were used by these organizations before declining. Respondents in the interviews were asked if there were electronic channels in their organizations that could allow employee recruitment and selection to be made without unnecessary physical interaction with job applicants during the COVID pandemic. Job openings were advertised, and applicants were able to apply their applications electronically; however, the interviews differed in the judgment of work candidates' profiles based on an online platform. It was found that many organizations did not conduct recruitment evaluations via technology that would enable them to accomplish the work for a long time. One respondent clarified that they did so even before the outbreak but that it is possible to do so in specific organizations because they did it before the outbreak. The respondents have shifted to remote working, and most have not managed to make positions redundant. However, most respondents have not taken government subsidies to maintain their workforce. In certain sectors, some hiring has taken place; however, most sectors have frozen hiring.

Performance Management

It was also found to be more challenging to control employee performance. Interviewees were questioned if COVID-19 made it impossible for employees to set practical (short-term and long-term) targets. It was found that due to disruptions caused by the disease, some of the goals that employees were expected to accomplish appeared to be challenging and, in some cases, impossible. It was also mentioned that the rapidly changing governmental restrictions and the unknown future timelines were failures in planning or estimating for the short term targets. Like primary and secondary school teachers, the worst-case scenario

in the education sector was that specific teaching goal was supposed to be accomplished. That was not possible because schools were forced to close due to COVID-19.

Moreover, the vast majority have reported that COVID-19 made it impossible for employees to meet previously set targets. The interviews raised another obstacle is that some companies opted for a new normal working at home. Working from home or Teleworking raised the surface in all sectors to be the only alternative to the standard working style (Aburumman, Fraij & Szilágyi, 2020). In these new changes and challenges, it seemed problematic to track the success in that practice, and it was stressful to organize the activities of various workers employed from home. This pandemic has developed new policies and, perhaps more relevantly, practices related to the new working style concerning performance management.

Employees Training

COVID-19 enormously influenced employee preparation. All 27 interviewees admitted that training programs planned for use by their respective organizations had been cancelled. This was done to avoid contact with the virus by workers. Moreover, they stated that their organizations have already begun to use online tools to train their employees. However, they said that It would not be easy to incorporate e-learning in many organizations. Many staff has not been educated on using this tool, and many have previously not used it. The interviews also showed that financial advantages were associated with personal training programs, as the diems provided to workers in each training program appeared unlikely in online training. That is why many employees favoured the use of online training less, and interviews have shown that lack of financial benefits in online training affects employees' willingness to engage in this type of activity. Many respondents also mentioned that the agile management that this pandemic has forced, acquired employees with new skills and enriched their capabilities to adapt different working styles and methods.

Compensation Management

Regarding the attitudes of businesses towards employees, the respondents listed three types of cases they witnessed. Firstly, some businesses were closed, and all employees were then fired. Secondly, some businesses have maintained workers by assigning unpaid leaves to them. Finally, some businesses offer salaries to retained workers. However, some businesses have only succeeded in keeping senior workers with salaries. The interviews showed that financial incentives management has become more complicated than a non-financial one. Companies are more concerned

with providing these rewards in the short and long term to their employees. Incentives have been limited and withdrawn for companies to help fulfil other financial commitments. Incentives have been cut. It was revealed that other organizations had gone a long way by asking their employees to leave without pay, and some were thinking of opting for pay-cuts. Also, other organizations were unable to pay salaries to their employees. One of the interviewees said that she was engaged with two organizations that had not paid their employees' salaries for more than two months. Although many organizations were severely affected in the management of compensation, respondents thought that employees working in government organizations would not be affected by those working in the private sector, specifically in salaries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study demonstrated how COVID-19 affected the nature of work as well as the four selected human resource management practices in Jordan. Most of these effects are beyond the control of organizations, but in a crisis like this, it is the right time for the HR Department to demonstrate how strategic they can be. Organizations are typically affected differently in any crisis based on the type of products or services they offer, the industry in which they operate, crisis management capabilities, and the organizations' preparedness to manage crises. Some of the HR practices, such as recruitment, training, and performance management, would not have been affected as much as they were had organizations put in place specific mechanisms to deal with this, particularly the adoption of Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM). This means that the Jordan crisis's preparedness and power are not well done in human resource management.

The psychological tension, anxiety, and insecurity of most of the workforce are so muscular that companies' degree of loyalty decreases, even though all workers have not been fired. Also, knowledge such as expertise, skills, internal coordination could be lost when workers leave organizations, and organizational culture ultimately suffers.

It is essential to highlight the issue of employee motivation in this study. Employee motivation is more likely to be affected when organizations stop providing bonuses to their employees. Management of the HR department in organizations should consider a variety of ways to motivate their employees. Inability to provide employees with sufficient financial rewards should make them think about other strategies, including delivering non-financial rewards to their employees. For

example, at a time like this when everyone is at risk of becoming infected with the disease, organizations need to start reviewing their health insurance policies to help employees and their families are insured appropriately.

This study confirmed that jobs in public organizations are more secure than in private organizations since the majority of respondents from public organizations were optimistic that their jobs would be secured and that they would still receive their wages for a more extended period during COVID-19, unlike those working in the private sector. The issue of working from home that emerged in this study is a reminder of the importance of hiring self-motivated employees. This is because monitoring employees' performance was found to be a problem when employees work from home. Training employees to enable them to work independently with less supervision is also essential, whether there is a crisis. Supportive organizational culture should also be in place to make this possible. Leaders should believe that organizational culture is the social energy that causes people to act. It is considered the invisible "force" behind easily observable and tangible things in an organization. If the organizational culture does not facilitate employees to perform independently, they will likely serve less than expected.

CONCLUSIONS

HRM Practices cannot be excluded from the severe impact of COVID-19. With the outbreak, various employers experienced job vacancies and recruitment problems. Employee training programs decrease when necessary to ensure that business is going as planned and that the employees stay safe in their organizations. Performance management had been under review since goals that seemed unachievable could not be achieved, and monitoring employees working from home became costly. Because of COVID-19, several organizations could not pay their employees' salaries or fulfil other critical roles like financial benefits. COVID-19 has had a more significant effect on private employees' job security than public ones. During times of economic crisis, the HR department needs to take on crisis management to help employees and their organizations be less affected by COVID-19.

On the one hand, organizations should strengthen their human resources because, to cope with uncertainties properly, workers need to improve skills and learn expertise. However, on the other hand, crisis management allows businesses to cut expenses for training sessions and other growth activities. Therefore, the HR manager must seek the right balance between reducing costs due to the

recession and staff growth. Otherwise, it is not possible to achieve effectiveness and performance. To facilitate HR functions such as employee recruitment and selection, employee training, performance management and others, organizations should consider adopting electronic human resource management (e-HRM) to be done electronically. This will serve as a way to avoid and/or limit unnecessary personal contact. For future research, the questionnaire will be built for a future quantitative survey of HR managers, based on the research findings of expert interviews, to extensively analyze the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on Jordan organizations and HRM. It would be useful to gain details on the organizational choices, how staff and teams worked, how enterprises were impacted by the new technologies and digital means, Teleworking, the critical priority of HRM during the pandemic, and how HRM strategy has changed.

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1
Open-ended Questions and Themes

#	Questions and Themes
1	How does COVID19 affect the work norms at your organization?
2	How does COVID19 affect recruitment at your organization?
3	How does COVID19 affect the Training at your organization?
4	How does COVID19 affect Compensation Management at your organization?
5	How does COVID19 affect Performance Management at your organization?

Table 2
Demographics of the respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency
Gender	Male: 15	15 (55.55%)
	Female: 12	12 (44.44%)
Working Experience	1-5 Years	3 (11.11%)
	6-10 Years	7 (25.92%)
	11-15 Years	5 (18.51%)
	16-20 Years	8 (29.62%)
	21-25 Years	3 (11.11%)
	26-30 Years	1 (3.70%)
Sector	Public	5 (18.51%)
	Private	22 (81.48%)

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