The Future of Work in a New Business Paradigm

Focal Points of HR and human capital management in the post-pandemic workplace

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Abstract

The Evolution Within Organizations During Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has redefined and accelerated workplace transformation globally. Every industry has been impacted and consequent responses tailored and calibrated to meet business-specific needs. Given the scale and speed required for change following the crisis, many organizations have sought support and guidance beyond their respective enterprises. While mature organizations have the resources and technical expertise to adapt and stay resilient, most vulnerable are those in the Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) segment.

Mature organizations have a competent HR structure in place to offer direction and help steer the ship to safety during uncertainty. The same cannot be entirely said of SMEs. Many such SMEs that are bereft of strong foundational investments in human capital planning and human capital management processes, sacrifice long-term organizational sustainability in pursuit of short-term goals. This has led to an erosion of employee confidence, and consequently, the confidence of business stakeholders.

HR today is faced with myriad challenges that include managing layoffs, organization restructuring, making urgent financial decisions, ensuring employee wellness, adhering to government regulations, and adapting to a newer, remote way of working. It has become essential that HR managers learn from global best practices to tide over these uncertain times and prepare their organization for long-term growth and transformation. This document explores the top focus areas for HR in a post-pandemic business landscape.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for In-office, Remote working, and Collaboration

Several organizations have not created SOPs for workforce categories, leading to inconsistent management of their people and assets. Organizations should release their SOPs at the earliest, updating them periodically based on new learnings. SOPs include organization approved tools, usage terms, social distancing norms, health advisory, precautions, details on data being captured and its use for monitoring and enablement. Escalation procedures should be explained in detail to stakeholders and contact information shared for ease in clarifications. Clearly documented SOPs help organizations with human capital planning in a consistent manner.

Physical and Emotional Wellness

HR must strive to gauge the emotional well-being of employees. Unlike physical well-being, emotional well-being can be ascertained only through regular feedback from supervisors, connecting with family members or by tracking social media handles of employees. In these extraordinary circumstances, innovative measures well within the ambit of law will have to be undertaken by the HR team to ensure the wellness of employees, and in turn, the interest of the organization. Special care will have to be taken of employees who struggle with working in isolation. Similarly, the anxieties of those working out of offices will need to be dealt with sensitivity as well. Employees should be made aware of the steps that need to be taken if they happen to get infected by the Novel Coronavirus.

Embracing Digital

Many organizations are under-invested in HR digitalization. HR should use this opportunity to reimagine human capital management processes and not just digitally enable existing processes, but also upgrade them with special emphasis on increasing straight through processing.

Contextual Policies – Tailored to geography and industry

Many organizations operate from multiple countries and will need significant tailoring of SOPs based on the local context. Partnering with local experts will help to keep SOPs aligned with government regulations and address local employee requirements depending on the region of operation.

Real-time Data & Analytics, and Information Management

Access to real-time data to respond adequately is a key HR requirement, especially to address employee safety needs and ensure continued productivity even as a remote working model is adopted. Data must be provided to employees on staying out of Covid-19 hotspots, first-aid and first responder access in case of an emergency. Similarly, to ensure business continuity, timely reporting must be provided to management as well. Real-time information on usage of official devices in remote locations will enable organizations to monitor and control assets in addition to providing timely help in case of a service request.

Organizations also need to keep a close watch on fake news and incorrect information circulated on public domains and within internal organizations forums. Proactive communication with customers and internal stakeholders is also crucial to protect brand image.

Business continuity – Key role succession planning

In an emergency like the pandemic, organizations need to ensure succession planning for all key roles to manage temporary unavailability. This list should ideally include high-potential and niche skilled employees whose absence can cause day-to-day disruption. This list should also include senior managers who interface with key internal and external stakeholders.

Performance Management

While restructuring takes place, KPIs will also need to be redefined in order that employees are aware of expectations and can align to larger organizational objectives. Global organizations are investing in training their workforce to become multi-skilled to build nimble, lean and efficient organizations.HR thus needs to focus on innovation in this space and adopt contemporary practices that will enable remote employee assessment and management in a post-pandemic workplace scenario.

Hiring, Induction, Continual Learning

While several organizations are using digital channels to on-board customers, there are many that have failed to redesign systems that allow such remote hiring and induction. Organizations with high employee churn will have to invest in this area to ensure smooth business operations. Digitization of the induction process along with training is a key element in HR strategy to ensure high productivity levels for new employees. Organizations also need to invest in virtual learning through industry-leading learning platforms to enable cross-skilling and upskilling, and to cultivate a culture of continual learning and growth that results in workplace transformation.

New Understanding of Work-life Balance

Work-life balance is crucial for emotional well-being, and this concept needs a redefinition in a post-pandemic business scenario. This new beginning, so to speak, where employees are spending an increasing amount of time with family members even as they work remotely, has led to challenging the long-held beliefs of work-life balance. With the increase in work from home, the essential boundary that demarcates the personal from the professional becomes blurry, and HR therefore needs to tailor responses and put in place a set of procedures that help an employee maintain this balance. HR should ensure social collaboration among employees is established virtually and affiliation groups are created to make virtual teams more cohesive.

Crisis Management Teams

Now more than ever do organizations find the need to set up and maintain a Crisis Management Committee comprising Governance, Regulation and Compliance, Human Resources, Administration and Business representatives to address urgent regulatory, employee, or business concerns.

Conclusion

The long-term sustainability of the organization will depend on how HR is able to redefine itself on several dimensions. The only certainty in uncertain times is that change is inevitable. What will therefore help in terms of human resource management and workplace transformation is a focus on continual learning and adaptability, building the ability to deal with ambiguity and unpredictability, and focusing on digital adoption to streamline business processes and enhance human productivity.

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