Delineating the HR Practices for Enhancing Resilience amongst Employees in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

The sudden breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic has a devastating impact on the lives of the people throughout the globe. The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has affected every sphere of life viz health, society, and economy. The repercussions caused by this pandemic have a long-lasting impact on businesses and their employees. It is a widely accepted fact that human resources are the backbone of every organization, and the pandemic has hit this backbone resulting in reduced productivity and well-being of the employees. Resilience has been identified as a key factor that helps the employees to perform well even in times of adversities and uncertainties. This paper has reviewed the past literature to find out the best resilience-enhancing HR practices that would result in amplified resilience among employees in the post-pandemic world. Also, this pandemic has given the opportunities to all the business leaders to be better prepared for such adversities in future by effectively implementing resilience enhancing HR practices, and making them future centric. The findings of this paper have a huge industrial and managerial implication in times of uncertainties and such life-threatening pandemics.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Employee resilience, HR practices, New Normal, Post-pandemic

Introduction

The unprecedented outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an upside-down change in every sphere of life causing disruption, distress, and multiple unforeseeable challenges. The World Health Organization (WHO) named the Covid-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020(Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). To curve the transmission and spread of this deadly Covid-19 virus, the governments around the world had started taking restrictive actions such as travel restrictions, restrictions on social gatherings, regional lockdowns, and nationwide lockdowns resulting in the closure of schools, colleges, workplaces, etc.

Though these restrictions proved to be effective in containing the spread of this virus (Alfano & Ercolano, 2020) but have resulted in

psychological distress, poor work-life balance, poor social support and, financial & job insecurity among the employees during the first and second wave of the pandemic(Wright et al., 2021). Restrictions on movements and gatherings have already been eased, organizations have been allowed to work, schools are also permitted to be opened for students of a certain age still there are apprehensions among people for further spread of this disease. Researchers in their studies have indicated the possibility of a resurgence of the COVID-19 (Mandal et al., 2021; Mangal & Gupta, 2021) but this has compelled employees and organizations to adjust to this new normal.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an atmosphere of uncertainty among employees, putting a huge strain on internal resources to deal with the difficulties that have arisen as a result of this pandemic(Ojo et al., 2021).In comparison to stress encountered in normal life, stress induced by epidemics and pandemics has severe effects on the psychological, physical and, social well-being of the employees(De-La-calle-durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021; Kimbu et al., 2021; Meyer et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021).Such events underlined the importance of building resilience ability among employees, organizations, and society to deal with immediate obstacles (Current COVID-19 pandemic) and survive in the long run (Future disasters)(Ngoc Su et al., 2021; Vinkers et al., 2020). Though the concept of employee resilience and organizational resilience has gained the attention of scholarly and management when employees are supposed to positively respond to the organizational change (Shin et al., 2012); but it has gained more significance in the present time of the pandemic (Vinkers et al., 2020) as the majority of employees are forced to do work from home resulting in anxiety, loneliness, and, stress due to increased household responsibilities, health and, monetary concerns. Thus, it becomes critical to keep the concept of resilience in mind and practice while dealing with such adverse situations.

Resilience refers to the psychological ability of people to respond positively to adverse events such as organizational change, natural disasters, and pandemics. (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000) defined resilience as "Resilience is a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma".

It is a well-researched and universally accepted fact that human resources are critical to the survival and growth of any organization in today's globalized and highly competitive business environment(Barnes & Adam, 2017). However, inefficient HR policies and practices, poor work culture, improper communication, etc. result in poor employee performance and reduced organizational productivity(Adam et al., 2020; Guest & Conway, 2011; Kalogiannidis, 2020). But in times of hardships and uncertainties like pandemics, resilience among employees becomes a major weapon to bounce back to the normal, and effective HR practices play a vital role in maintaining and enhancing resilience among the workforce in uncertain times.

Literature Review

Resilience has been identified as a personal resource that helps people to proactively respond and adjust to difficult situations by overcoming all the negative emotions such as anxiety and stress(Caniëls & Baaten, 2019). In contemporary times of distress and uncertainty, organizational resilience becomes the most important factor to survive and grow. (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011) defined organizational resilience as "a firm's ability to effectively absorb, develop situation-specific responses to, and ultimately engage in transformative activities to capitalize on disruptive surprises that potentially threaten organization survival". But it is important to keep in mind that employee resilience is a precondition for organizational resilience; employees who exhibit not only their ability to recover from hardship but also their ability to use and create personal and workplace resources can help to build organizational resilience(King, 2016).

The concept of resilience has emerged from the field of positive psychology and positive organizational behavior (Luthans, 2002). In positive psychology, the term 'Psychological Capital' (PsyCap) has been used which is defined as "an individual's positive psychological state of development; characterized by having high levels of HERO; the four elements of Hope, (Self-)Efficacy,

Resilience, and Optimism" (Luthans et al., 2007).(Ungar, 2011) opined that "In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their wellbeing, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways".

Researchers have identified resilience as the antecedent of various organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction (Kašpárková et al., 2018; Salam, 2017), job performance (Kumari et al., 2015), work engagement(Kašpárková et al., 2018), organizational commitment (Meng et al., 2019; Paul et al., 2016), reduced turnover (Mustamil & Najam, 2020; Näswall et al., 2019) and organizational citizenship behavior (Paul et al., 2016).(Kokubun et al., 2020) studied the role of social capital and resilience in the time of crises and empirically found that employees with higher social capital and resilience proved to be more supportive in an organization's endeavor to coping up with the crises (COVID-19 pandemic) than with employees with lower social capital and resilience.

(Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011) proposed that an organization's potential for resilience is built by strategically managing human resources and working on their basic capabilities so that organizations can respond to crises and unforeseen changes effectively and coherently.(Ngoc Su et al., 2021) suggested some important HR practices during the various stages of restrictions for employees tourism sector working in Vietnam's tourism industry such as practices related to health and safety of employees, emergency response system, positive psychology, economic-capital enhancing, diffused power & accountability enhancing, social capital enhancing, talent management, job redeployment, etc.(Kim, 2020) found that proficiency, adaptivity, and proactivity are important dimensions to make employees resilient and to respond positively during and after the crises. A recent empirical study by (Nyaupane et al., 2020) highlighted employees' perception of organizational traits such as safe working conditions, effective leadership, participative decision making, strategic planning, and its ability to go beyond the status quo plays a pivotal role in

making employees resilient.(Aguiar-Quintana et al., 2021) delineated that resilience moderated the negative consequences of anxiety and depression which was caused by job insecurity created due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, resilience has been recognized as a positive resource to face and overcome uncertainties, distressful events &challenges and to remain intact even in situations like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 Deloitte Global Resilience Report concludes that "organizations that plan and invest in anticipation of disruption-whether it's a gradual transformation or a sudden pandemic-are better positioned to adapt, rebound, and endure".

Research Objective

The objective of the study is to come up with the best HR practices to enhance resilience among employees.

Research Methodology

For the purpose of this paper, 50 articles from SCOPUS and Google Scholar have been reviewed.

HR Practices to Enhance Employee Resilience

A meta-analytic investigation by (Jiang et al., 2012) highlighted the importance of HR practices in successfully achieving organizational outcomes. (Bardoel et al., 2014) defined the resilience enhancing HR practices as " Those HRM practices that are intended, implemented and perceived to offer employees opportunities to 'spring back' from adversity and to develop and maintain resources that strengthen the resilience dimension of psychological capital."

Based on a thorough review of the literature, it is proposed that following HR practice will enhance the resilience among employees during and the post-pandemic world:

1. Flexibility:

One of the major challenges that employees and business organizations are facing is ' the great resignation' as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Cook, 2021). A recent global survey found that 54 percent of employees surveyed from across the world would contemplate quitting if they were not given some kind of flexibility in terms of the time of work, place of work, etc. (ThePrint, 2021). It has been estimated that the cost of selecting and training a new

employee costs more than 122% of that employee's annual salary (Oxford Economics, 2014). (Ojo et al., 2021) suggested management of the organizations to practice more flexibility in the time of crises than normal time. Remote working, work from home, the hybrid model of working, snowbird program, Flextime Compressed workweek, Shift work, Part-time schedules, Job-sharing, etc. will result in enhancing employees' resilience. Big technical giants such as Google, Facebook, Paypal, Microsoft, etc. actively supported and promoted flexibility in their organizations to promote resilience in their employees (Forbes, 2021a).

2. Servant Leadership:

Style of leadership always has an impact on the employees of the organization. A recent study by (Ahmed et al., 2020) empirically stated that an inclusive style of leadership has a negative association with psychological distress caused due to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, (Eliot, 2020) highlighted the importance of servant leadership in making employees resilient in times of ambiguity and distress.(Liden et al., 2008) identified the important dimensions of servant leadership such as "(a) emotional healing, (b) creating value, (c) conceptual skills, (d) empowering, (e) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (f) putting subordinates first, and (g) behaving ethically." Thus, in times of crises like pandemics adopting and practicing servant leadership will help in enhancing employees' resilience.

3. Well-being:

Employees' well-being has now become an important priority of any organization. The COVID-19 pandemic has badly affected the psychological and physical well-being of employees which in turn has affected the employees' resilience. The future 2021 workplace HR sentiment survey indicated that 54% of top management leader have realized the fact that employees' well-being and their mental health is their topmost priority (Forbes, 2021b).For example, HCL has launched COVID-19 Care Support, a 24x7 COVID-19 care helpline to provide all necessary support for the well-being of employees. Similarly, TCS has come forward with the Secure Borderless WorkSpaces Model (SBWS) to enable employees to work from home. TCS also provided a

variety of employee benefits practices throughout the outbreak, including medical coverage for employees and their families, paid quarantine leave, and a 24-hour medical helpline for medical and financial support and counseling. Google is promoting employees' well-being by self-care during WFH (which may lead to isolation), Encouraging detachment (from work like 'no meeting day'), resilience training, etc.

4. Performance Management:

In the post covid era performance management has become an important HR practice to enhance employees' resilience. Performance management is defined as "an ongoing process of identifying, assessing and improving the performance of employees and aligning performance with the organization's strategic goals" (Aguinis, 2013). Employees must continue to perform well in order to keep the organization alive during a crisis like COVID-19. In today's scenario evaluating employees' performance can be difficult. There are several factors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic that may have an impact on employee performance like changes in working conditions (remote working), work overload, social isolation, occupational stress, and family distractions, etc. It is essential for businesses to develop and strengthen their performance management system during this pandemic (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2021). The employer should share pertinent information about the company's strategic direction with their employees as well as provide feedback and coaching to them regularly. Proper monitoring and management of employees' performance promote better performance by the staff which ensures growth and prosperity of organizations.

5. Work-life balance:

(Bardoel et al., 2014) stated that organizations having effective WLB policies, employees of such organizations have strong commitment and resilience to cope up with uncertain and adverse events. Work-life balance policies result in strong family and social relationships, enhanced psychological capital, happiness, and better job performance (Bataineh, 2019). Remote working, work from home, the hybrid model of working (mix of in-office and remote working) are adopted as new normal at the

global level by business organizations to enhance resilience and ensure the well-being of employees. For example, Paytm has the policy of 'forever work from home', employees will not be forced to work from the office until they themselves want it (Moneycontrol, 2021).OYO Hotels & Homes has announced the permanent work from home and hybrid model of working for its employees, only 25% of employees of Tata Consultancy limited are working from the office, and 95% of the staff of Infosys and Wipro working from home (Trak.in, 2020).

Practical Implication

Uncertainties and change is a part of every business organization as the future is unpredictable but timely response to those challenges can be turned into an opportunity through appropriate strategy and a resilient workforce. It would be infelicitous to say that the post-pandemic era would be full of threats and challenges only rather it bring forward the opportunities to find out the ways to deal with such adverse and unwelcome occurrences and to become stronger and better prepared for such unpredictable future events. Organizations need to make their employees resilient well in advance before they face any crisis like the current COVID-19 pandemic. Management of the organization in any sector can use the above-stated HR practice to enhance employees' resilience before, during, and after a crisis or a pandemic so that their employees and the organization itself can positively respond to any adversity.

Conclusion

Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic bring huge challenges and uncertainties for business organizations. It becomes extremely difficult for organizations to survive in such stressful situations but an organization with an appropriate strategy can effectively overcome such situations.Resilience and optimism have become two important constituents of recovery plans from the setbacks created by the COVID-19 pandemic for all the organizations. It has been identified that resilience plays a significant role in such times both at the employees and organizational levels. Employees with a high level of resilience can positively bounce back from uncertain,

distressful, ambiguous, and challenging events like the COVID-19 pandemic. Further with the right mix of HR practices organizations can boost employees' resilience, which in turn will prove to be very beneficial for organizations in terms of reduced turnover and increased performance both at the employees' level and organization as a whole. Thus, resilience is the key to bouncing back from adversities and crises.

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