

Rethinking the role of HRM during COVID-19 pandemic era: Case of Kuwait

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Abstract

The recent pandemic in a shape of the new coronavirus COVID-19 has disrupted global economies and businesses and had unprecedented implications on organizations around the globe. The dramatic changes that were introduced due to the pandemic have influenced human resources management extensively. HR professionals were asked to navigate in the ambiguous present and unpredictable future by managing and guiding employees to cope with stress and adjust with the new remote working practices in an unprecedented speed, rate and scale. The coronavirus pandemic has forced HR professionals to rethink and redefine their role as the organizations started adjusting to enforced social distancing and a new working environment that they may have never imagined. The paper uses qualitative HR expert interviews as a research method. The article tackles to unveil the challenges HRM has been facing in Kuwait, determines the influence the crisis has on HRM and introduces the recommendations for managing the crisis from HRM point of view. The qualitative research findings indicate that organizations, alongside the HR professionals, should channel their efforts towards driving people transformation and enabling change, introducing flexible working practices, relying on new, innovative technology and developing the culture of trust & empathy to deal with the current or future crises.

1. Introduction

All over the world, COVID-19 pandemic has altered everyone's reality in just an overnight. Countries and its' economies, organizations and individuals have experienced the shock of a lockdown and the fear of ambiguity.

HRM professionals have a vital role to play in aiding organizations to navigate in the uncertain situation caused by the dramatic changes due to COVID-19 pandemic (Gigauri, 2020). The newspaper Economist beautifully compared the 2007-2009 financial crises to the current pandemic. If during the financial crises the role of talented Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) were highlighted, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a different challenge and emphasized on the importance and pivotal role of a smart, strategic and hard-headed Chief Human Resources Officers (CHROs). The perception of HR professionals have changed and are considered critical these days. Their duties are constantly evolving (The Economics, 2020).

The purpose of this research is to understand the level and magnitude of the challenges the HR experts have been facing in Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic and unveil the impact the crisis has on HRM. By the end of the paper, the suggestions and recommendations are provided to the organizations for managing the crises from HRM point of view.

The research data was gathered by conducting a semi-structured video conferencing interviews. The analytical direction of this study was determined by the research questions, alongside the theoretical framework.

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