

Navigating the New Normal: The Impact of Covid-19 on Human Resource Practices in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Aim of Study - Role of Human Resource Managers has always been in the process of evolution from being an administrative entity to becoming a welfare organism within progressive organization to being strategic and business partners, human resource departments have shown remarkable organizational resilience; in this evolution COVID-19 promulgated extensive challenges for organizations as it impacted lives, livelihoods, and economies worldwide and altered the way business and communities process. This research intends to explore the impact of COVID-19 on HR Practices across organizations in Pakistan.

Methodology - Data for the research was collected through online calls and telephonic interviews with Human Resource professionals employed in fifteen (15) organizations across Pakistan functioning in various industries through random stratified sampling. The structured interview designed with open ended questions to identify the major areas where Covid 19 impacted HR policies and practices.

Findings - It was found that various functions including Training and Development, Compensation Management, and Recruitment have been greatly affected by the catastrophe. The organizations were not ready to confront such a crisis, but once faced, the leadership promptly ensured all possible measures. However, with more focus on Digitalization, the role of HR has been re-defined amid COVID-19 making it more agile than ever.

Conclusion – With organizations adopting work from home and virtual means to connect, the role of Human Resource Departments has become significant in this Human-centric health debacle for navigating the organization towards ‘the new normal’.

Keywords: Human Resources Management, COVID-19, Training & Development, Compensation Management, Recruitment, Digitalization, Leadership, Health Crisis.

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Introduction

The year 2020 has been a unique year of revolutionary transformations around the globe; COVID-19 introduced the world to massive impact of weak social welfare and citizen care on one side (Ibn-Mohammed, 2021) nonetheless the advent of technology immensely supported in reducing repercussions of social distancing and supervision of remote workforce (Kalogiannidis, 2021). Consequently, organizations also entered a new dimension of dynamic leadership and critical decision-making wherein organizational leadership took drastic measures like Flybe, Compass Airline, Virgin Australia (Bloom, 2020); H&M, Gap (Danziger, 2020), Zara stores (Hanbury, 2020), Airbnb (ReportLinker, 2020) in shifting business strategies, announcing restrictions on business operations or complete shutdown of business.

As a developing country, Pakistan experienced a massive impact of COVID-19 on business and commerce. The government and the Industrial sector struggled to come to terms with this threatening condition while contemplating solutions to ensure crucially prioritize business or employee safety and welfare (B.V.Kapparashetty, 2020). Economic machinery worldwide started experiencing the impact of this health calamity and markets witnessed big giants' minimum damage. Along with various other trials, human resource practitioners in organizations were suddenly faced with numerous challenges and opportunities amid COVID-19. Consequently, Crisis Management became the most trending norm among the business community which is a costly exercise (Nancy R. Lockwood; SPHR; GPHR, 2005), as businesses realized the anticipated impact on all organizational strategies and operations.

This qualitative research has been specifically designed to provide an analytical framework of how human resource management departments in well-known organizations responded to COVID-19 in Pakistan; while aiming to identify the most crucial challenges confronted by the HR practitioners in to maintain the graphs for organizational progress. It also embarks on focusing on the underlying opportunities identified by experienced HR practitioners and simultaneously identifying a more futuristic outlook toward an HR best practices model that enables organizations to establish a balance between organizational growth objectives and employee safety and well-being.

This research would contribute as a significant academic donation for organizational strategists, business developers, human resource practitioners, workforce analysts, and research scholars.

Study Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Asses and record the responsiveness of organizational human resource management systems towards the global health crisis.
- ii. Identify the challenges faced by HR Practitioners, associated with the well-known corporation in Pakistan, amid COVID-19.
- iii. Assess the underlying opportunities that may enable HR practitioners towards developing the best human resource standards and practices, while safeguarding business interests, during COVID-19 in Pakistan.
- iv. Study and record the transformation of key roles and functions performed by human resource managers within organizations during the pandemic.

Literature Review

With the increase in frequency and complexity of organizational crises, the need for planned efforts to mitigate crisis events has become a serious concern for organizations. It is important to learn quickly from crisis events that actually occur (Wang, Hutchins, & Garavan, 2009). Unfortunately, Out of 137 large corporations studied, 47% had no plan for any type of disaster (Miller, 2002). Similarly, 40% of human resource (HR) specialists surveyed by the Society for Human Resource Management confirmed that their

organizations did not have crisis and disaster plans (Cohen, 2002). In 2019, Ernst & Young surveyed 500 board members and chief executive officers (CEOs) globally and found that only 20% of the executives surveyed believed their companies were prepared to respond to a large adverse risk in terms of planning, communications, recovery, and resilience standpoint (Ernst and Young LLP, 2020). It for precisely for this very reason of lack of preparedness for the crisis that took many organizations by surprise as the pandemic started spreading around the globe.

With its intense progress within days, COVID-19 immensely influenced the political, economic, social, religious, and cultural paradigms of struggling countries (Tobroni, Rizqi, Pelana, & Sianipar, 2020). Pakistan is a developing country that is largely dependent on aid and loans from international donor agencies and state governments; the economy of the country was tragically struggling to gain momentum when the pandemic occurred (Rashed, Rizwan, Javed, Sharif, & Zaidi, 2021). Industries, corporates, small businesses, social enterprises, non-government organizations, and state-owned businesses have all been severely affected by the spread of the coronavirus. Businesses remained confused and chaotic immediately after the announcement of the complete lockdown in March 2020 (UNICEF, 2020), subsequently, management delved into developing policies and procedures to achieve multi-dimensional objectives of health and safety, business progression, employee safety and well-being, and safeguarding business interests.

Apart from the health, safety, and economic concerns, another critical challenge for organizations in Pakistan was to manage employees and their performances to safeguard business interests while ensuring employee wellbeing (Gold, 2000); thus, the human resource department was handed over the critical task of managing employee performance and engagement in crucial times of COVID-19. Deloitte reported that the biggest challenges for human resources managers affiliated with the service sector were found to be moving to a work-from-home strategy (Deloitte, 2020), the ability of employees to be productive while working remotely, security and protection of data, lack of in-person management oversight and managing employee morale and talent (Delfino & Kolk, 2020). Recent research suggests that human resource managers remained focused on three specific HR functions during and post-pandemic: (i) selection of candidates that show tolerance to uncertainties, resilience, and curiosity (Roumpi, 2021) (ii) training in soft and critical skills and encouraging self-directed learning (Hamouche & Chabani, COVID-19 and the New Forms of Employment Relationship: Implications and Insights for Human Resource Development, 2021) (iii) ensure management support towards employees in these challenging times (Caligiuri, Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020).

Another survey conducted with 800 global HR executives in March 2020 found that 88% of organizations had either encouraged or required employees to work from home during the COVID-19 crisis (Gartner, 2020). The research also recorded that since this shift has been involuntary and required lengthy work hours that are often not time-bound; therefore, there is more potential for employees to experience increased work-life conflict. It is widely believed that Human resource management (HRM) is in the heart of these transformations helping organizations to navigate in the vague present and unforeseeable future (Gigauri, 2020). The future is anticipated to bring more flexible, remote-friendly, digital working norms; therefore changes in policies, processes, functions, workspaces, collaboration systems, and employee wellness are of increasingly urgent importance (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

The pandemic has obviously led to the emergence of a complex and challenging environment for managers and human resource management (HRM) practitioners who needed to find ingenious solutions to sustain their company's business and to help their employees to cope with the challenges of this unprecedented situation (Hamouche, Human Resource Management and the COVID-19 Crisis: Implications, Challenges, Opportunities, and Future Organizational Directions, 2021). This paper was envisioned to study in detail the changes that were embraced by human resource managers to devise a mechanism that has the provision to operate from remote locations and fulfill the dual objectives of safeguarding business interests and committing employee well-being within organizations.

Problem Statement

It is common knowledge that managing crises is considered an imperative role for Human Resource Departments; as the global pandemic pushed organizations into transformative human resource practices in building resilient work spaces, dearth of relevant information on academic and theoretical frameworks and effective applied practices is quite evident. There are very few studies on the impact of COVID-19 on Human Resource Management, its challenges, and its potential opportunities for future way forward in strengthening organizational resilience through embracing the ‘new normal’ more specifically in context of Pakistan. Therefore, managers and HRM practitioners would largely benefit from this study through comprehending relevant information and extract learning outcomes that may facilitate them in managing future crisis and challenges effectively and efficiently, to be able to support their employees and to sustain their company’s business. In this context, this research is designed to gauge the responsiveness and promptness of human resource managers to ensure effective and efficient work performances. It further studies the reactions of human resource managers in anticipating, identifying, preventing and managing HR operations and functions in work teams along with the rationale behind such responses; while also assessing whether these changes were able to safeguard the two main purposes of the human resource departments (i) protect business interests and (ii) ensuring employee well-being within organizations.

Research Questions

1. What was the promptness of organizations in Devising Health & Safety SOPs following the outbreak of Covid 19?
2. Were organizations able record and promptly respond to the human resource management systems during the global health crisis through employee centric policies?
3. Was there any impact or transformation in the functions implemented by human resource managers within organizations during the pandemic as compared to the pre-Covid times?
4. What were the challenges faced by HR Practitioners, associated with the well-known corporation in Pakistan, amid COVID-19?
5. Were there any underlying opportunities that might enable HR practitioners towards developing the best human resource standards and practices post COVID-19 in Pakistan?
6. What can be the future way forward to Human Resource Departments to ensure protection of business interests while ensuring employee wellbeing in times of any crisis?

Research Methodology

Research Strategy

To identify, evaluate and interpret the results of the study a deductive approach was applied; wherein online and telephonic interviews were used as primary method for data collection. Since COVID-19-related studies are considerably recent for academic research, therefore this study demanded extensive primary research targeting detailed perceptions, opinions, and attitudes to gain an in-depth insight into its influence on HR practices and practitioners in local and multinational organizations operating in Pakistan. This may not have been possible through any unstructured data collection tool; hence an open-ended questionnaire was exclusively developed for the conduction of telephonic interviews, in consonance with the demographic, religious, and cultural variants, wherein the respondents are more likely to engage through meaningful informative responses and the interviewer may also deduce the quality of each recorded response.

As an ethical consideration, the dignity and confidentiality of the participants were prioritized. The respondents were ensured that the name of their employer shall remain, confidential Respondents, were free to quit the survey or not answer any question at any point in time.

Sampling and Data Collection

An extensive primary survey was conducted from a pre-defined population of Human Resource Professionals working in various industries across Pakistan. To enhance the generalizability of the data, diversified industries were involved in the research including Automobile, Banking, Education, Energy, Engineering, Distribution & Logistics, FMCG, Textile, Pharmaceutical, and Retail & Real Estate.

Amid COVID-19 all the industries of Pakistan have faced equivocal disruption, data is collected from fifteen Human Resources Professionals, working in ten diversified industries. The selected organizations for this study represent most of the industries of Pakistan, hence making it convenient to generalize data on a larger scale for future academic endeavors.

The HR Professionals were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- Must be having at least 14 years of formal education;
- Must have 3 years of active working experience in Human Resources Department of their organization;
- Must be employed in an organization within Pakistan.

Primary Research Instrument

The primary research instrument finalized for Data Collection was telephonic interviews, based on structured questions prepared specifically for the study in line with the aims and objectives of the study. The instrument was categorized into three parts with a total of 15 items. The first part included Demographic Information of the respondents such as their name, organization/industry, designation, and years of experience. The second part had questions related to Organizational Policies Practices amid COVID-19, this section helped us to understand the organization's response to this Global Health Crisis and the reaction of their Leaders towards the crisis. A few of the questions were also regarding the impact of this Crisis on their organizational productivity and the measures organizations have taken for employee well-being during the pandemic. The third and most important section of the study consisted of a Likert Scale, asking about the impact of COVID-19 on various HR functions. The responses ranged from Highly Positive Impact, Positive Impact, No Impact, and Negative Impact to Highly Negative Impact, and the reasons were also recorded for an elaborative view. The third part also included open-ended questions with reference to the challenges and opportunities COVID-19 has brought to HR Practitioners in specific. New practices and measures for employee well-being were also discussed in this section. The last question asked in the study was predictive in nature, crucial to understand the viewpoint of HR Practitioners on the transformation of their role post-COVID-19.

Findings & Analysis

Demographic Information

The data was collected from various major business sectors of Pakistan. A total of 15 HR Practitioners were contacted from various industries in Pakistan, the frequency of data collected from each industrial sector is as follows.

Table 1: *Selected Companies*

Industry	Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Automobile	2	13	13
Banking	1	7	20
Distribution & Logistics	2	13	33
Education	1	7	40
Energy	3	20	60
FMCG	1	7	67

Pharmaceutical	2	13	80
Retail & Real Estate Management	1	7	87
Textile	2	13	100
Total	15	100	

Keeping in view the severity of the subject, years of experience were an integral criterion for shortlisting participants. Therefore, the participants were asked about their overall years of experience in the field of HR. The frequency distribution of responses is as follows:

Table 2: *Industrial Experience*

Years of Experience	Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
3 - 4	4	27	27
5 - 8	4	27	53
10 - 13	5	33	87
14+ and above	2	13	100
Total	15	100	

The data indicates that two of the major industries of Pakistan i.e. Automobile and Textile Industries were not prepared to confront the Global Health Crisis; whereas there were varying responses from business to business in the Pharmaceutical and Energy industries. The following table expresses a consolidated view of the rate of responsiveness towards the pandemic, as identified by the human resource managers from each industrial sector.

Table 3: *Rate of responsiveness towards the pandemic*

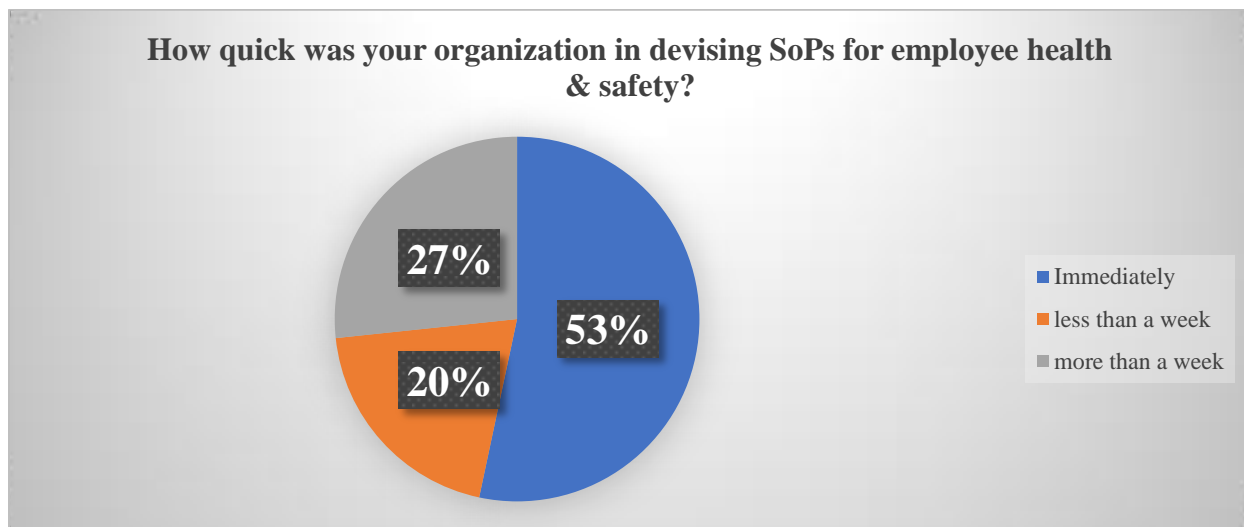
Industry	0-20%	20-40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100%
Automobile	2	-	-	-	-
Banking	-	-	1	-	-
Distribution & Logistics	-	1	-	1	-
Education	-	-	1	-	-
Energy	1	-	-	1	1
FMCG	-	-	-	-	1
Pharmaceutical	1	-	-	-	1
Retail & Real Estate	-	-	1	-	-
Textile	2	-	-	-	-

Organizational Policies and Standard Operating Procedures

Promptness of Organizations in Devising Health & Safety SOPs

This question was intended to evaluate the employee-centricity of organizations amid COVID-19. The responses were gathered ranging from immediately to less than a week and more than a week. The results showed that 53% of the organizations in Pakistan immediately devised adequate SOPs to ensure the health and safety of employees. Most organizations ensured lean management and employees were divided into alternative work shifts, work from home policy was also adopted and health and safety awareness sessions were held to ensure strict compliance with the Covid Policy as was being released by World Health Organization, Government and the Health Ministry of Pakistan.

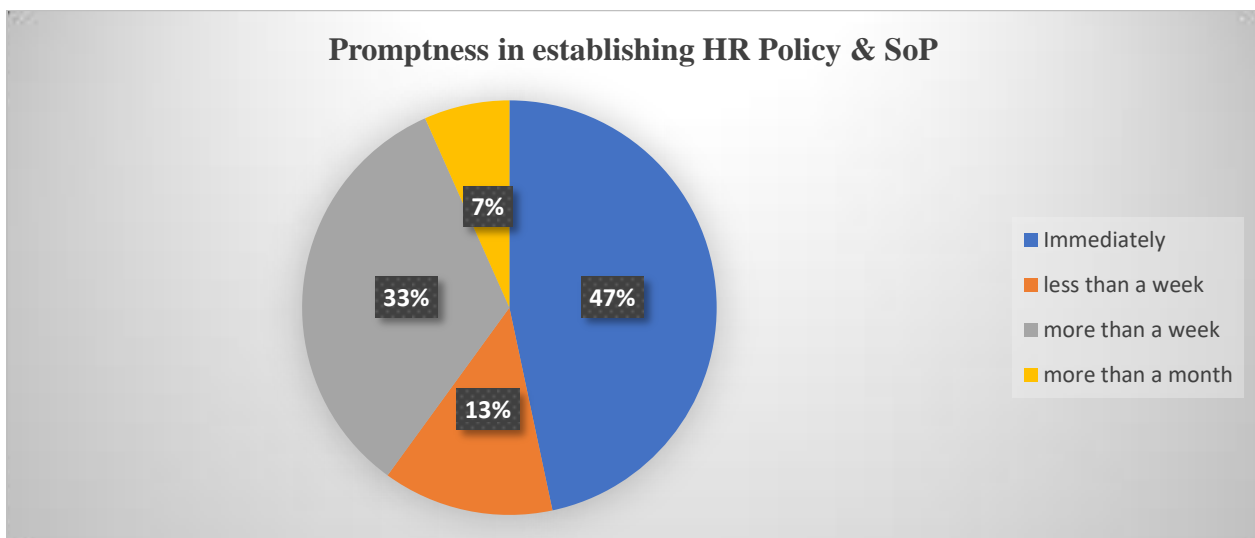
Figure 1: *Promptness of Organizations in Devising Health & Safety SOPs*



Promptness in Establishing Responsive HR Policy & SoP

In order to evaluate the responsiveness of Human Resources Practitioners towards the pandemic, this question ranged from immediate to more than a month. The responses showed that the role of HR was vigilant similar to how the organizations reacted. The study concluded that 60% of the HR policies and SoPs pertaining to the pandemic were established immediately or within a week.

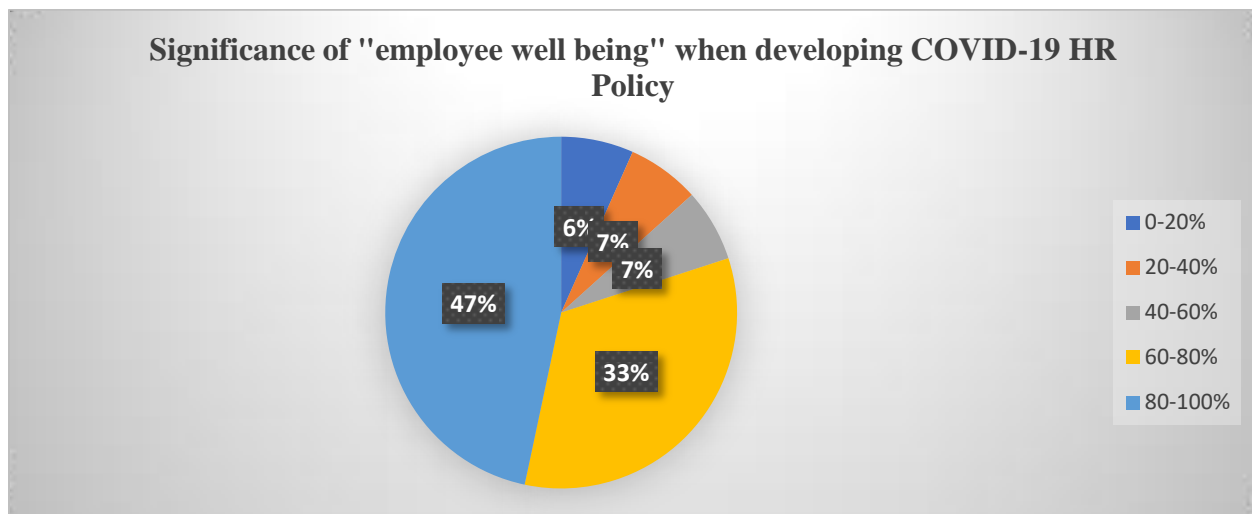
Figure 2: *Promptness in Establishing Responsive HR Policy & SoP*



Significance of Employee Wellbeing When Developing HR Policies

The designed responses to this question varied from 80-100% being highly significant and 0-20% represented the lower side. From the following data representation it is evident that most human resource departments in Pakistan (60-100%) remained concerned with 'employee wellbeing' while devising an HR policy amid COVID-19.

Figure 3: *Significance of Employee Wellbeing When Developing HR Policies*



Reaction of Organizational Leadership to This Critical Situation of Covid-19

COVID-19 has proved to be an ultimate leadership test for senior management across the globe (Homayoun Hatami, Pal Erik Sjatil, and Kevin Sneader, 2020). An open-ended question was incorporated to get insights into the reaction of organizational leadership across Pakistan amid this crisis

The responses depicted a positive image of the organizational leaders stating that most of the leaders among the data set collected from Pakistan dealt with the crisis proactively; while they also ensured that their decisions were empathetic and in the best interest of their employees.

Employee Health and Stress Management

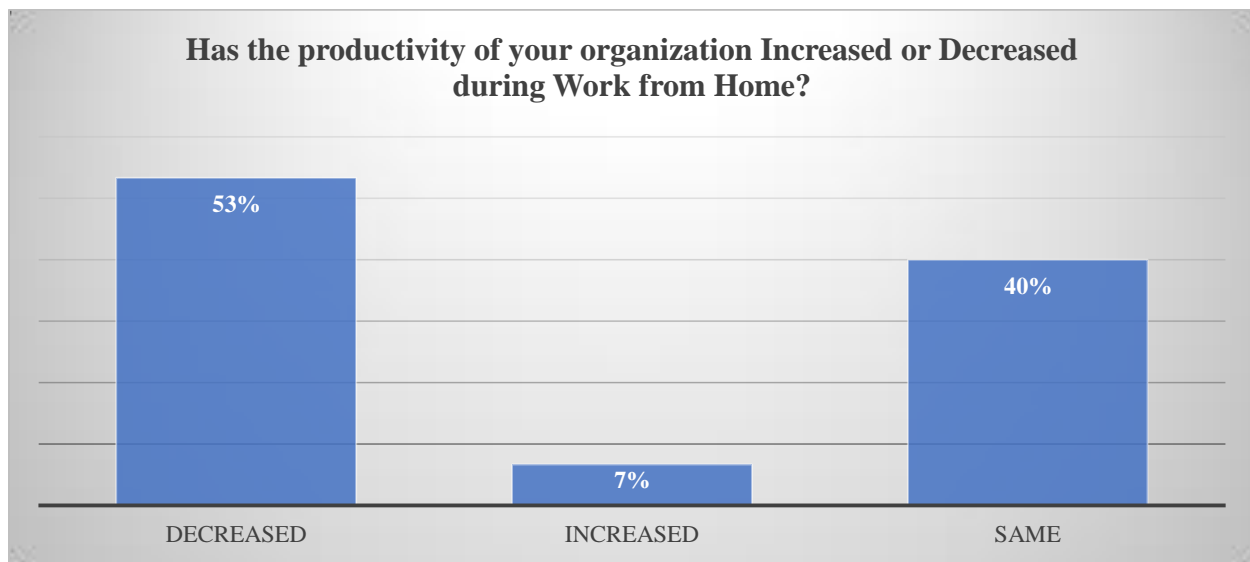
During the Coronavirus outbreak, most of the organizations took special care of their employee's health and safety through various measures. This query remained one of the most significant during the research, as it may serve as a guideline for any such future situations/crisis. Some of the most common measures include:

- Medical and Health Assistance Facility for employee and their families
- Sessions on Stress Management by engaging renowned psychologists
- Arranging Virtual Gyms
- Ensuring availability of Personal Protective Equipment for the employees
- Halting domestic and international travel
- Adopting Work from Home and shift-based working
- Staying connected with the employees.

Impact of Work from Home Policy on Productivity

Working from Home was the new normal adopted by various organizations in Pakistan to ensure business continuity. Considering the role of HR as Business Partner, this question was asked from the participants of the study to which 8 out of 15 HR professionals i.e. 53% were of the opinion that during Work from Home, the productivity of their organization has decreased, whereas 40% were of the opinion that there has been no change in productivity.

Figure 4: *Impact of Work from Home Policy on Productivity*



Readiness Level of Organizations to Confront Covid-19

To gather responses to this question a scale was provided ranging from 0 – 20% being the lowest and 80 – 100% as the highest level. 6 out of 15 i.e. 40% of the participants claimed that their organization was not prepared to confront a crisis like COVID-19, however, 20% of the organizations had crisis management system prepared beforehand.

Human Resources Practice

Impact of Covid-19 on Various Human Resource Functions

This section of the structured interview covered the impact COVID-19 has on the various HR functions. The respondents were asked to rate the impact on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Highly Negative Impact, Negative Impact, No Impact, Positive Impact to Highly Positive Impact. The respondents were also encouraged to explain the reason behind their responses wherever necessary.

Table 4: *Impact of Covid-19 on Various Human Resource Functions*

Readiness %	Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
0-20%	6	40%	40%
20-40%	1	7%	47%
40-60%	3	20%	67%
60-80%	2	13%	80%
80-100%	3	20%	100%
Total	15	100%	

Recruitment and Selection

The responses gathered indicate an evidently negative impact on Recruitment and Selection. In the wake of COVID-19, companies were unable to conduct face-to-face interviews, and there had been unfortunate situations including lay-offs, no hiring, and headcount reduction. However, COVID-19 gave a boom to the logistics industry resulting in a positive impact on recruitment and selection.

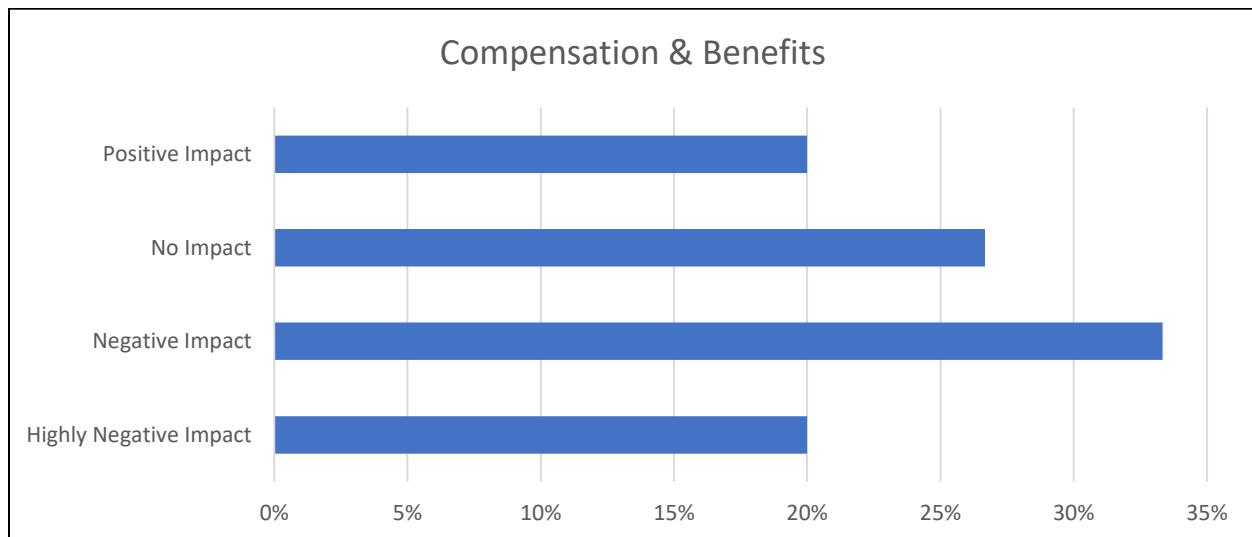
Figure 5: *Recruitment and Selection*



Compensation & Benefits

As the pandemic unfolded it left an unprecedented impact on the economy. 53% of the HR Practitioners are of the opinion that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on Compensation and Benefits. Leading to problems such as salaries withheld and deduction, halt of Annual Increments and Promotions, and no allowances or bonuses. Apart from layoffs, some organizations adopted pay cuts for senior management positions. However, some of the organizations, specifically those working in the energy sector compensated through extra allowance to their field workers.

Figure 6: *Compensation & Benefits*



Training and Development

With precautionary measures like Social Distancing, the function of training and development has faced a debacle. 80% of HR Practitioners claim that COVID-19 has severely affected the training and development function. However, few highlighted the positive aspect i.e. a visible decrease in training costs due to digitization.

Figure 7: *Training and Development*

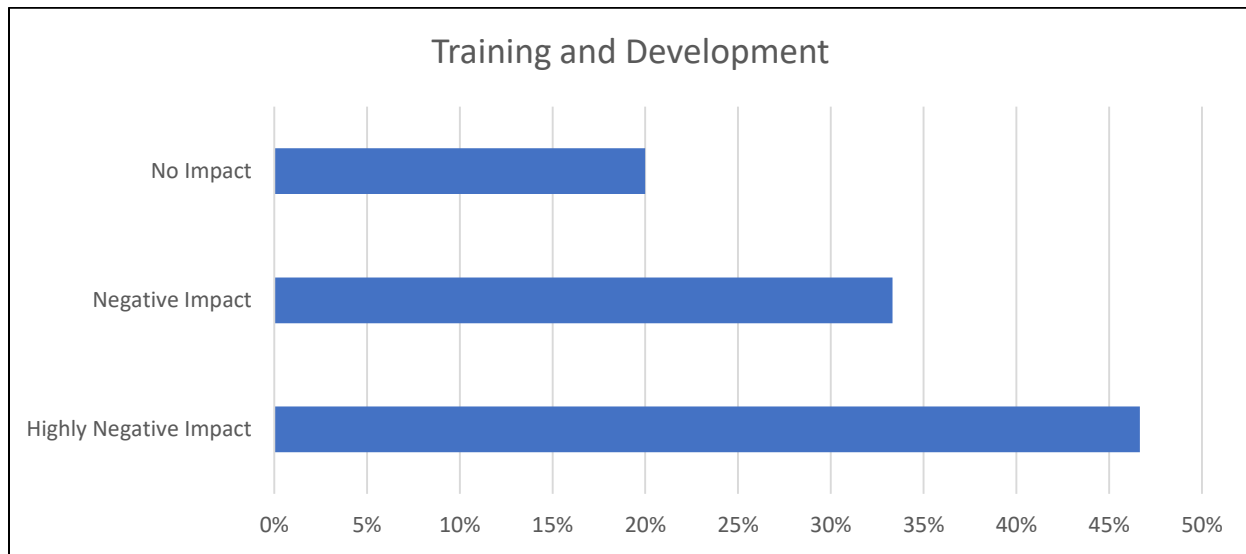
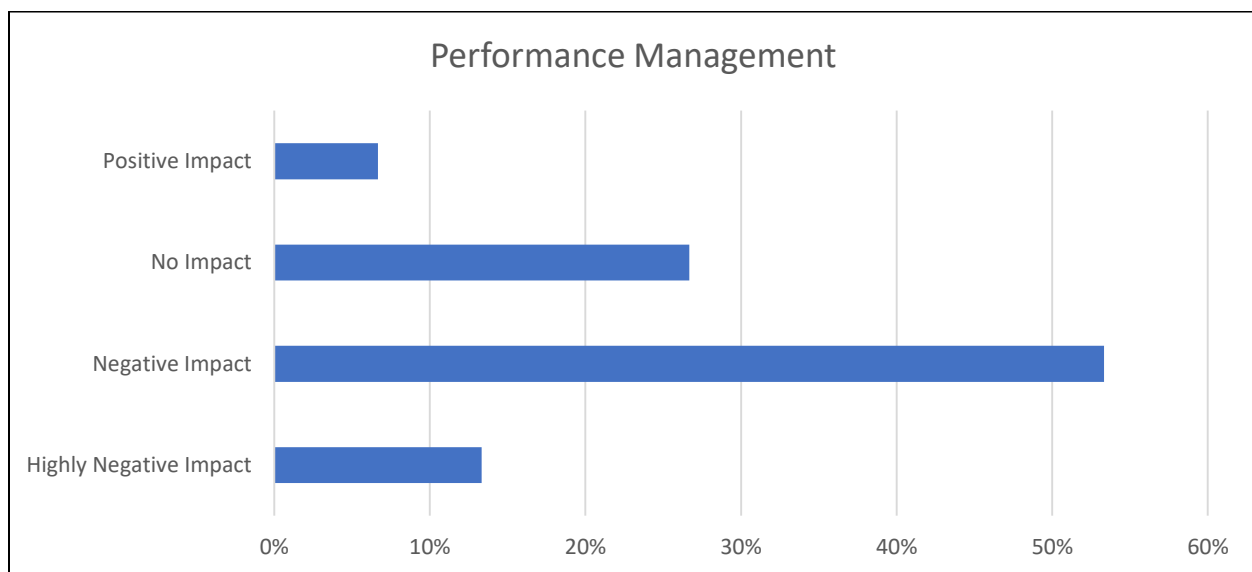


Figure 8: *Performance Management*

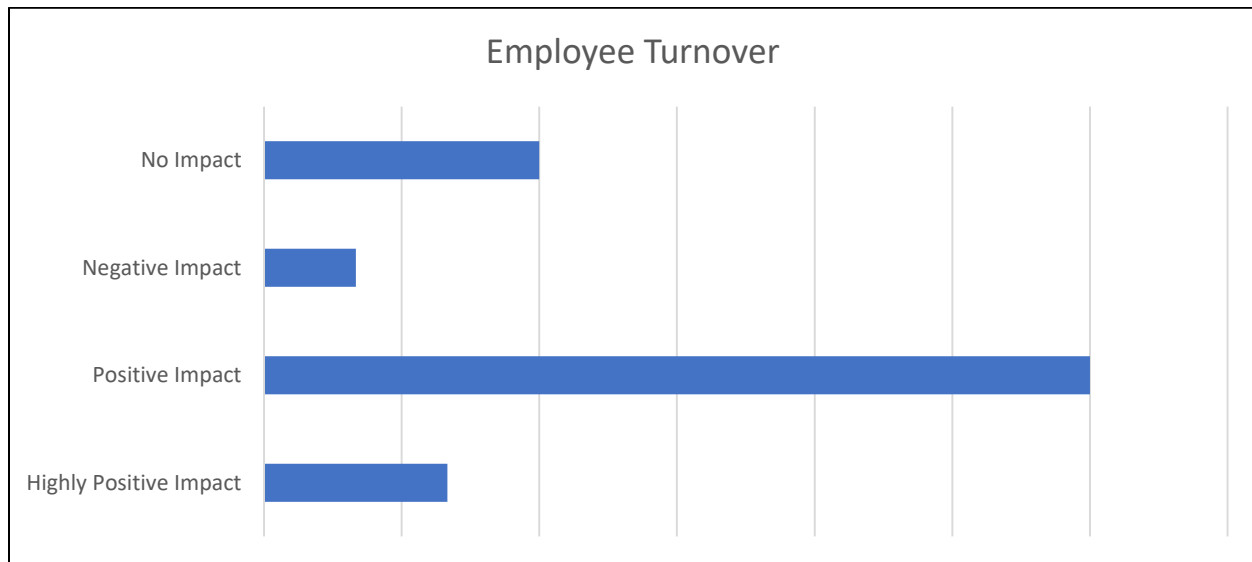


With challenges in setting goals for the future, to low increments, delayed appraisal cycle, and no promotions, 66% of the HR practitioners stated this function to be severely affected amid the pandemic. However, few organizations had adopted the practice of establishing short-term goals keeping in view the COVID tenure.

Employee Turnover

Be it locally or globally, employers aspire control their turnover. According to the respondents of the study, COVID-19 has impacted Employee Turnover positively. Due to a saturated job market and restricted employment opportunities employee retention has significantly increased. However, organizations are enforcing involuntary resignations from employees to implement downsizing strategies.

Figure 9: *Employee Turnover*



Discussion

Challenges in Managing Human Resources during Covid-19

Ensuring Employee Health and Safety - In the wake of COVID-19, the first and foremost challenge every HR practitioner faced was to ensure the Health and Safety of all employees. Interviewees highlighted that as the pandemic progressed in various phases, the government in Pakistan accordingly issued directives to manage human resources in the organizations; therefore businesses were also fairly conscious of media reporting of onsite cases and strict government policies for implementation of the Covid Safety Rules in fear of penalty and negative marketing and public relations. Consequently, from the data represented above, we can observe that human resource departments adopted work from home and alternate work shifts as standard practices. Though HR Practitioners clearly admitted that they found it severely difficult to engage the employees virtually and stay connected. Most of the organizations faced challenges in gauging Attendance and Punctuality while working from home. Interestingly, this major challenge was extensively worked upon and is being currently transformed into an opportunity that is discussed in the later section of this research.

Organizational productivity – Organizational productivity was expected to show a declining trend, while most interviewees admitted that the declining trend in organizational productivity was fairly evident in the initial days. However, as the Covid 19 restrictions and policies became the new normal, the data exhibits varied tendencies; 53% human resource managers represented an opinion that there was a significant decline in the organizational productivity while 7% marked an increase in the productivity with remaining 40% marking neither decline nor increase in the productivity. Interviewees identified two major reasons behind the declining trend in business (i) lower purchasing power and (ii) lower demand for certain products and services. While for 7% increase was observed owing to the nature of business for example software houses. However this varied response opens new dimensions for further probing in this research.

Implementation of Human Resource Functions – An inquiry was executed regarding the implementation of various conventional HR functions for example recruitment and selection, training and development and performance management etc. The data exhibits that despite serious measures by the organizations to establish more flexible working practices, the implementation of almost all HR functions showed negative to highly negative impact. Social distancing restrictions and strict Covid policies by the provincial and federal governments in Pakistan remained the major reason behind this decline in the

execution of basic HR functions across the country. However, an in-depth analysis of the interview data also implies (i) lack of commitment from the employees while working from home (ii) lack of resources such as equipment and facilities to implement HR functions through digital platforms such as laptops and paid communication software (iii) employees' lack of compatibility with digital means of communication (remained more obvious during the first few months but was later rectified through training and learning).

Opportunities in Managing Human Resources during Covid-19

Prompt Response to the Pandemic – The data findings exhibit a clear picture from responses received from HR managers concluding that the pandemic was a huge challenge; however, most organizations were able to devise technology-based policies and procedures as solutions for ensuring organizational performances. Though initial days remained a challenge for the Human Resource Managers in ensuring improved performances, where 53% of the managers recorded a decline in organizational performance while 40% identified that there was no change in performance. Nonetheless interviews did recognize the shift in behaviours towards acceptance of online work methods since Covid 19, and even with the threat of the disease all gone, employees are utilizing these procedures saving the organization from financial loss accordingly.

Organizational Leadership and Employee Wellbeing- Challenges pave the way for opportunities, the initial data collection reflects that organizational leadership, in various industrial sectors in Pakistan, claimed to remain committed to employee wellbeing and safety. However, apart from creation of opportunities for Work from Home and embracing digitization, HR Practitioners also considered the pandemic as a prospect to reconsider the organizational organograms and opted for rightsizing of human resources. This may have seem an impeccable opportunity to trim the organization's human resource liability; nonetheless, the claims by human resource managers of placing employee wellbeing at the highest level turned out to be in conflict with their intend to employees right sizing. A few interviews also suggested that given the economic challenges prevalent in Pakistan, employers were in search of options to offload human resource liabilities, Covid 19 provided them with reasonable justification to right size, re-engineer and restructure the organization.

Conduction of online training sessions – while almost all other HR functions exhibited a declining trend in terms of implementation, training and development was still able to exhibit a progressive performance during Covid -19. Detailed data dimensions suggest that this is mainly owing to availability and access to online learning and communicating mechanisms including equipment and software. This was one significant transformation in the employees wherein they adopted online learning and development sessions through utilization of online resources to effectively manage the human resource development. Consequently, the practice of online sessions for meetings and trainings is being adopted throughout the globe that not only has enhanced opportunities for global networking and linkages but has substantially reduced the cost of training budgets.

Creation of Work life balance – The options of work from home, flexible and alternate timings were very taken by the employees, though managers identified a decreasing trend in work performance. They also recognized that employees were able to effectively manage their work and home responsibilities during the pandemic and were enabled with more focus on their health and wellbeing. A few managers especially in the automobile, banking, and pharmaceutical sector identified their efforts in managing wellbeing plans for employees during Covid times. This created a huge window of opportunity for the organizations to ensure work life balance even after the pandemic is no more a human threat. However, detailed analysis of the data represents that 20% of the organizations are still exploring work from home and alternate/flexible schedules as options to develop a new normal in managing work teams, rest have restored to the pre Covid onsite work practices. A significant reason for this seems to be concerns for work performances and organizational progress; however the phenomenon should be further explored to drive evidence based conclusions.

Less employee turnover – A positive impact among many negatives, was noticed on the rate of employee turnover. Data suggest that the employee turnover rate vastly declined and employers had to invest lesser efforts and financial resources in employee retention. Managers attributed this behaviour to the prevailing uncertainties within job markets that led employees to be extremely cautious in furthering their career decisions. Therefore organizational human resource departments were able to continue well with the existing skills inventory, that was yet another substantial reason behind the downward trend in recruitment and selection within organizations i.e. lesser need for new employee acquisition.

Human Resource Management Post Covid-19 – Guidelines for Enabling Best Practices

The role of HR has become more people-centric than ever, from arranging COVID-19 Tests for employees to establishing isolation centers, from ensuring the availability of PPEs to extra pay for those working in crisis, from setting up virtual gyms to sending thank you letters to the employee's family. As the data suggests that immediately to the diagnosis of the spread of coronavirus, HR professionals throughout various organizations redefined and adopted policies and procedures to ensure minimum loss to business and profits. The data, however, suggests a mixed review on the transformation of HR's role post-COVID. Where few believe that the HR's role in organizations will further strengthen and policies will be revamped towards digitalization and remote working arrangements while more number of respondents believe that change is hard to establish in human resource management in Pakistan, owing to several external and internal organizational factors; therefore, they believe that HR functions will resume to their normal stance once the pandemic completely eradicated.

One significant observation regarding the application of HR practices, such as recruitment and selection, training, performance management, etc reflected in the data is that all the functions of HR are confronted with a significant decrease in performance efficiency due to COVID-19. There has been a significant decrease in hiring, HR practitioners are struggling to train employees work from home, and most organizations have restricted or refused financial rewards to their employees. It is therefore suggested that organizations may adopt the Critical Guidelines for Enabling Best Practices in Human Resource Management post-COVID Crisis to facilitate them in focusing on developing resilience and agility among human resources policies and procedures. The four Critical Guidelines have been developed after a comprehensive study of the data wherein best practices identified by the participants were merged to form an enabling model that will facilitate human resource managers to follow a definitive sequential direction to achieve their HR objectives.

- 1) Embrace – The first and foremost response to any crisis like COVID-19 is to accept the contingencies and challenges with all possible favorable and unfavorable variants; it is also critical to identify the internal and external influences that may change or affect the organizational direction and strategies. Embracing the situation would ensure focus and enhance a more proactive and definitive approach toward resolution.
- 2) Redefine – Embracing the situation also implies the acknowledgement of the need to transform strategic organizational policies and operational procedures in accordance to the eventuality. While adopting this guideline HR managers must also critically analyze subsequent data that supports their process of re-modeling decisions and ensures worker's safety and well-being.
- 3) Innovate – Though the most ignored among several other factors of effective progress, innovation remains the key to successfully achieving favorable outcomes in terms of employee wellbeing, safety and work performances in consonance with organizational development. The post-COVID era is expected to be occupied by new and unheard challenges that may only be addressed through innovative solutions. Lately, such innovation has been solely linked with the application of efficient technology however, the redefinition of business process models and operational procedure remain a crucial part of such innovation-driven mechanisms.

- 4) Integrate – As human resource practitioners develop and adopt innovative solutions to new challenges, the integration of resources is extensively significant. Organizations are expecting sharp declines in profit values in the immediate future; therefore post-COVID, cost-effective and performance efficient solutions would be a critical aspect for decision-making. Resource integration would ensure the simple efficiency rule where in maximum favorable outcomes are driven by minimum utilization of resources.

Conclusion

While it is relatively more challenging to plan for every contingency or event that may disrupt global economy and the way day-to-day business are conducted, COVID-19 pandemic has provided some insights into future opportunities for organizations to consider as they seek to thrive in a "new normal." In order to achieve the two main purpose of its existence (i) safeguard business interests and (ii) ensure employee wellbeing, human resource managers must explore and experiment future opportunities using increase in virtual work options, embrace change and acknowledge challenges, redefine strategies and business processes for inclusion of contingent factors; innovate creative solutions to address conventional problems, and integrate the resources to ensure a thriving organizational ecosystem even in post-COVID era.

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Conflict of Interest

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