

# **FUNCTIONAL MANAGEMENT PROJECT REPORT ON**

**A Study On Changing HR Practices Post Pandemic**

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This is to certify that project titled “\_\_\_\_\_” is successfully completed by Mr. / Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ during the IV Semester, in partial fulfilment of the Master's Degree in Management Studies recognized by the University of Mumbai for the academic year\_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_

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I hereby declare that this Project Report submitted by me to the \_\_\_\_\_, is a bonafide work undertaken by me and it is not submitted to any other University or Institution for the award of any degree diploma/ certificate or published any time before.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction**

When the entire world was forced to go under a lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic, the corporate world had no option but to adapt the new work-from-home culture. Majority of the companies had not prepared their employees for this, which resulted in a lot of new modifications being made in the working of an organization to tackle the challenges that came their way.

Human Resource Management (HRM) also faced a lot of new challenges with the entire workforce working remotely from home. It made it really difficult for the HR's of the organizations to manage the workforce remotely. The pandemic changed the way HR practices work in an organization and gave it a new definition. It changed the way an organization looked up to its employee's welfare.

This study's major focus is on how the HR practices were changed or redefined to adjust with the new working normal. It also focuses on what were the challenges faced by the HR managers as well as the workforce while adapting to these new changes. The study will also be shedding some light on how these changes in HR practices changed the role of an employee and the HR in an organization.

## **1.2 Situational Analysis**

This study is addressing the challenges faced by HR professionals in shifting from work from office to work from home during the pandemic, and also helping the employees in adjusting to the new normal. The study will help in shedding some light on the new defined HR practices post pandemic and which domains of HRM were affected the most during this change. The study will also help in understanding how the roles of the employees as well as the HR managers changed in the new normal.

### **1.3 Need of study**

During the pandemic, all companies were forced to shift to work from home. The work from home culture was very new to the corporate world and the employees as well as the management were finding it very difficult to carry out their day-to-day operations effectively. All the operations of the organization were forced to be digitalized almost immediately. Some operations were made easier (like digital marketing which made it easier to reach a broader range of customer), while some operations of the organization were difficult to carry out (like warehousing and distribution).

Similarly, every organization's HR practices were modified and redefined during and post pandemic where some of them lost relevance while others gained more importance. It is very important to study how this change in HR practices were implemented and how it changed the role of an HR as well as the role of the employees.

### **1.4 Aim of the study**

The main aim of the study is to understand how the HR managers identified, developed and carried out the various changes in the HR practices during and post pandemic. The study will focus how the role of an HR changed and how these changes impacted the role of the employees as well.

### **1.5 Objectives of the study**

There are three distinct objectives of this study. They are as follows:

- (i) To study the role of employees in the new normal
- (ii) To study the newly defined HR practices during the pandemic
- (iii) To study the change in the role of an HR during and post pandemic

## **1.6 Scope of the study**

The study is going to help us in understanding what were the new defined HR practices in the new work from home culture during and post pandemic. It will also help us understand how these changes in HR practices changed the way HRM works in an organization and what are the new roles of a HR manager.

## **1.7 Limitations of the study**

The limitations of this study are as follows:

- (i) Time constraints: For the study, there was a time constraint. The study is based only on two months of research.
- (ii) Limited area covered: For the purpose of this study, majority of the data collected was from the Navi Mumbai region only.
- (iii) Method used to collect the data: To collect primary data for this project, sample size of the respondents was not very large.
- (iv) Data confidentiality: A lot of data required for the study was confidential due to which expected results were not achieved.



## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Background of HR Practices**

The term "human resource management" has been commonly used for about the last ten to fifteen years. Prior to that, the field was generally known as "personnel administration".

Personnel administration was largely concerned the technical aspects of hiring, evaluating, training, and compensating employees and was very much of "staff" function in most organizations. The field did not normally focus on the relationship of disparate employment practices on overall organizational performance or on the systematic relationships among such practices. The field also lacked a unifying paradigm.

HRM developed in response to the substantial increase in competitive pressures business organizations began experiencing as a result of factors such as globalization, deregulation, and rapid technological change. These pressures gave rise to an enhanced concern on the part of firms to engage in strategic planning--a process of anticipating future changes in the environment conditions (the nature as well as level of the market) and aligning the various components of the organization in such a way as to promote organizational effectiveness.

An organization's HRM function focuses on the people side of management. It consists of practices that help the organization to deal effectively with its people during the various phases of the employment cycle, including pre-hire, staffing, and post-hire.

### **2.2 Theories of HR Practices**

#### *Organizational Behavior Theory*

The study of organizational behavior is applied to HRM functions and its related subjects helps us understand what people in organizational environments think, feel and do. This knowledge helps to anticipate, recognize and monitor organizational events for HR and, realistically all employees. Organizational behavior study includes research

areas dedicated to improving performance at work, increasing job stability, fostering creativity, and fostering leadership.

### *Institutional Theory*

Institution theory suggests that the environment inside the organization has a direct impact on formal organizational structure development. The organizational environment features such as cultural elements, symbols, normative beliefs, and other shape institutional structure.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

#### **3.1.1 Type of Research**

For the purpose of carrying out this research study, both, primary data and secondary data is being used. The primary data is collected using Interview questions. The interview was taken on call, face-to-face, video-calling, or through E-mail depending on the convenience of, both, the interviewer and the interviewee.

The secondary data has been collected via the various websites and the official company website. Another source of secondary data was through research studies by different researcher/authors.

#### **3.1.2 Research Method**

For the purpose of collecting data for this study, basic survey method was used where the respondents were interviewed using different means of communications.

#### **3.1.3 Population of the study**

The population of the study was limited to HR professionals and a few office employees working in different sectors. The total number of people interviewed for the purpose of this project were 15, out of which 8 were HR professionals and 5 were office employees.

#### **3.1.4 Data Collection Method**

There were multiple methods used to collect data for this study. One of the methods used was the interview method which was mainly used to collect the primary data. Another method used was looking through existing documents

and records for pre-analyzed data like research papers or articles written on the topic. Apart from that, personal opinion and observations were also recording during the entire period of the study.

## **3.2 Sampling Design**

### **3.2.1 Sample of the study**

In order to collect primary data for this study, a set of 15 people were interviewed.

### **3.2.2 Sampling Technique**

For the purpose of carrying out the study, the method of convenient sampling was used.

## **Chapter 4: Data Representation and Data Analysis**

### **4.1. Data Representation**

#### Objective 1:

Since the coronavirus pandemic, employees from all sectors and industries were forced to work remotely. This shift in the work environment was new for almost all sectors. Employees and businesses are required to adapt to the work from home culture and accordingly change the day-to-day operations. Especially employees were expected to change the way they work, how they moved around their workplace and how they interacted with their colleagues and client, etc.

Since the very start of the pandemic, most of the employees were flexible enough to adapt to the new changes and perform their tasks with the usual care and diligence. But there have been mixed responses regarding the impact COVID-19 had on the work from home experience amongst employees.

Initially, employees had to go to their company offices to work but post pandemic employees have to work from home on their laptops. Previously employees had fixed working hours but now their workload has increase since their home is their workplace. Earlier the people used to meet their co-workers and have meetings face-to-face but now they only communicate through video-conferencing or E-mails. Post pandemic, no one has any idea when they will get to see their colleagues face-to-face again. Employees are bracing themselves for more unprecedented challenges faced with the work from home culture as the traditional boundaries between their work life and professional life are continuing to break down.

After almost a year of working from home, government have started allowing organizations to open offices but with limited staff. But the problems for the employees have only increase. One of the biggest fears of returning to offices is being exposed to the virus. Employees fear that while traveling to and from office can cause them to come in contact with the virus or worse become a carrier and infect their families.

Another reason is most of them employees are parents to young children. Since the pandemic doesn't seem to end anytime soon, governments have ordered schools to

remain closed and continue with online classes. In such a situation, the parents can't afford to leave their child unattended. This is a case where both the parents are working professionals. Furthermore, there are employees who have senior citizens in their family. And since both senior citizens and children are more vulnerable to the virus, many employees prefer to work from home.

Where on one hand, there are employees who are ready to return back to working in offices. This is the case in cities where the COVID-19 cases have reduced. Thus, employees feel it is safer to travel. Majority of these employees are bachelors. According to some reports, employees feel that there is a lack of in-office collaboration and they miss the in-person meetings in their offices.

Due to these mixed responses from the workforce, many organizations are planning of creating a hybrid model of work culture, where the employees will mainly be working from home and only visit offices for collaborative projects or as and when the situation demands a physical presence.

Talking about the emotional and mental state of employees, it has come to light that the employees are finding it difficult to keep their morale up during this pandemic, especially for those employees who are working in large established companies with a huge workforce. Employees feel demotivated and over-worked. While taking feedback, companies have noticed that there is a surge in stress levels of employees during this pandemic.

For some employees, working from home has become an advantage. Before the pandemic, some of the employees who attended in-office meetings were often overlooked as contributors and they felt left out. But now, during virtual meetings, everyone is on the same page and every person's opinions are also heard. Furthermore, during the meetings held in offices, the duration of the meetings was unknown as after the work was done, employees tend to socialize. This resulted in a huge loss of time. But now, in virtual meetings, once the agenda of the meeting is met, everyone logs out at the same time. This increases the productivity of the employees and reduces the wastage of time in gossiping.

Employees are also expected to re-skill themselves as their way of working will also be changing. They will have to build a learning mindset so that they can be prepared for dealing with the constantly, and sometimes abruptly, changing environment. Post COVID-19 there have been a rapid adoption of new and advanced technology and it is likely to accelerate in changing the roles of employees. There will be changes in workload which might result in an imbalanced time management. Therefore, employees are expected to keep reskilling and upskilled themselves to help them move from one part of business to another.

#### Objective 2 & 3:

HR teams are facing a handful of challenges due to the employees working remotely. Even as simple as the attendance model needs to be modified. The HRs are expected to redefine new guidelines and alter the policies according to the new normal. Job descriptions will also be required to be reframed to be in-line with the part-time, full-time and work-from-home definitions.

HRs will have to come up with new methods which can be used to monitor the productivity and efficiency of employees working remotely. Whether it's the performance management system or employee engagement program, the HR managers have to revise the methods of carrying out all activities and set new targets, policies and guidelines to make sure the employees are able to work remotely. And while these HR practices are changing, it does redefine the role of the HR managers as well.

Post COVID-19, the work from home culture is here to stay. Remote working has become the new norm. And in order to adapt to this new way of working, it is necessary for the organization to digitize itself and transform the brick-and-mortar workplaces into technology-enabled virtual ones. One major benefit from this will be that now HR managers will be able to find a much suitable candidate from the large number of applicants from all over the country, since remote hiring would also gain momentum. This means that now geographical boundaries will no longer be considered a restriction.

Since employees will be working from home, they will lack the 'human connect' that was present in work from office culture. This is one reason companies are focusing more on the social safety and emotional well-being of their employees. HR teams will

have to deepen their connection with the employees and let them know that they are being heard. This is one reason employee engagement practices have gained relevance post pandemic. Companies have finally realized how important the human assets are in an organization.

Employee engagement is also important because during the work from home culture, the working hours of employees have also increase and have started taking up the personal time from their lives. This leaves the employees over-worked, stressed out and demotivated and the lack of ‘human connect’ only makes it worse. In such a situation, employee engagement programs work like a stress buster by helping the employees “blow off some steam” and also motivate them to keep working.

Another important thing HR manager need to focus on is the performance management systems. Before the pandemic, managers used to observe the performance of the employees by checking up on them from time to time. But post pandemic, it has been very difficult to do so since everyone is working remotely from home. In such a case the manager needs to change their ways of performance management.

For example, attendance was one of the most important part of performance management since managers used it to judge how sincere and dedicated an employee is to his work. It is because routine absence at work caused other members of the team to slack off at work and that would promote procrastination in the workplace. But now there is no way to check whether the employee is actually working or not. This in turn will create a lack of trust between the manager and their employees. So, in order to avoid that, new ways to measure performance will have to be established, like measuring performance based on the quality of work, rather than quantity and time taken to complete it.

HR managers are also in-charge of scheduling training session on a regular basis for the employees. However, due to the COVID-19 situation, they will have to schedule them more often or for a larger group of workforces. HR professionals will have to plan training session that will spell out the safe practices while working online or offline and give them tips for staying productive.



Some companies have invested in robots or wearable gadgets to assist the workers to ensure that adequate social distancing protocols can be followed while working. For this purpose, they will have to reserve more time for such trainings. The purpose of such trainings is that since HR managers can't remove all the obstacles, they can at least help the workers and relieve their stress.

HR managers will have to make certain changes in the employment contract and add in clauses or specifications related to the impact of COVID-19. For example, many companies mention the minimum number of working hours per week to work. They will also have to adjust the time-off policies of employees in case anyone comes in contact with the virus.

Moreover, these time-off policies need to be in-line with the government guidelines. So, the most recently recommended guidelines suggest that if an employee has stayed fever-free for 10 days since the symptoms first showed or at least stay fever-free for 24 hours without any medication, then the employee can come back to work.

## **4.2. Data Analysis**

*Null Hypothesis: There was no significant change in HR practices post pandemic*

*Alternative Hypothesis: There was a significant change in HR practices post pandemic*

After the COVID-19 pandemic, employees were forced to shift their work from offices to homes. This change in work culture caused a change in the day-to-day practices of the organizations. And since the workforce was working remotely, workforce management practices also changed.

Almost all the HR practices were affected in some way or other. Some lost their relevance and some become top priority post the pandemic. For example, employee engagement, employee training, performance management, and increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) are some of the major areas which gained popularity in the HR domain post pandemic. Whereas, the least affected HR practice would be the entire recruitment and hiring practices.

While interviewing various HR professionals, one thing that remained common amongst all of them were that everyone agreed that the work from home culture is going to be the new normal and it is going to transform the future of the corporate world for good. They also agree that HR professionals will be playing one of the key roles in contributing to this transformation.

HR professionals will have to redefine almost all the HR practices in-line with the new work culture. For example, they will have to replace the standard attendance and leave policies as there is no means to maintain them. Instead, they will have to place a higher degree of faith in their employees who are working remotely. They will also have to find innovative ways to keep the employees motivated and stress-free in order to maintain and increase their productivity.

Talking about productivity, performance standards will also be required to change and set according to the current situation. The HR professionals need to make sure that the employees are being given proper training from time to time on how to improve their work from home performance, and also work on their decision-making structure since now most of the communication will be done on virtual platforms.

From the above data, it can be concluded that there has been a significant change in HR practices post pandemic. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

## **Chapter 5: Results and Conclusion**

### **5.1. Results and Discussions of the study**

The pandemic has reset all the major work trends and as a result now HR professionals are required to rethink the strategies pertaining to workforce planning, management and performance. It is very important that the HR leaders revamp the policies and procedures in accordance with the new normal.

Along with that, they need to make sure that the employees are able to adapt to the new normal. The need for remote working is only going to grow since it is uncertain as to how long the pandemic is going to last. Increase in remote working is going to create a growing demand for automation and collaborative tools to help shift to virtual working trend.

As an HR manager, it is imperative for ensure that the employees are motivated and encourages to achieve the future goals of the organization and at the same time HR managers are required to properly train the employees to engage them more efficiently while working in virtual teams.

### **5.2. Conclusion**

The HR teams are currently working on the frontline in every organization in order to facilitate the employees. Amongst the chaos, HR managers are stepping up and supporting the employees and prioritizing their mental and emotional well-being. This is because during this unprecedented time, the employees are getting anxious and stressed out. Employers want to channel these emotions in order to keep their employees productive, motivated and at the same time, safe as well. As a final observation, the role of employees as well as of the HR professionals has changed drastically post pandemic and this has refined the way corporates look towards the importance of HR practices in an organization.

## **Chapter 6: Recommendations and Suggestions**

### **References**

1.

### **Appendix**

#### Interview questions:

1. What are the new changes in the HR practices post pandemic?
2. How has those changes modified your job as an HR?
3. How has the employees adjusted with the new norms?
4. What were the challenges faced in shifting to the new norms?
5. Which HR practices/trends became more important or lost relevance post pandemic?
6. Which of the new HR practices were more difficult to adapt to or became easier to do?
7. How was your experience during this new change in HR practices? What did you learn from this?