

**The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Resource Management, Bhavna Mehta, 2021
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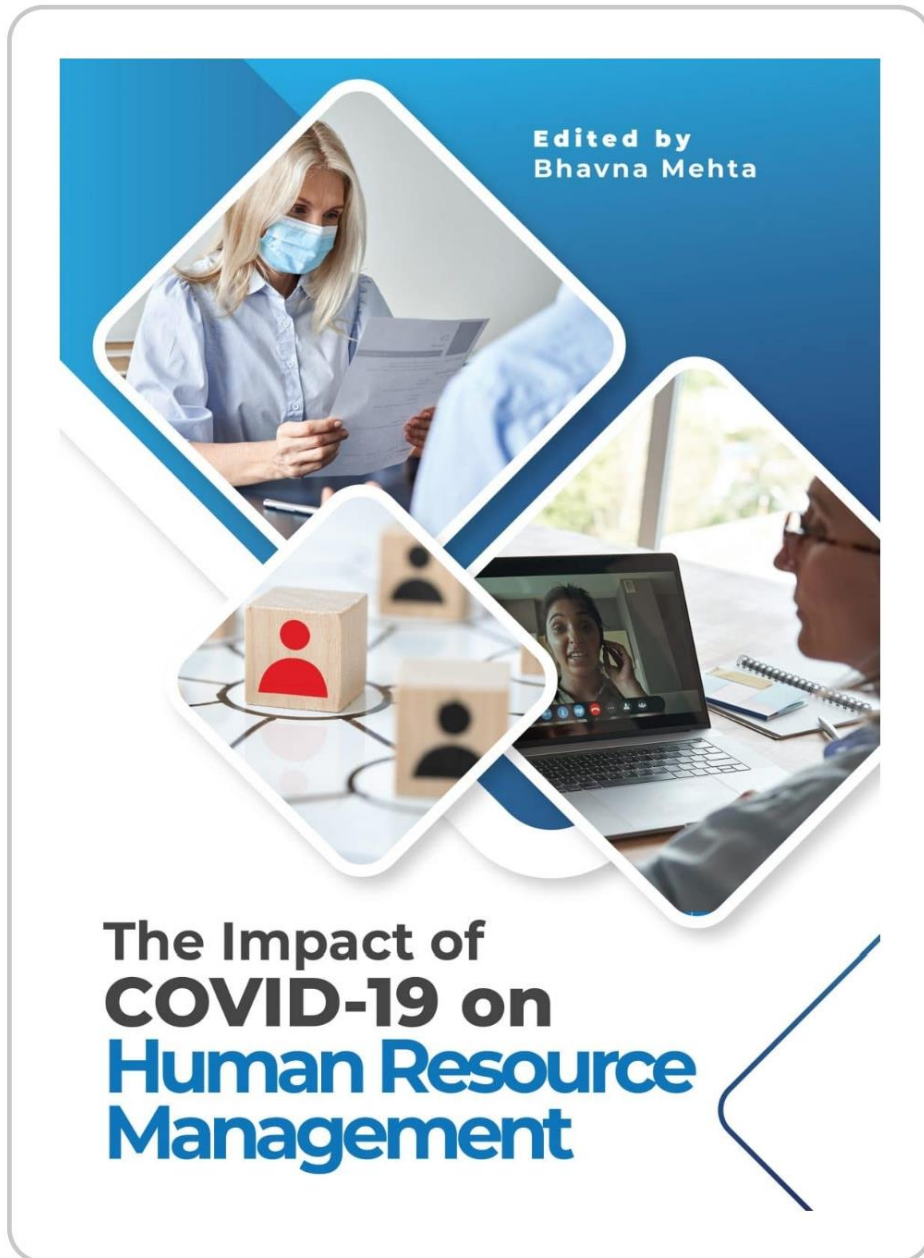
Abstract

This commentary critically reviews the book *The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Resource Management* edited by Bhavna Mehta. This book has seriously discussed the implications, challenges, opportunities, and related other aspects of human resource management in the wake of COVID-19. It has also presented future organizational directions. The book has eleven chapters written by scholars from different countries, making it a global book.

Keywords: Human Resource Management; COVID -19 Pandemic; Work from Home; Work Disruptions; Industrial Relations; Double Burden Syndrome

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic, though initially has been considered a global health crisis, was proved to be a global human crisis that has adversely affected the *world of work*, economy, social life, structures, institutions, and systems. The world of work has been so badly affected that it has impacted – work, workers, workplaces, and their management to the extent of creating new terms like online/offline work, remote work, work from home, new normal, social distancing, blurred work-life balance, etc (Bhatt, 2021; see also, Bhattacharyya, 2022). The impact of COVID-19 on Human Resource Management has been multi-dimensional and multi-variants with grave consequences— right from an adaptation to new working life to demotivated workforce; to a life full of fear, health issues, insecurity, and uncertainties with feelings of helplessness and vulnerability; and a stagnant workforce to the forced migration of migrant workers (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020; Dodsworth, 2021; Fifi & Mocco, 2020; Suresh et al., 2020) and a few other aspects of economic, social and political nature. A book on COVID -19 and human resource management in terms of discussing the implications, challenges, opportunities, and many more aspects along with future organisational directions is a welcome addition to the existing knowledge bank. The book under review was undoubtedly pleasant reading and learning for me. The book has eleven chapters written by scholars from different countries, making it a global book. While each chapter ranges from less than 20 pages, making it 144-pages open access, a peer review book with a simple but effective two-page foreword. The book is an outcome of the scholarly contribution of 18 scholars- belonging to various disciplines and many developed and developing countries and gives the book an interdisciplinary perspective. The book brings to the fore the nuanced experiences, creepy feelings, sufferings, and impacts of COVID 19 on the different aspects of an organisation— ranging from—organisational change, strategic policies,

future HR competencies, employee relations, HR practices, work from home, women employees, etc.

Chapters

Chapter 1 has justified its title *Strategies and Policies Regarding the Human Resources under Pandemic Conditions*, which C. Tomescu-Dumitrescu wrote from Romania. The researcher informed that the Covid-19 pandemic changed and continues to change the human resources organisation, and the pandemic has transformed organisational fundamentally. It has also offered an opportunity to digitalise work, create access to information, and increase the collaboration, but the researcher also pointed out that the organisations have to reconsider the workplaces to make use of the advantages offered by the technology without leaving aside the most essential cog of the team: the people (p18).

Chapter 2 talks about the future human resource management competencies in the wake of COVID 19, which has been constantly influencing the organisational work culture and human resource management. Based on the qualitative research paradigm, Cecile Schultz of Pretoria, South Africa, has responded to the fundamental question of the essential future human resource management competencies to deal with unforeseen challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic successfully. Though the competencies required to excel in difficult times are yet not known, a range of competencies from— affective, cognitive, intrapersonal, intrapersonal, or conative domains may be required, which *inter-alia* will focus upon innovation, foresight, social and emotional intelligence, ability to deal with technology, digitalisation, and virtual teamwork, etc. The area needs further research.

In Chapter 3, Eleni Triantafillidou and Theodore Koutroukis from Greece have examined the impact of COVID 19 on employee relations. Reviewing prior research in this area, the researcher duo has found that fear, uncertainty, and changed behaviour has impacted

employees—employer relationships on the one hand, and employee commitment and engagement is affected on the other. They suggested that the functions of human resource management HRM should focus on helping employees adjust to the new normal, and the organisations need to manage external crises and remain adaptive and alert. Had this chapter been empirical, it would have been in the position to support its arguments forcefully.

Riann Singh and Shalini Ramdeo from West Indies have convincingly advocated for employees' mental health after COVID-19 in their Chapter 4 *I am not Okay*. As it is a matter of common knowledge that the COVID pandemic has escalated fears and uncertainties in all sections of society, employees were no more exceptions. Employees' mental health responses are as equally good preposition for business as it is for employees' well-being. Some studies have reported increasing trends of neuroticism characterised by experiencing stress, upsetting or worrying about many different things, getting upset easily, experiencing dramatic shifts in mood and feeling anxious, and struggling to bounce back after stressful events (see Galea et al., 2020; Kroencke et al., 2020; Galea et al., 2020). Thereby, it is rightly suggested that the efforts need to be made more stable and emotionally resilient workforce. However, scholars could have elaborated on Employees Assistance Professionals and Occupational Social Work concepts. The same researcher duo with the altered preference of the authorship has contributed another chapter (Chapter 5) with the interesting title *Out with the Old, In with the New: Innovative Work Practices for Navigating the Unknown*. As the title suggests, researchers have discussed the COVID-19 pandemic impact on work practices using a few innovative ways and redesigning less used practices like flexible work arrangements, remote work, flexitime, compressed work schedule, job sharing, etc. during an extended crisis. Recognising the social implications of the pandemic with far-reaching consequences for persons in general and employees in particular, they have suggested that the role of HR personnel continues to be critical in assisting workers in transitioning and

navigating the unknown, as they must continue to keep workers safe, engaged, and motivated where the organisation can stand out from its competitors (p.66).

Zogan Opperman, Molefe J. Maleka, and Welile Mabaso of South Africa have presented a content analysis-based discussion and insights from a South African organisation on the theme of the Chapter 6 entitled *HR practices during the COVID-19 pandemic*. The focus was on determining employee well-being practices and describing labour relations during crises. The result reported radical changes in HR practices were inevitable during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have taken care of the psychological and physiological aspects through newer practices intended for well-being on the one hand and the equal emphasis was kept on labour relations practices, including assurance for salaries the union's concerns. With many new sets of recommendations, they focused on workforce planning and Employee wellbeing and engagement as the nucleus of future employment value propositions. However, resilience and dealing with ambiguity will be added emphasis as the competencies of the future workforce.

An Organisational Development practitioner from India, Nilanjana Bhaduri, has drawn attention in Chapter 7 to redesigning the Corporate Learning to Beat the Pandemic and has elaborated on the task of upskilling the workforce as the corporate Learning and Development (L&D) function. Though the employees have accepted Work-From-Home (WFH) situation, they have faced the stress of bringing work into their homes, physical isolation, digital fatigue over the usage of digital tools, and unforeseen fear related to their learning abilities and attitudes. She has rightly pointed out that the L&D function has multiple unlearning and new learning to incorporate and raises many questions related to individual, contextual, life-skill learning, and organisational learning/change. She aptly suggested a more empathetic and design-thinking approach to make the learning strategy effective and successful. In Chapter 8, Richard Kipkorir Rotich

from Kenya has explained the impact of COVID 19 on the company's work management, which includes a standard work schedule, flexible working hours, teleworking, hiring arrangement, shift system, and telecommuting- a mix of partial remote working and partial office working, etc. In addition, H R personnel have adopted other measures to mitigate disruptions at businesses and workplaces which had many innovative practices such as optimising working conditions via job redesign and job crafting, relationship formation at work to enhance forward cohesion, stress management skills, and so on. The findings indicate how the future workplace has anticipated and unanticipated challenges, affecting psychology and behaviour, stressing training, culture, and attitude change from the employees at the workplace (see also, Kramer and Kramer, 2020).

In Chapter 9, titled *Lessons learned from the impact assessment of COVID-19 on public administration and human resources*, Maria Rammata from Greece has highlighted the challenges for public authorities and governance and leadership; conventional governance forms against new, unexpected, unknown problems. The authors derived the conclusion that administrations need to acquaint themselves with experimentation and "trial-and-error", to combine the "regulation" and the "execution", to "adopt" and "adapt" to new conditions with a new mindset. A "small-wins" approach is of great assistance as it is a step-by-step methodology in which administrations gain knowledge and capitalise on what works and what does not for handling the situation (p.95). The old governance and its transformation to the modern and the current "post-modern" governance in the wake of the COVID crisis have exposed to the variations of the external environment, characterised by the terms Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA). It is apt to say that the VUCA environment has multiple facets and repercussions in many public policy domains, from health to finances, education, transportation, and so forth. The reasons behind the high contagiousness of Covid-19 were unknown; those affected could not have the

appropriate treatment at once; it was life-threatening and had explosive growth, making it from a local problem in a Chinese town to a problem of global concern (p104). The pandemic arguably proved that technocrats or politics are dependent on the expertise and the knowledge of pandemic experts. Therefore, there is a great need to harmonise the political will with technical expertise (p.111).

József Poór (Slovakia), Krisztina Dajnoki, Ildikó Éva Kovács, Arnold Tóth, and Botond Kálmán— all from Hungary— discussed challenges and responses of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Hungarian human resources in Chapter 10. Using an 'online questionnaire', the study, carried out by 13 Hungarian and one Slovakian university, has collected massive data from 508 Hungarian companies and public bodies to answer the challenges and changes the Coronavirus crisis has caused domestic human resources. The study points out that Hungarian culture is very individualistic and explicitly masculine; success is measured in performance and power; a competitive attitude and settling conflicts via struggle are characteristic of our culture. Hungarian people do not like uncertainty; they require rules, which they often break. In this culture, hard work is valued, and time is money. Frugality and perseverance are seen as values. However, people are prone to pessimism (p.117). The researcher has also explained the history of HRM, employment, compared with India and other neighbouring countries, economy and employment, employees' concerns, HR response, etc. This chapter is a by-product of the team's hard work, producing excellent multifaceted data and a wide-ranging deep critical analysis, supported by 60 references in the chapter. Researchers are likely to produce another report in the second phase with the number of respondents exceeding one thousand and compile a comparative study extending to several countries. Thereby, the research can have significant policy implications.

The editor of the book, Professor Bhavna Mehta with Eapen Sam, has gifted the last chapter of the book with the self-explanatory title *Work*

from Home (WFH) during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A New Challenge to Human Resource Department in relation to Women Employees in India". The first author and editor of the book is heading the faculty of a well-known university in India and is known for her hard work and soft communication skills. The researcher duo has presented their study to explore and explain how the work from home culture under the grab of new normal has impacted the working women in India. The study has raised a serious issue and challenge for the Human Resource managers. Because of the women's subjugation to the patriarchal way of life, the responsibility of managing a household falls upon women alone; the findings of the study show that the women felt that they were becoming victims of the "double burden syndrome" due to Work from Home (WFH) —a situation where the women have to juggle between their professional work and their domestic chores. The findings bear resonance with the results of the previous work/life balance studies made in Assam and West Bengal (Bhattacharyya, 2009; 2013; Lahiri-Dutt and Sil, 2014). WFH has become a burden for the women because, at home, a woman primarily has to play the role of the caregiver before indulging herself in any other kind of work (pp140-41). In a classy manner, the chapter explained how the work from home had added more woes to the existing problems women face in the Indian context.

The authors also traced the different challenges faced by HR professionals through different chapters. Another crucial aspect covered in this book is to reflect upon the present situation and future vision for HR managers. The book could have been made more alive by inserting some flow charts, diagrams, figures, tables, or photographs

Conclusion

Overall, the book is academically enriching for practitioners and scholars of HRM and other allied disciplines interested in the well-being of employees like social work. The book has beautifully captured the different scenarios during the first or second wave of COVID 19 and made it so relevant in a diverse culture. The book

will be useful for the researchers and students of HRM in particular, and readers in general who will find it helpful in analysing the impact of COVID-19 on HRM practices. It is undoubtedly a welcome addition to the HRM knowledge bank and has sombre practical implications. The book will be long remembered in managing work disruptions and changing facets of the work in the *world of work* in coming years.

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No Conflict-of-Interest Statement

I hereby declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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