**HR in a pandemic**

[Navroz Surani](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/navroz-surani)

Tuesday, Sep 07, 2021

The importance of human resource (HR) function in any organisation cannot be refuted. It is responsible for managing the workforce to improve employees’ productivity.

HR activities involve developing and administering programmes designed to enhance the effectiveness of an organisation encompassing the entire spectrum of designing and cultivating the employer-employee’s relationship. More and more organisational leaders and stakeholders have realized that in a knowledge economy, competitive advantage can be achieved largely by focused attention and effective management of its human resources.

However, despite its great significance, the function of human resources has generally not received its due recognition. Many business leaders and CEOs value human capital but not the people in charge of managing human capital function.

This could be due to many reasons including to some extent failure on the part of HR professionals to effectively demonstrate their value-added contribution in an organisation. During the Covid-19 pandemic, HR leaders in organisations around the world faced novel challenges and had to step up by doing innovative and strategic work to help their organisations navigate pandemic-related workplace challenges.

HR was called upon to develop expeditiously various programmes and policies such as policies on remote work, employee health and safety, new ways of engaging talent, programmes on managing mental health issues and anxieties amongst the workforce, plans for business continuity and for keeping the employees engaged, communicating messages of hope and motivation and last but not the least radically managing change and promoting nurturing and caring culture within the organisations. From various blogs and articles appearing on various social media platforms, it appears that HR teams in several organisations have risen to the occasion and delivered successfully under the most trying circumstances.

Dave Ulrich, the famous HR guru, has on many occasions emphasized that their HR practitioners must endeavor to deliver value. In his book ‘The HR Value Proposition’ he has stated, “HR practices must create value in the eyes of investors, customers, line managers, and employees.”

When one reads about HR’s role during the pandemic, one is astonished to see how much it had to do to create, reinvent and reposition its activities. From strategic adviser, it had to be a strategic player in the real sense and had to jump within no time to manage HR issues facing the organisations during the pandemic. The pandemic crisis has thus provided a platform for HR professionals to innovate and deliver value-added programmes and policies.

A major shift during the pandemic has also been witnessed in many progressive HR organisations where the focus has rightly shifted from ‘one size fits all’ to people-centric policies where employees are supported and employees’ positive experience has become a top priority for the management. Increased use of technology has opened newer opportunities for employee learnings and knowledge mobilization.

So, what does it imply for HR? Covid-19 has provided an ideal opportunity for many HR leaders to boldly make stakeholders realise their immense contributions in managing the workforce during the pandemic. It is an opportunity to earn and build more respect for the HR profession as well as the HR departments. It's time to reinvent and reposition HR, and it's time to partner with the organisational leadership to create a compassionate organisation with a focus on empathy, care, dignity, and respect for employees.

There was never an opportune time than now for HR to make a conscious effort to communicate its valuable contributions using its Covid 19 impactful interventions as proof of being a truly strategic player to the organization and its leadership. It is also time for HR to reassert its role, be brave, and continue to create a post-Covid-19 world of work policies and systems giving a refreshed look to the HR function. The time to act is now.

The writer, currently based in Toronto, is the director of Human Resources and Resource Development at the Aga Khan University.

Email: navrozsurani@yahoo.com