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Re-vision of Future Trends in Human Resource Management (HRM) after COVID-19

ABSTRACT

Objective: The article is an attempt to make a diagnosis about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on HR practices including recruitment and selection, remote working, motivating

employees, re-skilling and communicating. This theoretical study is a kind of revision and discussion with the "future trends in HR" predicted a few years ago before pandemic.

Methodology: The research method was a review of the most recent research findings from business practice and from scientific literature concerning the impact of the pandemic on various fields of human resource management. Due to the growing flood of media information, the authors wanted to select the most updated HR practices implemented in organizations from the reliable and acknowledgeable sources.

Findings: The biggest challenges for HR after COVID-19 will be: restructuring the place of work and the content of work, applying more advanced technology to recruitment, selection and performance; more interests, appreciation and motivation from managers will be needed as well as building trust, a sense of belonging among team members. The list of benefits will be revised towards enhancing mental health and well-being. The reality after the pandemic will require new competencies from managers and employees so re-skilling and re-training are the most expected approaches.

Value Added: This article is becoming an important voice on the impact of a pandemic on the HR practices. The emerging and current results of research on HR trends will allow targeting education systems and equipping employees with the most predictable competences which will be useful in the era after the pandemic.

Recommendations: The COVID-19 turmoil has changed the prepared strategic plans for development of many organizations. This external factor hardened all continents and built new reality where some tips and recommendation are highly welcome. Thus, we proposed few revisited personnel solutions which HR professionals may implement. We also invite other scholars to research the pandemic impact on many multidimensional levels: economic, political, social, technological, ethical ones.

Key words: COVID-19, pandemic, HR challenges, remote working, reskilling, well-being

JEL codes: M54

Introduction

The dynamic changes taking place in the environment of an international organization are reflected in the labor market and clearly translate into the intra-organizational context of human resource management in the form of strategic, structural and cultural conditions shaping the HR policy and practice (Pocztowski, 2019).

The concept of volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) is gaining significance now. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has been recognized as a major exogenous shock that has altered the competitive landscape for both small and large companies (Wenzel, Stanske, & Lieberman, 2020) and as follows from business practice, 34% of employers didn't have emergency plans prior the pandemic (SHRM, 2020a). The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed extraordinary vulnerabilities arising from widespread global uncertainty. Uncertainty is no longer the context experienced by just senior multinational corporations (MNE) leaders involved in managing complex global supply chains, volatile financial markets, and unpredictable geopolitical relationships. Rather, uncertainty has become the context for numerous international employees who are working from home for the first time, experiencing job instability and financial insecurity, and worrying about their and their loved ones' health and safety (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Ł. Sułkowski called for more research and reflection on the social, economic, organizational and cultural aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic (Sułkowski, 2020). Therefore, by reviewing and tracking the latest business and scientific research, one may get the impression that the current models and strategies for human resource management, known best practices, as well as predicted future trends (eg. Deloitte, 2017; *The Future of Workforce Development*, 2017; *Workforce of the future. The competing forces shaping 2030*, 2017; Manpower, 2017; WEC Employment Confederation, 2016; Williams, 2016) completely recapitulated. The headlines of numerous articles say: re-visioning, re-structuring, re-skilling, re-training, as if the reality we have known so far needs to be reformulated. It is not enough to adapt in a given area or to improve existing practices. It is about laying new foundations. The aim of this review article will be to show new trends practices in HRM that need to be redefined in order to actually meet business goals after COVID-19. The trends which were announced a few years ago regarding strategic competences, diversity and inclusion, demographic issues, skills gap, employee mobility and the role of technology in management should

be revised (Krysińska-Kościańska, 2017; Przytuła, 2018; Strzelec, 2019). In Deloitte Human Capital Report 2020, which has been issued BEFORE the outbreak of COVID-19, the retrospective vision of changes which re-shaped the business world since 2011 till 2019 is presented. Surprisingly, these findings perfectly suit to the world we are living in today: "The world today looks remarkably different from the one in which we launched the first Global Human Capital Trends report in 2011. The past decade has been marked by radical change, by a "newness" that has evolved at a pace that can only be described as exponential. Technology invaded the workplace at a speed that would have been unimaginable a decade prior. Workforce demographics shifted substantially, with five generations in the workforce, a decline in working-age populations in many advanced economies, and an increase in the focus on equality for all workers as it relates to pay and treatment. And as the workforce evolved, so did worker expectations – with calls for organizations to do more to help improve individuals' lives, address societal problems, mitigate technology's unintended consequences, and act equitably and ethically."

Therefore, future trends were predicted, but even the predictions from 2019 will not be fulfilled anymore and are outdated after this sudden, unexpected global pandemic. Covid-19 has fundamentally changed how businesses operate today and in the future.

Rethinking how MNEs use global teams and virtual collaboration and international assignments could constitute important elements in a re-configuration of the HRM function. There is an opportunity for HRM research to collect relevant and useful evidence to facilitate global work in the future, by examining the role of the HRM function during and after the crisis. Even large organizations with sophisticated pre-pandemic personnel policies are likely to be re-writing the rules. For example, as travel restrictions ease, employers and individuals will make decisions about whether, when, and where they feel safe to travel. HRM scholarship can offer an evidence-base for global mobility policies that will help employees to adjust to new ways of

working in teams and the inevitable stress and uncertainty of post-pandemic travel (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Restructuring the workplace

After a few months of remote work, many organizations realized that the physical space, offices, car parking are not needed anymore if employees decide to work from home. Those employees who will agree to work in the office will need specific circumstances to be safe, keeping distance and have possibility to open windows to ventilate. These departmental zones will form the foundation of a new “company ecosystem” — one that is more efficient, serves the unique needs of teams better and is far less costly to implement. Ultimately, this new approach will enable more effective teams and improve culture and engagement (Igloosoftware, 2020).

Remote work can be structured so that employees split their time between home and the workplace, on alternate weeks and on a rotating schedule. It can include designated times for everyone to be physically present – for instance, there might be a good reason for everyone to be on site on e.g. on Monday of every month. Or a company could choose a “work-from-anywhere model” in which employees can work remotely all the time but still be able to visit any work location anytime if they wish to do so for the purpose of affiliation (Kaufman et al., 2020). Organizations need to re-write the rules concerning content and place of work to navigate the exponential change that appeared with COVID-19. Increasing sanitation and cleaning, implementing social distancing guidelines along with operational changes like decreasing business travel and reducing the use of common spaces like kitchens or recreation areas. These tasks are predominantly assigned to HR department in which 87% of HR professionals recently reported that their work has been crucial to their organization since the pandemic began and over half of them felt their work is more appreciated than before the pandemic (SHRM, 2020b).



More technology in recruitment & selection

According to KPMG research, in 2019 HR specialists planned to invest specifically in HR technology that enhances HR analytics and allows for further HR automation over the next two to three years. Sixty percent also agree that embracing these new technologies will require a significant change of roles within HR (KPMG 2020). Indeed, this plan has gained importance since COVID appeared, as majority of recruitment and selection practices were provided by e-bots or via ATS (application tracking system). Video interview usage went up from 22% in 2019 to 58% this year. Drug test usage in selection dropped 21%, likely due to lack of availability for in-person testing. Reference checks also went up 9%, suggesting that organizations are looking for ways to learn more about their candidates when other in-person methods are no longer available (McKinsey&Company, 2020).

Technology is a key enabler for faster, cheaper and better delivery of HR services and in some cases can have a transformational as well as unintended negative effect (Thite, 2019). The wealth of various online/mobile communication solutions is advantageous on the one hand, and can be the curse of abundance on the other. Employees are forced to change focus from one platform, app, or project to the next when a new notification comes through, threatening productivity and collaboration. The survey found that 55% of workers use at least two company approved apps just to do their jobs on a daily basis. At the same time, 57% of employees use at least one non-company approved app. Knowledge-sharing is also threatened by this collaboration tool fatigue. The percentage of employees who avoid sharing documents because they either can't find them or it would take too long to do so has increased to more than half of workers (51%) (Ilgloosoftware, 2020).

More Intrinsic Motivation, Engagement, Sense of Belonging and Well-being Activities are Needed

The digital workplace of today is vastly different from the workplace a decade ago — due to both age-old challenges as well as some new realities. There are more tools, more flexibility in where we do our work and more communication with coworkers, whether they sit next to us or work half a world away. But the demand for a more engaged, effective remote workforce has increased exponentially. It is more important than ever to listen and take action to help employees succeed (Iglsoftware, 2020). According to Deloitte study, enhancing engagement and sense of belonging has been organizational priority for this time and those efforts will pay off in the near future. 79% of organizations say fostering a sense of belonging in the workforce is important for their success over the next 18 months (Deloitte, 2020b).

It is not only about knowing IT tools but about intrinsic motivation and engagement to work. There are for example some predictions concerning motivation of academics due to forced e-learning after COVID spread. Sułkowski, Przytuła & Kulikowski (2020) predicted that forced e-learning might lead to a decrease in motivational job characteristics (like task identity, task significance, autonomy and social dimensions of work) for academic teachers. Moreover, it might expose teachers to many e-learning disadvantages exaggerated by the extraordinary and disturbing COVID-19 situation.

Besides, the psychology literature offers substantial evidence that one of our fundamental human motivators is the need for competence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of professional stimulation while working from home is fostering more self-directed knowledge-seeking to satisfy the need to learn, grow, and demonstrate competence. At a time when employees' desire to learn, grow, and demonstrate competence is heightened, companies that offer access to, or reimburse, employees' online training achieve a clear win-win; they increase talent capability and, concurrently, foster employee motivation (Caligiuri et al., 2020).



Historically, remote workers have felt out-of-the-loop and disengaged from their coworkers, but that's changing. The survey found that organizations are making greater efforts to support their remote workforces, to listen to their opinions and include them in company culture. In fact, 93% of remote workers said their companies have made an effort to make them feel included in the company culture and 62% say their concerns are taken as seriously as their office-based coworkers' concerns. 85% of remote workers have had at least one meeting interrupted due to technology issues like lost connections (Igloosoftware, 2020).

The most important HR trends pointed by employers this year was well-being of their employees and sense of belonging. Employees' well-being is now more important than ever. Only the hierarchy of employees' needs has changed, because as a result of the new realities of work and constantly changing external factors, the staff may feel a loss of balance, increased anxiety, decreased efficiency, disturbed relationships with loved ones and colleagues, as well as reduced physical condition. 80% of companies declare that the well-being of employees will be important or very important for their success in the next 18 months, but only 10% are fully ready to implement this approach. According to Deloitte survey, 97% of respondents believe that caring for the well-being of employees is the company's responsibility, 50% of respondents notice a positive impact of well-being not only on the experience of employees, but also on other areas, and 65% of respondents admit that well-being is not part of the work model. While 97% of respondents believe companies are responsible for the well-being of their employees, it is only 40% admit that they measure the effectiveness of actions taken in this area (Deloitte, 2020a). What is more, organizational culture (pointed by 43% managers), leadership behaviors that reinforce organizational values of fairness, respect and psychological safety (33%) and also personal relationships (24%) are the biggest factors influencing an organization's ability to create belonging (Deloitte, 2020b).

Remote working

According to Boston Consulting Group the employees worked an estimated 25% of their time remotely before the pandemic, and it believes that this figure could rise to approximately 50% or more (Kaufman et al., 2020). COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of remote working. More than 70% respondents agree they valued digital solutions that deepened their connection with other people, and 63% believe they will rely on digital technologies more than they did prior to the pandemic even well after it subsides (*2021 Global Marketing Trends*, 2020). Survey on 12 000 employers found the pandemic has forced employers to move an unprecedented share of employees—some 40%—to remote working but more than 25% of employees will work in hybrid models that combine remote and onsite work. 60% of respondents indicate they want some flexibility in where and when they work in the future (BCG, 2020).

Because this shift has been involuntary, continues over a lengthy period, and requires entire households to be house-bound, there is more potential for employees to experience increased work hours, as well as increased work-life conflict. For employees who were globally mobile, and now find themselves working from home during the pandemic, the shift is particularly significant and borders between work and family may require re-negotiation and re-organization (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, since March 2020 not so many “best practices” have been available yet and learning how to lead a remote team is not so obvious. Managing a remote workforce can be challenging because 85% of remote workers have had at least one meeting interrupted due to technology issues like lost connections (Igluosoftware, 2020). Other research reported that 93% of managers learn through trial and error, 60% answered that they read articles, newsletters, or blogs. When it comes to the future of remote work, the outlook seems to be very positive in the minds of remote managers and 87% of them believe that remote work really is the future and it will become ‘the norm’ within the space of 5 years (*The Remote Managers*, 2020). Simi-

larly, according to SHRM survey 7 in 10 employers were struggling to adapt to remote work (SHRM, 2020a).

Thus, it is a clear message to managers: to cope with virtual collaboration on a large-scale during this crisis they must develop and reward employees' virtual collaboration skills, foster perceived proximity, and design ICT, work goals, and the communication structure in a way that fosters collaboration (Caligiuri et al., 2020). As Oxford Economics predicts, remote work will be a talent magnet in coming years and must be viewed as a long-term investment (Oxford Economics, 2020).

Re-skilling and re-training – towards new competencies and new talents

The shortage of highly skilled specialists with international and intercultural experience (e.g. expatriates) has become a big challenge for international companies for the last two decades (Brookfield Global Relocation Trends, 2016; Dickmann, 2017; Manpower, 2017; Schuler, Jackson, Tarique, 2011) and 40% of employers find it difficult to recruit workforce – which has been the biggest increase since 2008 (Manpower, 2017).

In 2020 almost 87% of respondents say they either are experiencing skill gaps now or expect them within a few years. In this situation the solution to this problem could be hiring or skill building as stated by 56% of McKinsey's respondents (McKinsey&Company, 2020).

Employers must figure out how they can adapt to rapidly changing conditions, how to find new skills for "distance economy" and companies have to learn how to match those workers to new roles and activities. It is about how leaders can reskill and upskill the workforce to deliver new business models in the post-pandemic era. Reskilling programs most often focus on building employees' skills in critical thinking and decision making, leadership and management of others, and advanced data analysis. All these are the skills that the previous research has found (Przytuła, 2018) to be in

greater demand in the coming years (McKinsey&Company, 2020). Agrawal et al. (2020) pointed that the skill building should be focused on four areas: digital, higher cognitive, social and emotional adaptability and resilience. In response to this, HR executives generally identify with the significant need to reskill the workforce and according to the *2019 Global CEO Outlook*, 44% of CEOs across major markets plan to upskill more than half of their workforces in new digital capabilities (such as advanced data visualization, ability to code, etc.) big data, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity (KPMG, 2019). Reskilling was pointed by 75% employers as the most important HR trend in 2020 (Deloitte, 2020b) and in response employees are eager to reskill and that three-quarters of nearly 1,500 full-time employees around the world are more motivated to improve their technical or professional skills as a result of COVID-19 (Oxford Economics, 2020).

Global and Virtual Mobility and its Mental Consequences

COVID-19 has changed not only how people work but also the basic patterns of movement and travel. These changes may require relocating activities to other countries. Companies may pick up talent locally but then will have to get new employees up to speed on their new roles-through re-skilling.

Globally mobile employees face unique challenges even during “business as usual” circumstances. In the wake of an unprecedented pandemic, which has upended daily life across the globe, these challenges are exacerbated by being in a new country. Navigating the ins and outs of an assignment abroad is already a long and potentially stressful process for globally mobile workers; during a period of uncertain health and economic outcomes, anxieties are further amplified (MetLife, 2020). During the pandemic, life has changed a lot for many who were international business travelers and globally mobile employees in MNEs; their current “grounding” may mean they are experiencing a sense of loss. Their frequent travel, hotel accommodation,

and business dinners have been replaced by stay-at-home restrictions and virtual meetings. The stress caused by the demands of virtual global work is real; many employees are experiencing long work hours to accommodate time zones and performance challenges in less than ideal remote working conditions (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Mental health and stress are the leading sources of concern for employees working and living abroad. This was true before the start of the pandemic and has only intensified in the months after. Employees need their employers' help, and globally mobile employees need assistance from their company's well-being programs to bridge the knowledge gap as they navigate living in a new country. In the era of COVID-19, explaining health insurance, life insurance and disability benefits are paramount, particularly for inpatriates who may not be accustomed to the local healthcare system (MetLife, 2020). Meanwhile, over one third of employers were providing resources to support healthy adjustment to remote work including: mental health podcast, CDC toolkits, newsletters, books (SHRM, 2020a).

The needs have not changed significantly between the time before pandemic and the new reality. Constantly the most important need for well-being is regular physical activity (according to 67,5% respondents). Mental balance is the most important (from 35% before the pandemic to 43.9% in the new reality). While prior pandemic only 3% of employers offered benefits related to mental condition, nowadays 72,6% of employees expect benefits related to mental condition, and the most desirable forms concern coping with stress (according to 54.7% respondents) and the strategy of calmness, peace and mindfulness (51%) (Activy, 2020).

Almost two thirds of companies are allowing current mobile employees to temporarily return to their home country, 43% of companies agreed on early end of assignment, 22% did not offer any additional support, 14% agreed to temporary relocation to an alternative location and 11% of respondents were offering additional cash support to cover additional costs. As far as strategic plan is concerned, 44% of companies said they will return to business as

usual as soon as possible with the same number of moves and only 12% see the COVID-19 will have a fundamental impact on how we view workforce mobility and the need for international moves (PwC, 2020).

Communicating and Enhancing Social Ties

An average person in 2020 will generate 200-300 contacts daily on the internet thanks to different channels providing continuous online connection (Przytuła, 2018) and "a sensor economy" will emerge, based on devices that are aware of surroundings and location, and recognizing services and communication needs. The current crisis sheds light on the challenges of social and interpersonal ties between people. 71,1% of respondents indicated that the integration of employees in the company has decreased, and 59.4% of them declare that they need integration with other employees in the new reality (Activy, 2020). For those who had not built strong working relationships before the crisis, working and managing at a distance and through virtual communication media has made it hard to maintain (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Delivering technical infrastructure and providing software seem to be obligation of employers that follows from the psychological contract towards employees, who provide their own office equipment, electricity, online capacity to continue working in remote circumstances. But above all managers are in charge of shaping new socio-cultural patterns (Sułkowski, 2020) or new social contract. Research on managing expatriate assignments in MNEs shows that communication and support from managers is an important buffer against job stress experienced by employees. This knowledge can be applied to the pandemic situation of working from home. For some people, social isolation as well as uncertainty about their health, job, and future will have a negative impact on their mental health. Any stigma linked to mental health might prevent some employees from seeking help, and MNE senior managers should therefore communicate with empathy, encourage wellness resources, and offer practical support for employees' health and safety

(Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Research conducted by the Boston Consulting Group indicated that 75% of employees said that during the first few months of the pandemic they were able to maintain or improve productivity on their individual tasks (such as analyzing data, writing presentations, and executing administrative tasks). For collaborative tasks (including exchanges with coworkers, working in teams, and interacting with clients), the number is lower. What was surprising in this analysis that social connectivity is what enables employees to be collaboratively productive. And collaborative productivity is essential for any company looking to improve communication, increase efficiency, accelerate skill acquisition, or harness innovation (BCG, 2020).

Conclusion

Concluding the above research and survey findings it is obvious that COVID-19 as a global, external factor made the HR business practices introduce new rules, policies, tools to adjust employees to the new situation and still to continue business purposes.

All the strategies and plans that were made even one year before pandemic, have to be revised, changed, reshaped. For several months various organizations have tested some solutions which might serve now as a benchmark for others and as a point of reference in restructuring their own HR policies. Below we presented a list of predicted changes and potential practices diagnosed by some business analysts (Table 1):

Table 1. Future trends for HR practices after COVID-19

Research/survey	Predicted changes after COVID-19
BCG (Kaufman et al, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the future of work will be increasingly hybrid – a blend of onsite and remote locations; • focusing on well-being and social connectivity to help employees to recover faster from traumatic, painful, and stressful period;
(Igluosoftware, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make remote workers feel included in the company culture; • focus on how to empower, engage, and make employees productive and support them the right IT tools at their disposal;
(KPMG, 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the power of the next generation of HR is in creating a holistic and mutually reinforcing “whole system” approach to building the workforce (and organization) of the future; • it lies in an organization’s ability to integrate new capabilities, taking a worker-centric view while addressing cultural shifts and embracing an increasingly digital workforce;
McKinsey (Agrawal et al, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build a skill set that will help employees in key parts of your business respond well to changes; • expand the ability to operate in a fully digital environment; • develop cognitive skills to ensure that critical players can respond to the need for redesign and innovation; • strengthen social and emotional skills to ensure effective collaboration; • build adaptability and resilience skills to thrive during an evolving business situation;
(McKinsey&Company, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • filling most gaps will require a mix of approaches, such as hiring and reskilling;
(MetLife, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helping globally mobile employees succeed means understanding the unique challenges and stressors many of them face and offering solutions that can foster a flexible work-life integration; • globally mobile employees are struggling across every component of holistic well-being; • A holistic look at well-being includes four key components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health: Condition of psychological and emotional well-being • Financial health: State of personal and family financial security • Social health: Ability to form satisfying interpersonal relationships • Physical health: Level of illness, injury and general lifestyle;
(2021 Global Marketing Trends, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to build trust in these turbulent times, brands should look at what people value – rather than what they look like – and ensure their promises are in sync with their competence to deliver on them;

<p>BCG (Kaufman et al, 2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · for recruiting, HR leaders can accelerate tech-enabled recruiting methods, such as video interviewing, automated resume review, and gamified evaluations; · for onboarding, companies need to determine what a remote "day 1" and "onboarding week" will entail; · virtual coffee chats, welcome videos with greetings from current employees, and virtual networking can work wonders to foster engagement and immediate buy-in;
<p>(Oxford Economics, 2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · respondents have acknowledged that several factors (including work/life balance, diversity and inclusion, compensation) will become more important in attracting and retaining talent due to COVID-19; · new ways of working demand new skills, including technical capabilities and workplace behaviors that must be learned on the fly; · managers need to make sure reskilling efforts do not fall by the wayside, and prioritize communication and constant contact with their workforce;
<p>(Activy, 2020)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · health has become an absolute priority in every dimension – physical and mental; · the importance is increasing mental balance so the offer of employer's benefits should contain: mindfulness, exercises for the condition and healthy spine, learning proper breathing, facial yoga, webinars about building resilience, working remotely at home with a child.

Source: own study.

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