

CREATING A CONDUCTIVE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT DURING POST COVID PERIOD

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Abstract

This research paper examines the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on human life especially on working people's mental health and emotional well-being leading to restlessness, anxiety, psychological distress, and depression and also suggests few coping strategies to deal with these negative situations and maintaining mental and emotional well-being by making people feel cosy and comfortable by creating a conducive and creative work environment and a healthy work culture by asking their wellbeing and helping and assisting them in all possible ways. It aims at identifying the main stressors during post COVID-19, examining the main moderating factors which may mitigate or aggravate the impact of COVID-19 on people's mental health. The researcher has used the observation method and this paper is based on secondary sources of data.

Keywords: COVID -19, mental health, emotional well-being, work from home.

Introduction

The pandemic COVID -19 is considered now as the biggest global health issue and also considered it as the biggest challenge for mankind. The coronavirus disease has spread across the globe, it has greatly affected our day to day life, businesses, industries, and disrupted the overall economy. In the beginning, people were in a shocking state about how to manage this situation and various organizational activities and gradually found a digital platform as the best platform to run the business-related activities and the best solution for many other issues. Everything has shifted from physical work-setting to virtual digital platform. The announcement of lockdown and industries shut down brought migrant labourers' crises in

industries and many crises on political, social and economic issues leading to a lot of stress among the people as we all know that during these unprecedented times, we all need to work extra hard to manage our mental health and emotional well-being.

The objective of the study

1. To study the impact of COVID -19 on various aspects of human life.
2. To study the coping strategies to tackle this pandemic issue.

Due to the lockdown and social distancing people are having a feeling of 'people-disconnect' and a lack of human touch and social disconnect and also facing issues related to financial losses and job-insecurity.

Due to this Pandemic COVID -19, people are leading their life in fear and stressful situations and still avoiding moving out having a fear in the mind of getting infected from corona causing mental stress to people.

As we all know that Pandemic COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei, China, and has resulted in an ongoing pandemic. As of 20 August 2020, more than 22.4 million cases have been reported across 188 countries and territories, resulting in more than 788,000 deaths. More than 14.3 million people have recovered. Common symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath, throat infection, and loss of smell and taste. While most people have mild symptoms, some people develop acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) possibly precipitated by cytokine storm, multi-organ failure, septic shock, and clots. The time from exposure to onset of symptoms is typically around five days but may range from two to fourteen days. Recommended measures (especially from those with symptoms), quarantine (especially for those with symptoms), covering mouth during coughs, and keeping and maintaining precautionary measures are to be followed by humans for safety and welfare purposes. People are strictly advised to use of mask and gloves and continuously using sanitizer have been recommended by health officials in public settings to minimise the risk of transmissions. Health officials also stated that medical-grade face masks,

such as N95 masks, should be used only by healthcare workers, first responders, and those who directly care for infected individuals. There are no proven vaccines nor specific antiviral treatments for COVID-19. Management involves the treatment of symptoms, supportive care, isolation, and experimental measures. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020 and a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Local transmission of the disease has occurred in most countries across all six WHO regions and for the first time in history, the total lockdown was declared in many cities in the world.

COVID-19 pandemic caused enormous disruption in businesses and it may take many years to recover for some industries, if at all. The growing impact of the Pandemic COVID -19 crisis has really hampered the functioning of several sectors including technology, aviation, automotive, food processing industries, manufacturing industries and banking sectors, consumer electronics, travel, and tourism, etc. So, there is an environment of uncertainty and gloomy all over. This pandemic has caused a global disruption to the global supply chain. The disruption is likely to lead to the permanent shutdown of many businesses and unable to bear the financial losses and disruptions caused by the pandemic. Cash flow dried up for all sectors due to a lack of economic activities. Flight of manpower became a huge challenge. Organizations had to quickly change themselves to adapt to the new

world order and people were supposed to be well versed and equipped now by digital technology. Disruptive technology is an innovative way that significantly alters the way that consumers, industries, or business operates. Examples of disruptive technology include e-commerce, online new sites, and GPS systems. Companies are trying to cope up with economic turbulence caused by COVID 19 through the massive usage of the digital platform by working from home (WFM) people working from home (WFH) are compelled to live in social isolation and social distancing. Industries are struggling with manpower surpluses, shortages, Competency gaps, and Scattered positioning, so employers should look for different formats of employee engagement and different ways to get people back and maintaining the synergy.

Strategies to come out of this situation

Tech Savvy people-During this period, people are working from home (WFH) and under such circumstances mode of working has also changed completely. Under such circumstances, pandemic COVID -19 as a game-changer has enforced organizational employer to re-shape and re-assess, re-design, re-think about embracing a new work culture that is anchored in global connectivity and employees are also re-oriented to learn new skill sets especially about proper using of digital platform. In current times when people are remotely working, they need to know and work on various digital platforms like virtual web conferencing /meeting tools/WebEx /Zoom /Google classroom. Certain technology like

cloud telephony and cloud-based document sharing has made communications among people very easy and flexible. Few startups have deployed drones and AI-based robots for performing high-risk jobs such as disinfecting rooms, communicating with infected people.

People Connect & engagement-People are complaining about anxiety, Fear, restlessness stress, depression so organizational employers and HR managers need to conduct various kinds of training programs on communication, stress management, technology -related programs to making people feel connected and cared and for mental health and emotional wellbeing of people. Especially a few areas where the dearth of competencies are required at this stage as we cannot ignore this fact that the mode of organizational functioning has completely changed and the majority of organizations are performing activities on the digital platform so the HR fraternity needs to fill competency gap and skill-gaps both technically and non-technically. Many key-people still want to stay in their hometown and want to work from Home (WFH) so retaining that key-people is also one of the biggest challenges at the moment. From an industrial relations point of view, the unions are getting restless as workers are scattered & working from home, so utilizing their energy in a positive and channelized direction and also getting those people back on work is also a big challenge. The Supply chain and value chain issues-Processes have to be redone by HR. Companies are struggling with Shortage of

manpower, Competency gaps, scattered positions, Disrupted supply, Lack of synergy. HR needs to look for different formats of engagement and to look at different ways to get people back and maintaining the synergy and teamwork in remote work environments and coming up with redefining the HR role. Since the new way of work needs new skills (both technical and behavioral), HR needs to have a strategy to address these key business issues. This is the most critical business issue today. Restructured and redefined work roles coupled with re-skilling and up-skilling of human resources is the need of the hour. It needs to be done through imparting training and developing people on new skills required to run the business. Up-skilling is learning current tasks more deeply as this is the need of the hour to learn and understand new technologies-skilling is unlearning old skills and learn new skills. People have to recognize that the old way of working is now thing of the past. When the lockdown was declared, organizations and industries started facing issues mainly on the people-disconnect issue as they went back to their villages. 80 % of people from the organized sector went homeless overnight. Even now the biggest challenge for HR is to get back people to work as soon as possible. Many people do not possess sophisticated systems along with headsets, video cameras, high-speed connectivity, and the skills to manage all (Lisa Rowan, 2020). Assisting such people, by giving them training about the technology as well as availing all the facilities to such employees is also a good

way to cope up with the challenges in front of employers HR personnel, and Consultants.

Maintain resiliency and normalcy-It is helpful to deploy the tenets of positive psychology, including resiliency, positivity, and psychological safety. Employers can play an important role in bringing such tactics to the virtual workspace in which their employees operate (Lisa Rowan, 2020). It is important that employers to lay the ground-work for employees working from home to establish and maintain normalcy—whatever normal may mean under current circumstances- including taking time out of the day to tend to love ones. Part of laying the ground-work for normalcy includes establishing and agreeing upon goals, along with regular measurement of the progress of goal achievement. This is followed up by aligning weekly priorities and milestones and everyday meetings with the employee to make them feel a sense of belongingness, inspired and self-motivated. It is also critical to give employees a place to feel seen and heard (Lisa Rowan, 2020).

Collaboration-Collaboration is one of the biggest challenges and strategies. Effective collaboration goes much beyond just ensuring that people log in for meetings and calls when they are supposed to but Spontaneous collaboration has a big role to play in how people come up with innovate ideas and creative solutions — and this should be taken into account when crafting a good remote work strategy by providing meeting tools, chat apps and data sharing software.

Dealing with people stress-During these unprecedented Times, Organization employers and HR people need to put extra effort into managing their people's emotions and mental wellbeing. Anxiety and stress are at times good especially if we manage it well and effortful prevent panic contagion and create time for self and our loved ones by being computer /laptop screen-free and by being calm and focussing attention on normal daily activities as people ask for a routine and seek opportunities to share lightness and humour, by being hopeful and resilient during this uncertainty. An excess of news, misinformation, and rumours and visual images related to pandemic and crisis periods can create symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and poor health so there is a need to limit COVID-19 media exposure.

During this period, employers and HR people need to listen and support their people will go a long way. Encouraging video calls and promoting casual interactions can go a long way in reducing the sense of isolation that people report when they work from home. The culture of having video hangouts every week is one great option, where team members can log in remotely to play games and catch up with colleagues (INSIGHTSHOME, 2020). Managers can ensure that work achievements as well as employees' personal milestones like birthdays and anniversaries are shared and celebrated with everyone on the virtual team. A spot of friendly competition or a shared joke can make all the difference when one is working alone all day.

HR people can always host a virtual lunch or a dinner party using FaceTime or Zoom so that they can have a conversation with all while these virtual meetings and discuss various issues related to the organization. This all creates a sense of belongingness.

It's also very important for companies to evolve and change to ensure that the workforce is rebooted and get smarter through virtual acclimatization and virtual relationship management. During this crisis period, there is always a need to acknowledge & appreciate the role-played various employees. Managing your employee's mental health and psychological well-being during this time is as important as managing your physical health by practicing physical exercises, yoga, and meditation. Find opportunities to amplify and narrate positive and hopeful stories during meetings and positive images of local people who have experienced COVID-19. For example, stories of people who have recovered or who have supported a loved one and are willing to share their experience. The stigma associated with mental health problems may cause reluctance to seek support for both COVID-19 and mental health conditions so keeping all staff protected from chronic stress and poor mental health during this period means that they will have a better capacity to fulfill their roles and responsibilities. The employees need to keep in mind that the current situation will not go away overnight and people should focus and channelize on longer-term occupational capacity rather than repeated short-term crisis responses by

ensuring that good quality communication and accurate information updates are provided to all staff. Rotate workers from higher-stress to lower-stress assignments and also implementing flexible schedules for workers who are directly impacted or have a family member affected by a stressful event.

Daily physical exercises, yoga, meditation to be performed at home to maintain mobility and reduce boredom. Keep regular routines and schedules including regular exercising, cleaning, daily chores, singing, painting, or other activities.

During this crisis period, people need to be very supportive of others and supporting self too. For example, employer, HR people can always make a call once or twice in a week during a virtual meeting and ask about their well-being and any assistance if they need. Working together as one community can help to create solidarity in addressing COVID-19 together. Take care of yourself at this time. Try and use helpful coping strategies such as ensuring sufficient rest and respite during work or between shifts, eat sufficient and healthy food, engage in physical activity, and stay in contact with family and friends' senior always suggest your people not to use unhelpful coping strategies such as the use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. (Mental Health During COVID-19, 2020) In the long term, these can worsen your mental and physical well-being (Vivek Kumar Jha, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak is a unique and unprecedented scenario for many workers, particularly if they have not been involved in similar responses. Even so, using strategies that

have worked for you in the past to manage times of stress can benefit you now. You are the person most likely to know how you can de-stress and you should not be hesitant in keeping yourself psychologically well. (Alex Rawlings, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendation

- We can conclude that pandemic COVID -19 is considered a global health calamity of the century and WHO has already declared it as a Pandemic. According to the report of the world health organization (WHO) on 18th April 2020 the current pandemic outbreak affected over 2164111 people and killed more than 146,198 people in more than 200 countries throughout the world.
- The biggest tragedy is that people had to lose their lives as still no antiviral drug or vaccine has been approved till yet. So there is no other way left except adopting self-protection and precautionary measures like using masks, gloves, and a sanitizer, and quarantine ways and restrictions to be the part of the crowd this all has caused an economic slowdown of not only china, the US, or India but the overall globe.
- COVID-19 outbreak has really impacted human life especially on working people's mental health and emotional wellbeing leading to restlessness, anxiety, psychological distress, and depression. So, there is an urgent need to cope up with these mental agonies as soon as possible.
- And also, there is a need to assure to self and others to keep in mind that the current situation will not go away overnight

and you should focus on longer-term occupational capacity rather than focussing more on a short-term crisis.

- This is the time when people relative's, office staff, colleagues all are required to be united mentally and emotionally may ease the anxiety.
- Activate your social contacts to provide you with assistance if needed.
- Eating a healthy diet. avoiding alcohol, drugs, proper exercise, and maintain calm and solace, and patience in life, and continuously remain connected to the loved ones on the phone, video calls and social media is the solution to overcome this crisis situation.

- Recommended measures (especially from those with symptoms), quarantine (especially for those with symptoms), covering mouth during coughs, and keeping and maintaining precautionary measures are to be followed by humans for safety and welfare purposes.
- People are strictly advised to use masks and gloves and cover their mouth while sneezing or coughing and continuously using sanitizer have been recommended by health officials in public settings to minimise the risk of transmissions.
- Health officials also stated that medical-grade face masks, such as N95 masks, should be used only by healthcare workers.

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Dr Meenakshi Kaushik has more than 16 years of experience in teaching, training, research and corporate in the area of HRM & OB & leadership development and Values & Ethics. Presently, she is associated with Lingayas University as a Professor (HOD, School of Commerce & Management, Faridabad). She was also been associated with Accurate Group of institutions, Greater Noida as a professor since 6th Feb 2019 till 30th, Nov 2019. Prior to this, She worked as an Associate Professor in NDIM (GGSIPU), from 19th Feb 2014 till June 2018. Her Ph.D is entitled as "A Study of Leadership Effectiveness in Women Executives in Context of Delhi Based Business organizations" has brought relevant theoretical and empirical imperatives on leadership development strategies among working executives. She has been associated with prestigious management institutions like IMT, Amity University, DBS, and ICFAI. She had also been associated as a Trainer in ISTD (New Delhi) for six years taking session's weekends. She has guided many students pursuing PhD as well as MBA / PGDM. She has attended several summits/conferences/seminars at national and international levels and presented papers. She received best paper presentation award on "Position of Women in Rural Infrastructure" at Rajasthan University. She is the members of AIMA, SHRM and NHRD, DMA. She also has an Industry experience for more three years. She has conducted many workshops for senior and middle-level professionals of corporate and industry sectors on the issues related to Gender issues and HRM. She has also imparted guest lectures in JDMC (DU) on entrepreneurial development. She is also a reviewer in Scopus Indexed Journal.
