



HR Management in Post-Pandemic India: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered the management of Indian employees, including their work schedule and location. This study aims to (1) clarify the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and human resource management (HRM), (2) talk about how the pandemic has affected HR, and (3) offer original and creative HR solutions to deal with those HR issues in the post-pandemic period. This report makes the case that Indian businesses must reconsider and rethink their HR policies and procedures in light of the present "new normal," which means they will not be able to resume their pre-pandemic work environment. Future research directions and ramifications are also mentioned.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, impact, work-life balance, remote work, HRM, India.

1. Introduction

Competence, motivation, and retention are just a few of the many internal and external elements that affect human resource (HR) outcomes. Political, economic, legal, social, technical, and labor market issues are examples of external factors. On the other hand, internal elements often include organizational structure, culture, financial strength, technology and physical resources, and management style. Organizations typically have greater influence over internal dynamics, even when they may have little to no control over external factors. The novel coronavirus illness (COVID-19), which can spread through airborne transmission, is one of the external variables that has had a significant influence on enterprises and their workforce.

Early in 2020, COVID-19 caught everyone off guard, disrupting and altering lives in ways that had never been anticipated or handled before. Organization-wide upheaval, complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty are some of its repercussions. Additionally, it has had a significant impact on workplace practices and policies, especially those related to human resources (Cooke, Dickmann, & Parry, 2022; Adikaram, Naotunna, & Priyankara, 2021). First, in March 2020, India's jobless rate hit a record high. In March 2020, there was a remarkable mass exodus of work from home (WFH). The "Great Resignation" took place between the middle of 2021 and the beginning of 2022. Lastly, as will be addressed later, there has been a trend to "quite quitting" since mid-2022, followed by "loud quitting" (Detert, 2023; Morrison-Beedy, 2022). The epidemic has had a significant impact on how businesses operate and oversee their employees.

In addition to economic downturns, job losses, resignations, and the closure of numerous firms, the pandemic also created a complex and difficult environment for managers and human resources experts. Millions of Indian workers were reluctant to return to their jobs even after COVID-19 vaccines were introduced in late 2020 (Susik, 2021; Kalogiannidis, 2021). Since then, it has been difficult for Indian businesses to find, hire, and keep skilled workers. According to Taylor (2022:6), "for approximately a year, approximately 10 million jobs in India were unfilled because workers were leaving their jobs in large numbers." In India, there were over 9.6 million open posts as of September 2023. Bureau of Labor Statistics, India, 2023.

Even though a lot of research has been done on how COVID-19 affects a variety of topics, including hiring and retention (Collings et al., 2021; Vahdat, 2022), burnout (Gigauri, 2020), resignation (Allman, 2021; Tessema et al., 2022), flexible work schedules (Azeem & Kotey, 2021), "quite quitting" (Detert, 2023; Klotz & Bolino, 2022), "loud quitting" (Detert, 2023; Harter, 2023), the economy (Pak et al., 2020), and mental health,

There are several studies that describe the connection between COVID-19 and HRM in general, as well as the related HR problems, and supply chains (Barman, Das, & De, 2021). The purpose of this study is to fill this

research void. This study specifically attempts to (1) clarify the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and HR issues, (2) talk about how the pandemic is affecting HR, and (3) offer original and creative. There are four sections to this study. Following the introduction, the second section examines the body of existing research and creates a conceptual framework that clarifies the connection between COVID-19 and other HR-related concerns. The research approach employed in this study is described in Part 3. The key points of this study are covered in Part 4. The study's consequences, conclusions, and future research directions are covered in the final part.

2. Literature Review

As shared above, outside variables like COVID-19 have a big influence on an organization's overall performance as well as its HRM policies and procedures in particular. People and organizations need to work together (Tessema & Soeters, 2006). According to the literature currently in publication, human resources are an organization's most valuable asset (Gerhart & Feng, 2021; Huselid, 1995). According to Barney (1991) and Huselid (1995), human resources are an organization's most valuable resource and source of long-term competitive advantage. Effective HRM, which is concerned with the efficient management of human aspects in an organization, is necessary for organizations to have effective HRs. HRM is the process of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling the recruitment, training, development, motivation, and retention of human resources (Verhulst & DeCenzo, 2022). (Phillips, 2022).

Factors that explain how the COVID-19 pandemic and HRM are related

The topic of how the COVID-19 pandemic affected HRM is raised by the fact that it has negatively impacted HRM. We found that the following five elements can help explain the connection between HRM and the COVID-19 pandemic after examining the existing literature.

A rise in work-from-home (WFH) was caused by the epidemic.

The Indian government imposed a mandatory shutdown in March 2020. Millions of Indian workers were therefore forced to work from home; that is, companies either voluntarily or involuntarily allowed their employees to do so, and many of them have discovered that they prefer the WFH alternative. They were able to see the benefits of working from home, including reduced commuting time and costs, comfort from working from home, flexibility in juggling work and family commitments, and enhanced wellbeing. Following the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccination in late 2020, employers anticipated that workers will resume full-time work. However, because they profited from working from home, the majority of those individuals were hesitant to return to the office full-time. Reduced commuting time and costs, the ease of working from home, the ability to manage professional and personal obligations, and enhanced wellbeing are some advantages of working from home (Kazi & Hastwell, 2021; Taylor, 2020).

For example, approximately 45% of workers in September 2021 worked from home to some extent and were not interested in going back to work full-time (Maurer, 2021); roughly 27% of workers worked remotely to some extent in September 2022; and roughly 25% of workers worked remotely to some extent in September 2023. Accordingly, WFH in India increased fivefold, from 5 percent to 25 percent, between 2020 and 2023 (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2023). It is more difficult to manage personnel who operate remotely than those who work in person. As a result, the rise in WFH has presented enterprises with new HR difficulties.

Employee resignations rose as a result of the pandemic.

Since employees leave for a variety of reasons, including retirement, changing careers, getting sick, and better possibilities, employee resignation is an unavoidable occurrence. The volume of employee resignations during the epidemic, however, was unusual. The majority of Indian workers were protected throughout the first year of the pandemic and chose not to quit their jobs because of concern for the economy's unknowns. However, many employees felt empowered to leave and seek out better possibilities in the middle of 2021. In 2020, employees were able to reevaluate how fulfilling their work was, according to Kaplan (2021). Cook (2021) also emphasized that the pandemic provided Indian workers with an opportunity to reevaluate their objectives, occupations, careers, and lives. Millions of Indian workers consequently quit their jobs in order to retire, switch careers, or work for a different company that better suited their requirements and preferences. For example, approximately 51 million workers left their occupations in 2022, compared to around 48 million in 2021 (The Labor Statistics, 2023). Employee separation, replacement, and training expenditures all grew in tandem with the rise in employee resignations.

The pandemic exacerbated job unhappiness and employee disengagement.

Even before the pandemic, there were problems with job satisfaction and employee disengagement. On the other hand, the epidemic raised job satisfaction and employee disengagement. About 18 percent of Indian workers were "loud quitters" in 2023, compared to almost 50 percent who were "quiet quitters" in 2022 (Harter, 2023). The aforementioned numbers are staggering and show how disengaged and unhappy workers are with their jobs. The terms "quite quitting" and "loud quitting" are widely used to describe employee

disengagement, a prevalent HR issue in today's workforce. "Quite quitting" is a form of disengagement in which employees put in the least amount of effort to retain their jobs by not going above and beyond what their organizations may expect of them. This occurs when employees perform the bare minimum of work requirements (scale down their efforts) and are psychologically detached from their jobs (Detert, 2023). They act in this way because they believe that while working excessively, they are not adequately compensated for their efforts (Harter, 2023). Quiet quitters believe that the rewards they gain for their efforts are not commensurate with the amount of labor they undertake. The following are some instances of "quite quitting": declining to volunteer for extra work, refusing to work overtime, refusing to work beyond their job description, being less inclined to exhibit good citizenship, remaining silent in meetings unless directly addressed, and rising absenteeism and sick leave rates (Klotz & Bolino, 2022).

Conversely, "loud quitting" is a type of disengagement in which workers are more vocal about their discontent, openly voice their discontent, as well as their desire for change and the reason behind their departure. They are actively disengaged and don't hesitate to complain, vent their emotions, or share their concerns. Loud quitters, as opposed to quiet quitters, typically grumble more loudly and outright decline to perform tasks they don't think are necessary (Harter, 2023).

Compared to "quiet quitting," "loud quitting" may be worse. Organizations must therefore search for patterns of disengagement, disillusionment, and job discontent and determine the underlying reasons for these disengagement and unhappiness. Unengaged employees have a detrimental effect on the bottom line of the company, whereas engaged employees have a favorable influence. For example, companies with engaged workers make 23% more money than those with disengaged people, yet the global cost of lost output from disengaged workers is \$8.8 trillion (Pendell, 2023). As a result, job discontent and employee disengagement have increased the HR difficulties that businesses face.

The pandemic made workers more stressed.

The following problems have caused the pandemic to worsen the stress levels of Indian workers (APA, 2021; Hamouche, 2020a; McNeil, 2021; Zielinski, 2021). First, a lot of workers were worried about what layoffs, bankruptcies, and salary reductions would happen in the future. Second, COVID-19-related disease, death, and turnover have resulted in the loss of many employees. Third, a lot of people no longer have regular social ties. Fourth, a lot of employees have more work to do. Fifth, employees must wear masks or be vaccinated. Sixth, a lot of employees struggle to strike a good work-life balance. In situations where there is uncertainty or danger, employees are more likely to experience stress and frustration (Chen, 2021; Kumar, Kumar, Aggarwal, & Yeap, 2021). According to earlier research, stress, anxiety, and depression are prevalent mental health issues among employees (Hamouche, 2020a; Zielinski, 2020).

One of the main reasons for employee absences is mental health issues, and the expenses of presenteeism—the practice of employees with mental health issues but nevertheless showing up for work—are much higher. As a result, the HR difficulties have been exacerbated by rising employee stress levels.

The pandemic made hiring more difficult.

Prior to the epidemic, hiring was one of the biggest HR problems. But as the pandemic raised employee demands and expectations, hiring difficulties have gotten worse. The job market has been competitive and employee-driven for the last two years, with a 50-year low unemployment rate (The Bureau of Job Statistics, 2023). For example, there were over 10.7 million unfilled positions in India in September 2022. This type of labor market has made hiring the most difficult HR task and given Indian workers a lot of job options. Recruitment and retention have grown in both scope and complexity.

Post-pandemic HR strategies

Due to the fact that they have made it more difficult for firms to recruit, retain, and inspire employees, those five variables have had a major impact on HRM. How might organizations address those issues is the question. In order to help firms address those HR issues in the post-pandemic age, we have outlined five HR methods.

Giving FWAs

Offering FWAs, or work schedule choices (such as in-person, totally WFH, hybrids, shortened workweeks, and flexible schedules), which increase employees' flexibility at work, is one of the HR tactics that would aid in improving HR outcomes in the post-pandemic period. The epidemic has altered our sense of the traditional work schedule as well as where, how, and when we work (Chamberlain, 2021; Zielinski, 2021). Companies must evaluate their employees' preferences for where, when, and how they work as their need for flexibility grows and make an effort to meet those needs. The reason for this is that employees who receive FWAs are typically happier, healthier, less stressed, and more productive (Microsoft, 2021; Sammer, 2021; Tyler, 2022).

According to earlier research, companies that offer FWAs have a respectable amount and caliber of goods and services (Kazi & Hastwell, 2021; Seth, 2021). Therefore, companies must give FWAs wherever possible. As they adjust to how people work best, they also need to reconsider and reinterpret their HR rules and procedures.

Providing enticing compensation and benefits

Offering competitive salaries, hourly pay, and employee perks is another HR tactic that could help enhance HR outcomes in the post-pandemic and present tight labor market. Individual and organizational performance may suffer if these services are not rendered (Grimaldi, 2021; Parker & Horowitz, 2022; Susik, 2021; Tyler, 2022). Organizations must provide careful thought, particularly to high-performing personnel and roles that are difficult to fill. One-size-fits-all benefit plans should be avoided by organizations.

Having e-HRM that works

HR outcomes have been significantly impacted by effective e-HRM. According to available data, e-HRM gives businesses a competitive edge. Examples of this include technology-based hiring and selection methods like hiring software, social media platforms, interactive technologies like video interviews, gamification of hiring, HR analytics, and recruitment chatbots (Tessema et al., 2020), virtual onboarding (Chen, 2021), virtual training (Zielinski, 2022), and virtual socialization (Ladika 2020) (Bondarouk et al., 2017). As a result, companies need to focus on e-HRM, which is greatly influenced by technology.

Giving appropriate organizational assistance

The pandemic had a negative impact on the physical and mental health of employees (Hamouche, 2020a; Kumar et al., 2021), thus it is important to give them the attention they need. Therefore, offering appropriate assistance to staff members is a fantastic human resources tactic that would help businesses recruit, inspire, and retain employees in the post-pandemic period. Better HR results are more likely to occur in organizations that meet the demands of their employees. To put it another way, when people get the help they require, they are more likely to join, put in more work, and remain with an organization for a long time. The following are some notable instances of organizational support that can be given to staff members:

***To assist employees in juggling their personal and professional lives.**

Employees' desire to combine their personal and professional life has grown during the epidemic (Maurer, 2021; Hirsch, 2021). Companies must provide flexible scheduling alternatives, permit employees to take time off if necessary, and provide chances for remote work in order to assist staff in better juggling their professional and personal commitments (Maurer, 2021; Tyler, 2022). Organizations must adjust their HR policies and initiatives in accordance with these measures.

***To assist employees in obtaining efficient EAPs.**

Personal issues among employees, such as substance misuse, mental and emotional health disorders, and financial and legal difficulties, have escalated during the pandemic (APA, 2021; Tyler, 2022). Therefore, having efficient EAPs can aid in lowering employee difficulties, which enhances workers' productivity and well-being. EAPs are programs that assist staff members with personal issues such family connections, financial and legal difficulties, emotional and mental health challenges, and substance or alcohol misuse (Verhulst & DeCenzo, 2022, p. 355).

*** To facilitate virtual socialization among employees.**

Organizations must give their employees opportunities to virtually socialize (e.g., virtual parties, non-business communication, and pre/post-meeting chats) since the pandemic has reduced social interaction. This will help them stay connected and form bonds with their coworkers, which will increase their job satisfaction (Ladika 2020; Zeidner, 2020).

*** To assist employees in obtaining wellness programs that function.**

The physical and emotional well-being of employees has declined during the epidemic (Fournier, 2021; McNeil, 2021; Sammer, 2021). For example, 73% of the 93% of employees who said they were having difficulties with their well-being in 2022 attributed such difficulties to the pandemic (APA, 2022). Therefore, companies must offer wellness initiatives that support employees' mental, physical, and emotional health (Huo, Boxall, & Cheung, 2020).

***To assist employees in receiving the right care and oversight.**

Companies must treat their employees with decency and respect given the numerous stressors and difficulties they encounter during the pandemic (Telford, 2022; Tessema et al., 2022). Burkus (2017) emphasizes that companies need to focus and take into account the essential assets of their employees. Employee well-being must therefore be prioritized since it has a significant impact on HR results.

*** To assist employees by offering enough paid time off.**

Due to physical and mental health issues, family member isolation and quarantine, homeschooling, the difficulty to maintain a healthy work-life balance, school lockdowns, and a shortage of childcare providers, employee obstacles have escalated throughout the pandemic (Carucci, 2021; Telford, 2022). Numerous

workers have also suffered from long-term ailments. Accordingly, companies must provide workers with greater paid time off, which necessitates modifying organizational leave regulations (Ladika, 2020).

***To assist workers in becoming more engaged and satisfied with their jobs.**

Job discontent and employee disengagement have escalated during the pandemic (Harter, 2023; Telford, 2022). Given the detrimental effects of low employee engagement and discontent, companies must take steps to improve employee happiness and engagement, such as assisting staff members in feeling a sense of belonging to their teams, enjoying their work, and having a favorable opinion of their companies.

*** To assist employees in obtaining a program of reverse mentorship.**

Millions of workers who were working from home throughout the pandemic are now obliged to work in person. For people who work from home, offering a reverse mentorship program can be quite helpful in helping them re-adjust, communicate, learn from one another, and work together. Colleagues, regardless of seniority, "pair up" in a reverse mentoring partnership so that they can learn from one other. Both parties' careers may gain from this since their knowledge would be shared. This can enhance communication and assist close gaps in hierarchy and generation. By fostering a more collaborative workplace culture and bridging the generational divide, this program can enable staff members at all levels to play a part in the company's post-COVID recovery and expansion (Tylor, 2022).

*** To assist remote workers in getting the right training and IT infrastructure.**

As more employees work from home, it is essential to assist them in obtaining appropriate IT support (Sammer, 2021; Zielinski, 2021). Remote workers must have access to the technical assistance they require, such as training, online workspaces, email, and instant chat systems, and specialized work phones) to effectively and pleasantly finish their responsibilities. Additionally, companies must update their IT and HR policies (Saxena, Bagga, & Gupta, 2021).

Establishing a secure and healthful work environment

Despite the fact that workers want to work in a safe and healthy environment, the epidemic has made them even more so. Employees become more conscious of the significance of creating a safe and healthy work environment as a result of the pandemic (Subramony et al., 2022). Employees' worries about their health and safety at work have grown during the pandemic (CDC, 2021; Sheather & Slattery, 2021). Although the COVID-19 pandemic officially ended on May 11, 2023, the virus is still present since we are transitioning from the pandemic era—when the virus spreads unchecked—to the endemic chapter, when healthcare facilities are not overburdened.

As a result, enterprises in India must come up with new and inventive ways to comply with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's (OSHA) and the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) standards for COVID-19 and other workplace health and safety concerns. Concerns about COVID-19 among employees have grown during the pandemic (Telford, 2022; Tyler, 2022). Employee concerns about COVID-19 and other health and safety issues must be quickly heard and addressed. Millions of workers were not provided with timely and pertinent COVID-19-related information during the epidemic (Tyler, 2022). Nonetheless, this problem can be resolved with the use of AI-powered legal and regulatory compliance technologies (Sheather & Slattery, 2021). These systems detect pertinent laws and regulations, scan and analyze enormous volumes of legal and regulatory data, and offer real-time assistance on compliance requirements using sophisticated algorithms. Additionally, they can assist companies in keeping abreast of developments in COVID-19-related legislation and regulations as well as other new challenges (Collings, 2021). Millions of Indian workers are unaware of COVID-19 during the pandemic (Alonso, 2021). In order to raise awareness, organizations should invite professionals to offer guidance and trustworthy, unbiased information about COVID-19, immunizations, and other measures. For ethical and legal reasons, businesses have previously attempted to create a safe and healthy work environment. Nonetheless, creating a secure and healthy work environment can boost an organization's capacity to recruit, retain, and inspire workers as well as yield financial gains (Harbert, 2021).

A framework that explains how the pandemic and HRM are related

We created a conceptual framework (Figure 1) that illustrates the connections a researcher anticipates finding between the various study components. As a result, our framework illustrates the relationship between HRM and the pandemic on the one hand, as well as the HR issues that the pandemic has affected and the HR solutions that can be used to solve those issues in the post-pandemic period on the other.

We first borrowed concepts from three theoretical stances/approaches—universalistic, contingency, and configurational—that offer distinct accounts of the relationship between HRM and performance in order to create our framework. For instance, the universalistic approach makes the assumption that businesses with the best HR

practices will perform better at any time and in any location (e.g., Delery & Doty, 1996); the contingency approach makes the assumption that businesses with HR practices that depend on the situation's context will perform better (e.g., MacDuffie, 1995); and the configurational approach makes the assumption that businesses with HR practices that are consistent across the board (horizontal fit) and best fit their strategies (vertical fit) will perform better (Delery & Doty, 1996). According to a literature review, they have theoretical underpinnings in resource-based theory, human capital theory, and contingency theory (Paauwe, 2004; Tessema & Soeters, 2006; Youndt et al., 1996).

Studies have indicated that both internal and external factors impact the context in which employees are managed (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2022; Phillips, 2022). Nonetheless, the influence of the pandemic on HRM was the main focus of this study. As seen in Figure 1, we developed a conceptual framework to describe this connection as well as HR tactics in response to the epidemic. The following presumptions form the basis of the conceptual framework:

* The COVID-19 pandemic is one example of an external issue that affects HR functions (A), which in turn affect HR outcomes (C), which in turn affect employee performance through employee competence, motivation, and retention.

*The efficiency of HR services, such as hiring, training and development, employee performance reviews, compensation and benefits, and workplace health and safety, determines how effective HR outcomes are (Paauwe, 2004).

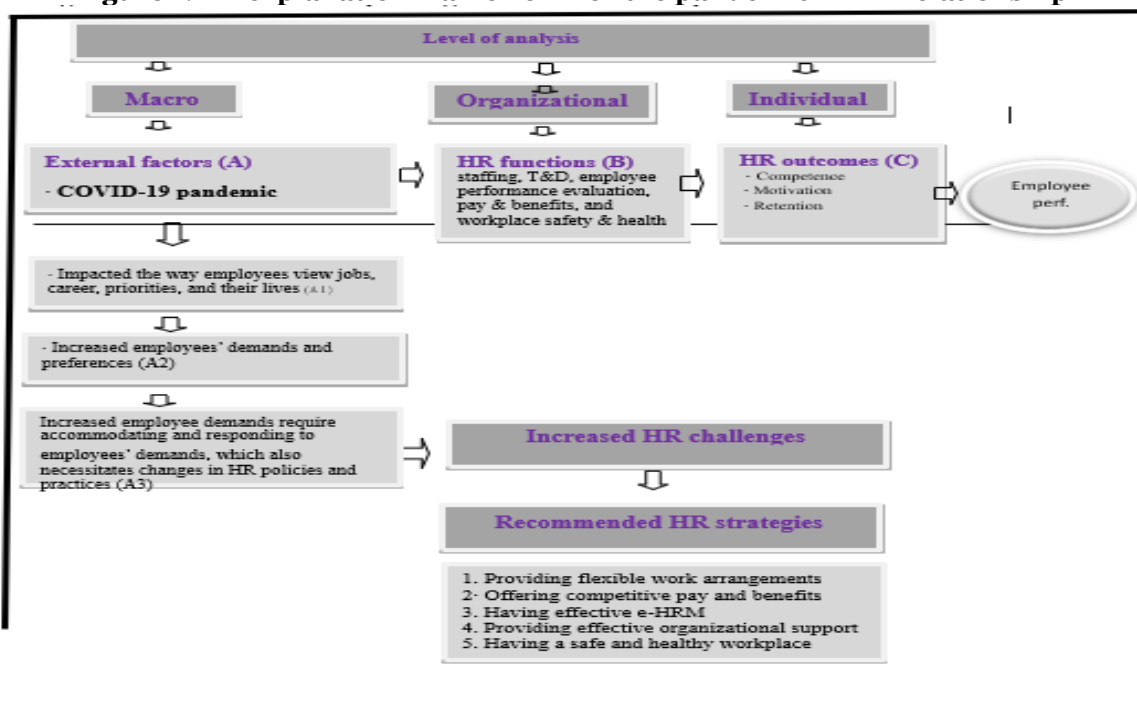
*HR outcomes suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's enhanced HR problems.

*Workers' perceptions of their employment, professions, lives, and priorities were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (A1), which therefore influenced their preferences and demands (A2). It is necessary to adapt and respond to the evolving needs and preferences of employees, which calls for modifications to HR policies and procedures (A3).

*The pandemic's effects on HR are addressed via the five recommended HR solutions. HR functions will have a greater influence on HR outcomes the more successfully the recommended HR strategies are put into practice.

*There are three layers that impact HRM effectiveness: organizational, which refers to organizational aspects, individual, which refers to employee attributes, and macro, which refers to external circumstances. However, this study's primary focus is on organizational (HR functions) and external (COVID-19 pandemic) aspects. It is impossible to assess the COVID-19 epidemic and HR functions without taking into account various HR concerns at the individual level.

Figure 1: An explanation framework for the pandemic-HRM relationship



Research Methods

The subject being studied and the research questions to be explored are conceptualized by research methodology, which also offers resources for conducting research and gathering relevant data (Ghauri, Gronhaug, & Kristianslund, 1995). Therefore, the research problem and its goals determine which method or methods to employ. The authors' observations and experiences, as well as secondary sources, were employed in this study. Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar Web of Science were used to search for articles. We combined the following terms and phrases: COVID-19 and HR/HRM, COVID-19 and recruitment/retention, COVID-19 and mental health/burnout, COVID-19 and resignation/separation, COVID-19 and flexible work arrangements, COVID-19 and "quite quitting," HR-performance relationship, external factors and HRM, and COVID-19 and the labor market. We found 68 publications that improved our knowledge of the connection between HRM and COVID-19. As a result, we created a conceptual framework that clarifies the connection between COVID-19 and HRM and HR solutions that can help Indian firms deal with their post-pandemic HR issues.

Findings and Discussion

In accordance with the goals of the present study, we described the relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and HRM, talked about how the pandemic affected HR issues, and offered original and imaginative HR solutions to deal with those issues in the post-pandemic period. Additionally, we built a framework (Figure 1).

The approach makes the assumption that outside variables, like the pandemic, had a detrimental impact on HR operations, which in turn had a negative effect on HR results. Five factors are identified in this study to explain the relationship between HRM and the pandemic: the rise in the number of employees working from home, the rise in employee resignations, the rise in disengaged and dissatisfied employees, the rise in employee stress levels, and the rise in recruiting difficulties. These elements made HR more difficult for Indian businesses.

Workers in India have the opportunity to reevaluate their priorities, professions, and lives as a result of the pandemic (Cook, 2021; Maurer, 2021). Workers in India were allowed to assess the fulfillment of their employment in 2020, and many came to the conclusion that it was not (Kaplan, 2021; Maurer, 2021). As a result, a large number of Indian employees either quit in order to retire, change occupations, or join another company that better suited their requirements and preferences; on the other hand, those who stayed on board raised their desire for organizational assistance. As a result, the perception of turnover risk among Indian employees has evolved (Tessema et al., 2022). Thus, firms now face more HR issues as a result of the dual effects of rising employee demands and preferences and resignation rates.

This study emphasizes how the epidemic has had a significant impact on how Indian employees should be handled, including their working hours and location. One significant finding is that many firms' HR rules and procedures are out of step with the realities of the Indian workplace, largely due to the pandemic. For example, many aspects of traditional HR techniques that were once thought to be appropriate may no longer be appropriate in the post-pandemic environment and should be suitably updated and modified. Organizations have to change or stay the same.

Thousands of articles about COVID-19 have been published in the last three years. COVID-19 and employee health, COVID-19 and retention, COVID-19 and mental health/burnout, COVID-19 and recruitment, COVID-19 and training, COVID-19 and resignation, COVID-19 and FWA options like work-from-home and hybrid, and COVID-19 and "quit quitting" are just a few of the aspects of employees and organizations that they highlighted. To the best of our knowledge, however, no study has offered a thorough framework outlining the connection between HRM and COVID-19. Unlike previous frameworks, ours includes five HR strategies that can help managers and HR professionals deal with the difficulties they confront in the post-pandemic phase. It also clarifies the relationship between COVID-19, HR practices, and HR outcomes. In addition to suggesting that they take into account five HR methods, the framework can assist firms in comprehending how the pandemic affects workers' views of their employment, careers, lives, and priorities. Organizations' capacity to draw in, inspire, and keep talented workers tends to improve when they take into account the suggested HR tactics.

Labor shortages were another issue that COVID-19 raised awareness to. Over the last three years, millions of Indian workers have left their employment for a variety of reasons (such as seeking more flexible and well-paying positions, fearing the COVID-19 pandemic, retiring, taking care of their families, starting their own business, and continuing education). On the other hand, millions of Indian workers who choose not to quit have turned into "quit quitters" and "loud quitters." Furthermore, the unemployment rate is still at a 50-year low (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Organizational decision-makers should think creatively and try to

comprehend the hearts and minds of their employees in light of the crisis and its scope. This calls for them to adapt to the changing needs and preferences of their workforce. According to available data, companies who were able to change their corporate culture and accommodate the needs and expectations of their workforce fared well during the epidemic. Organizations must therefore keep learning how to adjust and deal with the new needs and expectations of their workforce because failing to do so may have negative repercussions.

Small-scale testing of new HR policies (best practices) and subsequent adjustments may be beneficial to firms. It all comes down to making tweaks along the route and learning from mistakes. Before the suggested HR methods are completely implemented, it would be prudent to carry out a pilot study and evaluate the costs and advantages of each.

This study contends that isolated HR strategies may not help organizations realize their ARM (attracting, retaining, and motivating employees) objective. However, comprehensive (vertically and horizontally integrated) HR policies that work together can lead to better HR outcomes. This is because HR policies either work together as packages or conflict with each other (Gerhart & Feng, 2021).

Implications, conclusions, and directions for future research

The framework may be helpful in diagnosing and comprehending the relationship between HRM and the pandemic. Additionally, it lists five HR techniques that can be used to solve HR difficulties in the post-pandemic era. The HR problem areas that need organizational resources can be identified using the recommended HR techniques. Instead than proposing a one-size-fits-all solution, this study seeks to draw organizational leaders' and decision-makers' attention to HR concerns primarily brought on by the epidemic and advise them to tailor them to their particular contexts. The suggested HR tactics can, on the one hand, assist a company in attracting, inspiring, and keeping a productive staff; on the other hand, they can encourage people to join the company, put in more effort to achieve its objectives, and remain for a long time.

How to put the suggested HR techniques into practice was the fundamental query. Integration and elimination are two components of a technique that can be used to implement them. The approach's eradication component requires a business to do away with some of the traditional HR procedures and policies (such as strict work schedules and leave policies) that could impede its attempts to recruit, inspire, and retain a sizable portion of its personnel. On the other hand, in order to implement the integration component of the method, companies must recognize and address the needs and preferences of their employees in order to implement new HR policies and practices (see Figure 1). In order to do this, companies must routinely gather feedback from their employees and determine what aspects of their unique work environments are supportive of implementing the suggested HR measures and what poses a risk to such an endeavor. Employee demands must be appropriately identified and addressed by organizations. To find out how workers feel, what they want and anticipate, and why they left their employment during and after the pandemic, organizations should regularly perform surveys and exit interviews.

This study adds to the body of knowledge regarding the relationship between HRM and the pandemic. Because it can supplement earlier research on the relationship between the pandemic and HRM, this study is contemporary, pertinent, and valuable. On the one hand, HR managers and professionals can better grasp how the pandemic has affected HRM and how to update and modify their HR policies with the aid of the suggested framework. However, the framework can assist researchers carry out empirical study on the relationship between HRM and the pandemic, offering a helpful framework for future studies on the subject.

Even if this study adds a lot, it has certain shortcomings that might be fixed in further studies, such as the fact that it only looked at the Indian setting, which limits how far the results can be applied. Research is specifically needed to compare the Indian situation with other nations or look at how the epidemic has affected HRM in other developed and developing nations. Lastly, in order to better understand the pandemic's effects on HRM, future research should look at how it affected HRM at the organizational level (as a case study).

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