Human Resources Strategies & Lessons Learned During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Literature Review

Queenie C. PLATER[1], Marquise D. FRAZIER[2], Patricia Y. TALBERT[2], Vivian H. DAVIS[3], Payton S. TALBERT[4]

[1]   Queenie C Plater, LLC, 6720 Surreywood Lane Bethesda, 20817 MD, USA;
     queenieplater@qcpconsulting.com

[2]   Howard University, 516 Bryant St NW, Washington, DC 20059, USA;
     marquise.frazier@howard.edu, iD patricia.talbert@howard.edu (corresponding author)

[3]   Summer Group, LLC, 5871 Melrose Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90038, USA;
     vhsiadavis@summergroup.me

[4]   Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota,1536 Hewitt Ave, St Paul, MN 55104, USA;
     payton.s.talbert@gmail.com

Abstract: The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been the most devastating public health crisis since the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-1920. COVID-19 has impacted every human being and operational system throughout the land. The pandemic has caused challenging times for businesses, financial markets, government agencies, and academia. One area frequently overlooked is COVID-19's impact implications for workplaces, working practices, and Human Resource Management (HRM) operationalization. This literature review aims to identify best practices implemented for the sustainability of Human Resources (HR) functions and the survival of institutions in the age of a dynamic public health crisis. This is an effective approach to better understand the disruptions caused by COVID-19 on HRM and examine how this pandemic has impacted organizations. The findings obtained focus on four main pillars: (1) recruitment, retention, and the Great Resignation, (2) employee well-being and wellness, (3) remote work options, practices, and professionalism, and (4) HR practitioners' leadership development. These have continued to be salient themes interwoven throughout many articles. These findings suggest that talent and having the most experienced, operationalized, and professional individuals as part of one's organization are paramount to its success. Upskilling is imperative, and all stakeholders must be open to the inevitability of change as change is constant.

Keywords: human resources; human resources management; leadership; COVID-19; pandemic.

Introduction

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has been the most devastating public health crisis since the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-1920. COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) first appeared in Wuhan, China. It quickly spread like wildfire across the globe, impacting countries and territories worldwide within a matter of months. The COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone as there was no way to escape the impact of this virus. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2022), as of January 2022 in the United States, the virus has been responsible for more than 860,000 deaths and over 70 million cases of infection. Globally, over 262 billion individuals have been infected and over five million people have died (WHO, 2021). In March 2020, many countries and local municipalities' mitigation efforts included immediate lockdowns and implementation of social distancing measures (de-densification), thus having a tremendous impact on all Human Resources (HR) functions within any institution globally. Theoretically, every industry should have been prepared to learn from the results of the Spanish flu pandemic

of the 1900s. However, most industries were not, and HR departments worldwide had to scramble to meet the needs and demands of business during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to identify best practices by completing a comprehensive literature review to explore implemented strategies for the sustainability of HR functions and the survival of institutions during the COVID-19 public health crisis. The overarching pillars guiding this work encompass several of the major HR areas affected during the pandemic, including (1) recruitment, retention, and the Great Resignation, 2) employee well-being and wellness, (3) remote work options, practices, and professionalism, and (4) HR practitioners' leadership development. According to Gittleman (2022), the great resignation has been defined as a large population of individuals exiting the workforce in November 2021, which was an all-time high. This is a significant approach to better understand the COVID-19 disruptions on HR, introduce how organizations have been impacted by this pandemic, and learn methods to adopt for the future.

Methodology

This article undertakes a general literature review to provide comprehensive information and an informative overview relating to how HR, Human Resource Management (HRM), and organizations have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to the present. The authors worked with the Louis Stokes Health Science Library and searched the following database systems: ProQuest, PubMed, Primo, EBSCO Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, Semantic Scholar, and Google Scholar. The search consisted of two measures: (1) exploring the database with salient words to include HR, HRM, and impact via the pandemic; and (2) using those same words to drill down and search organizations and administration departments, and then including the term COVID-19. The systematic approach entailed searching PubMed: (Workforce/organization & administration [MeSH Major Topic] AND COVID); Primo using the ExLibris discovery tool or the library catalog: (human resources COVID); EBSCO Academic Search Premier: (HR COVID, HR Departments [subject term] AND COVID); ProQuest: (ABI / Inform Global MAINSUBJECT. EXACT ("Human resources") AND ab (COVID) human resources departments AND COVID); and Business Source Complete: (Personnel management and HR Consulting Services or Administration of HR Resource Programs AND COVID). The dates included searching for articles starting January 1, 2020, until December 31, 2021. From 63 articles, 39 were selected. This followed the aforementioned inclusion criteria, excluding the other articles since they included minor information about HR only and did not focus on HR strategies and lessons learned. Since COVID is a new topic, and the primary focus of this article is addressing HR lessons learned, the next step entailed organizing the articles by similar themes and topics, then placing the information into groups. The researchers coded the articles and assigned keywords for each article. Then, the researchers used NVivo®, 11 to assist with organizing, analyzing, and visualizing qualitative data to create a query/report to assist with structuring the qualitative information and organizing it to show patterns and themes to assist with telling the story. NVivo® is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International, which is popular for providing rich insight and producing clear outcome information for reporting, (NVivo®, 2022).

Human resources

According to Paycor (2022), the evolution of the HR discipline began in the early 1900s in the United States and Europe. It was created under the umbrella of Personnel Management, at a time when poor employee working conditions required unions to protect the basic rights of employees, including physical/occupational safety and some amount of reasonable pay for their labor. For the next couple of decades, as businesses continued to grow and expand, employers were actively seeking ways to increase employee motivation and productivity. This led to developing strategies to retain employees, hiring organizational psychologists, and conducting research studies to determine employee motivators (Powers, 2019). During the 1960s and 1970s, the U. S. Congress ratified further legislation to protect employees from discrimination and other negative employment practices, including passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and forming the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2022).

Eventually, personnel management became HR management, and as employers grew in size, they began to understand that human resources—people—were their greatest assets that could serve as a competitive advantage. As Sinek (2012) stated, "If we don't understand people, we don't understand business" (para. 1). Since then, HRM has become more strategic in nature, focusing on how to assist with the hiring, firing, compensation, and compliance issues, and how to manage an organization's HR to achieve the highest possible levels of employee performance. This led to the development of other functional areas within HR, such as organizational development, change management, data analytics, and succession planning.

The COVID-19 pandemic created many crises within the U.S. healthcare system. As the crisis wore on, the situation worsened due to many factors, including a lack of important knowledge for suitable and meaningful treatment (absent the four usable vaccines), people's social behaviors, medical staff lacking critical care skills, and limited hospital capacity (Baldwin & di Mauro, 2020). Much like politicians, HR leaders had to make critical decisions without knowing and fully understanding the disease's progression and the critical uncertainties surrounding the disease (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2021). Responses to key issues often vacillated between the critical demands of healthcare and the need to operate the business in other areas besides the quality of care considerations (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2021).

Literature review

Recruit, retain, and the Great Resignation

The HR department is the cornerstone of any organization. Skilled HRM professionals direct valuable components and operations within an institution to increase input, throughput, and output. Some of the many functions HRM professionals perform include recruitment and training, total employee compensation, maintenance of employee records, policy and procedure development, and ensuring compliance with local, state, and federal legislation. While not an exhaustive list of responsibilities, these are some salient and primary obligations. Historically, recruiting, hiring, and retaining employees has been HRM's number one priority. Due to the nature of the dynamic evolution of HR within any institution and its complexities, institutions must have the ability to adapt to the ever-changing public health, socioeconomic, and environmental shifts (Figueroa et al., 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a re-examination of the most important tenets and qualifications needed within an organization, thus making HR jobs more difficult to

fulfil. Sheather and Slattery (2021), found that organizations were stretched to their limits, and retaining employees was extremely problematic pre-pandemic. According to Denis et al. (2021), pre-pandemic conditions had a significant impact on employees, at times including distress and mental health diagnoses. This situation often led to difficulties in HR's ability to recruit, retain, and attract top talent, proving that pandemic levels have only exacerbated this already trying process. Jones, Versace, Lyle, & Walsh (2021) agreed that the pandemic has affected the recruitment of healthcare employees in rural areas in Australia. This impacted the health and welfare of many communities, similar to the U. S. experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jones et al. (2021) further discerned that bridging the gap and maintaining partnerships within communities is essential for organizations. This process increases the possibility of maintaining gainful employment and keeping employees for the long term which goes beyond initial hiring, as it takes communities and cohesive partnerships to attract practitioners in this environment.

Employee well-being and wellness

In addition to having a solid fundamental understanding of hiring, retention, and the Great Resignation, successful employers understand and respond appropriately to the employee mental health crisis/challenge that emerged during COVID-19. Before COVID-19, a mental health crisis/challenge had been brewing with highly stressed employees on the verge of burnout. Employees were stretched too thin and overworked in their professional careers. Research by Yu, Park, and Hyun (2021) found that two-thirds of respondents experienced difficulties focusing on job performance due to stress. That, along with demands such as children, school, and family, drove employees to seek a "work-life balance" (p. 531).

Stress, if not managed well, can cause various physical issues, exacerbate mental health concerns, and lead to depression and other mental health illnesses. This impacts individual work performance and, ultimately, organizational performance (Yu et al., 2021). According to Dongarwar et al. (2020), 83% of U. S. workers have reported suffering from work-related stress with a loss of $300 billion to American businesses. Employers had already begun to feel the pressures mounting from employee stress levels and attempted to alleviate the situation with various programs, including the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), supportive meditation programs, wellness programs, and additional mental health benefits to health insurance coverages. These were pre-COVID-19 employer efforts to provide employee support for effective stress management under normal circumstances.

Beyond the financial and economic disruptions, the impact of COVID-19 has been unimaginable at the global level. As noted by Vinberg and Danielsson (2021), COVID-19 has and will continue to "affect the health and socio-economic situation of millions of people worldwide" (p. 1). Vinberg and Danielsson (2021) further explained that research suggests there is a range of negative health effects, such as mental health consequences due to shutdowns, employee layoffs, and social distancing measures, leading to loneliness and social isolation. According to Carbone (2021), dramatic and sudden changes to people's lives and livelihoods created high employee stress levels worldwide. Evidence and research from prior epidemics, such as SARS, EBOLA, and MERS, supported that "psychological distress and major depression can result from a pandemic or an epidemic outbreak" (Hamouche, 2020, p. 4). Indeed, the Great Depression was associated with greater anxiety and depression due to job insecurity and financial concerns (Wilson et al., 2020).

Teleworking

The digital age has provided employers with access to remote workers when monitoring daily production, personal information, trends, and accountability (Bersin, 2017). New patterns are taking shape at the front line and remotely, where employees are working around the clock to deliver products, goods, and services (Church & Ezama, 2020). Employers have put systems in place to allow staff to work remotely and be held accountable. People and technology can help reduce costs through initiative-taking and predictive issue avoidance using automation. Managers can measure and improve the employee experience across IT touchpoints to help create an integrated, secure hybrid workplace (Bersin, 2017).

HR leadership and development

According to A. P. Barton vis-à-vis Christian Science Church, "In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity (as cited in Kaul et al., 2020)." John F. Kennedy (while campaigning for the United States presidency in 1959), often said, "When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters—one represents danger, and the other represents opportunity." Never before have these statements rung truer regarding leadership than since COVID-19's impact on the workforce/workplace. According to Dirani et al. (2020), a crisis is an opportunity for a strong leader, one who is strategically focused, to directly confront and address the challenge so that it becomes an organization's competitive advantage. The strongest organizations have been those that have been able to effectively respond to the crisis. Research has consistently demonstrated that organizations most effectively responding to a crisis have strong leadership teams. During a crisis, organizations are likely to experience unimaginable disruptions. Leaders under crisis demand a different leadership style, and unless an organization's leadership can adapt, the organization will almost certainly suffer and potentially not survive. As Dirani et al. (2020) stated, "How leaders respond to the crisis could permanently shift the economic, social, and health foundations of their communities" (p. 381).

Discussion

The immense amount of change and impact created by COVID-19 on the global economy and workforce catapulted responsibility levels for organizations to a point that could not have been previously imagined or predicted. Meister and Brown (2020) posited that HR's importance within an organization is increased by the changes and demands of a public health crisis when employees seek specific guidance from HR staff on how to navigate the ever-changing landscape or the new normal. Further research has shown that 73% of employees are dependent upon employers to prepare for the future (Meister & Brown, 2020). Meister and Brown (2020) further found that during the 2008 financing crisis, the Chief Human Resource Officer's (CHRO) role was of equal importance to an organization's success as that of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) (Meister & Brown, 2020) when guiding an organization through the muddy waters of crisis into the future.

HR Finance: After investing thousands of dollars in recruiting and educating individuals for specific and career-specialty positions, retaining these new employees becomes essential. In 2015, according to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), one study examined organizational average cost per hire and assessed it as over $4,000 per employee (n=2,048; Navarra, 2022). Bersin (2013) noted that turnover cost is a minimum of 1.5–2x an employee's annual salary. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected employer bottom lines with extremely high attrition rates. The aforementioned costs mean that a

loss of 125 employees within one accounting year could cost an organization well over $1,000,000 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

Before the pandemic, finding the right talent was difficult. Leaders used technology to assist the search process. The pandemic exacerbated this situation. It affected organizational culture, disrupted competitive advantage, threatened opportunities, and resulted in legislation filled with ad-hoc changes and adjustments. Given these conditions, a new strategy was needed that included supporting talent from within, identifying and recruiting talent from the outside, and maintaining and providing opportunities to gain experience within the organization. This approach also emphasized the need to use appropriate and personalized means of motivation (Necula & Micu, 2021) to thwart the mass exodus that appeared to be occurring, according to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022).

Economists have nicknamed this mass exodus the Great Resignation (Sheather & Slattery, 2021). As organizations continue to look for ways to provide opportunities to retain talent, employees are demanding growth and development (upskilling), and companies are now providing upskilling as a competitive benefit. Additional benefits offered to counter the Great Resignation include increasing 401k contributions, reducing health care premiums, and recruitment and retention bonuses. Employers are also offering flexible scheduling, telecommuting possibilities, and higher pay. They are taking action to make frontline jobs more appealing and expand employee recognition programs (Sheather & Slattery, 2021).

Turbulence surrounds today's workforce and workplace, and tomorrow's workforce and workplace will be vastly different from today's (Ibarra, 2020). Organizations require specific skills and leader attributes. These skills are needed at all workforce and workplace levels. Employees will have markedly different needs and preferences, and workers will have different views based on their experiences, culture, ethnicity, and education (Ibarra, 2020). Businesses must meet these needs in some fashion to remain competitive and retain top talent.

Employee wellness & mental health: In addition to job insecurity and financial concerns, other stressors may have drained employees' mental health during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Hamouche (2020) explained that the main stressors employees can experience during a pandemic are "1) Perception of their own of safety, threat and risk of contagion, 2) Infobesity and the Unknown, 3) Quarantine and confinement, and 4) Stigma and social exclusion" (p. 4). The COVID-19 pandemic impacted employees from every industry. However, studies have focused on industries like healthcare cruise lines, hospitality, and, of course, the migrant worker category.

According to Giorgi et al. (2020), research has demonstrated that among healthcare workers, COVID-19 has caused sleep disturbances and thoughts of suicide. They further suggested that COVID-19 has brought extremely high levels of stress, insomnia, substance (alcohol and drug) misuse, depression, and symptoms typically seen with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; p. 5). These symptoms and behavior types seem most prevalent in healthcare workers, migrant workers, frontline workers, emergency responders, and younger people (Horsch et al., 2020). Several research studies have referred to COVID-19 as a psychological pandemic where healthcare workers need psychological personal protection equipment to protect themselves.

While not as widely studied or researched, these issues are also prevalent among other frontline workers, including migrant workers and young adult workers. Azizi et al. (2021, p. 2) identified issues among employees in the cruise line industries who experienced high

levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. Yu et al. (2021) stated that empirical analysis suggests that "attributes of epidemic attributes create stress for hotel employees, which impacts their overall performance" (p. 544). Additional research is needed with employees in other industries such as restaurants, and other customer-facing frontline employment.

As the pandemic persists with new virus waves and mutations, employers must continue to monitor the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of their employees. As Grigore (2020) noted, the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and stress, are often missed, and the impact of mental health on a business is underestimated. Employers must manage these issues as they will impact an employee's productivity and business outcomes. Giorgi et al. (2020) referred to experts who predict that COVID-19 will take a toll on those who experienced psychiatric problems pre-COVID-19 as well as on those who have never experienced any type of psychiatric issue or symptom. Employers must manage these issues as they will impact an employee's productivity and an organization's outcomes. Further research is needed to identify additional risks and other industries and occupations continuing to experience significant stress and anxiety levels, especially as the pandemic continues. Employers should offer employees free mental health programs and a safe space to address their needs and issues. Programs such as the EAP have been adopted by many employers, which often contain a mental health provision for employees seeking assistance.

Telework and technology: The digital age is upon us, and how an organization operates is critical to its success. Having the right technology is paramount (Church & Ezama, 2020). Seeing the need to make adaptable changes, organizations such as Centre Hospitalier de l'Univestite De Montreal's (CHUM) pharmacy department decided to take another look at telework during the pandemic. The department's experience with telework began pre-pandemic as an experiment responding to prescription validation overload in the evenings. This experiment gave the organization experience with telework. It was able to address difficulties related to teleworking and technology, including difficulty communicating with other hospital staff remotely and measuring validation performance (Adam et al., 2021). Thus, during the pandemic, the first wave of teleworking setbacks was easily resolved. The vast majority of the 84 pharmacists and some certified pharmacy technicians (PhT) were granted remote access to all necessary hospital software. During the first wave of COVID-19, one pharmacist, 12 PhTs, and three of the eight pharmacists in the oncology outpatient unit was changed to telework. CHUM gave all employees a one-week timeframe to allow them to install all the necessary software. It also provided IT support where needed.

A follow-up was required to evaluate the performance and reliability of the pharmacists' teleworking to ensure they were able to fully complete all work as assigned. An analysis of the number of validated prescriptions showed that the pharmacist validated 27% more prescriptions within the telework space when compared to a centralized workstation within the hospital without impacting the performance of the pharmacists in the hospital (Adam et al., 2021). According to Adam et al. (2021) these data points encouraged CHUM to change a second position dedicated to prescription validation at their emergency satellite into telework five months after the beginning of the first wave of COVID-19. Although the period of observation is shorter, the data is significant only when all pharmacists are compared with each other (Adam et al., 2021). CHUM leadership realized that creating a flexible working dynamic allowed employees to become more productive, as noted by the new positions added to telework. Telework now appears to be a vital part of the future, and it remains prevalent in many organizations.

Leadership: How an organization manages itself out of a crisis creates opportunities. Dirani et al. (2020) contended that across the globe, COVID-19 management responses seem to be the highest test of leadership. Business leadership during crises operates quite differently than in normal times. Since COVID-19 completely disrupted every aspect of life, including business operations, appropriate organizational leadership responses were necessary. Leadership under a crisis requires a completely distinct set of skills and savvy. Thus, those organizations without effective leadership before the crisis faced vexing problems during the pandemic concerning planning, management, and financial issues. For instance, Dirani and colleagues (2020) explained that while there were multiple reasons why more organizations filed for bankruptcy in the U. S. during the pandemic, the lack of strong or effective leadership was a major one.

Research has demonstrated that different leadership levels and styles are required to navigate an organization through very rough waters. Employees require someone to chart the course, set their minds and worries at ease, assist in managing their emotional concerns, and help them understand how to move forward and continue without a major impact (Talbert, 2020). As Wooten and James (2008) stated, although most executives understand the implications of an organizational crisis, they are ill-equipped to deal with it. Wooten and James (2008) researched leadership competency types (which are limited) and, at the time of this writing, categorized only three organizational crisis types: accidents, scandals, and product safety and health incidents. According to Ahern and Loh (2020), examples of leadership during a crisis have been more evident in military and emergency management work. However, the magnitude of COVID-19 completely blindsided non-military and non-emergency sector organization leaders. It left them without a map showing them how to manage a crisis of this magnitude.

The literature suggests that leadership under crises is vastly different. As Lagowska and colleagues stated (2020), the skills required—a combination of emotional, physical, social, and technical—go beyond the skills needed during normal times. Crisis leadership skills demand a completely different skill set to lead people through a crisis, and this can be an enormous challenge. Leadership must be able to assess and process information quickly, be very decisive, set a direction, maintain calm, manage fear, and be talented and skillful in communication and empathy. It must be able to build and sustain trust, creating and maintaining an environment promoting collaboration, resiliency, flexibility, and adaptation to change.

According to Dirani et al. (2020), "a crisis can destabilize the organization" (p. 382) and its workforce. Therefore, a critical function of leadership is to ensure a stable organization able to move effectively through a crisis and shift from normal operations to a crisis management mode when necessary. During crises, information often comes from various sources. This information is ever-changing, competing, and contradictory. In addition, leaders may have to address information coming from a variety of non-traditional sources outside their area of expertise. A leader must effectively sift through all of these complications while maintaining a deliberate calm and looking at the situation objectively. A leader must "focus on how to navigate the situation" (Lagowska et al., 2020, p. 2).

This was the case with COVID-19, as information changed frequently. Emotionally charged opinions and best practices were strongly tied to political parties. During the initial outbreak, scientific and evidence-based information was both ever-changing and challenged. Employees looked to their leaders for confidence and a way forward, in some cases not only about work but also about clinical information. As stated by Ahern and Loh (2020), establishing and building confidence among employees requires leaders to make tough decisions while affording employees some sense of control. This necessitates difficult choices with high stakes, where there is no right or wrong answer. As discussed

by Kaul et al. (2020), the most effective leaders are those who can lead the organization and their employees by demonstrating forward thinking, courage, and making difficult decisions.

According to Kaul et al. (2020), successful leaders are those who can discern and navigate through conflicting and competing for information and data succinctly and quickly, decisively translating and operationalizing this into a plan to move forward. Throughout this process, leaders must be effective communicators. The elements of successful and effective communication are related to frequency, content, and approach. Communication must be clear and consistent, relaying the gravity of the challenge as well as the adaptive possibilities (Kaul et al., 2020). A vital component of communication is transparency. That is an important principle in crisis management, including what leadership knows and does not know (Forster et al., 2020). This also includes "candor and frankness about the uncertainties that exist" (Ahern & Loh, 2020, p. 266). The communication should also include information available to staff so they can access it and have an active voice. Incorporating authentic and values-based leadership can create a shared vision, and a sense of purpose for staff, and anchor core values. As Kaul et al. (2020) stated, "crisis is an opportune time to rediscover one's core values" (p. 812). Employees will look for leaders to model behaviors and ensure that leaders' actions match their spoken words.

While a leader needs to be decisive and intentional, the leader should also be adaptive, flexible, and nimble. Since decisions during crises can be made based on imperfect information, a leader needs to be able to modify or change course when necessary. Crises will evolve, and a leader has to subscribe to an iterative strategy (Kaul et al., 2020). Leaders must communicate and demonstrate empathy. As Forster et al. (2020) pointed out, leadership empathy is crucial, and this is particularly necessary when a high degree of human tragedy occurs. This was extremely critical during COVID-19 as many fell ill with the virus or lost loved ones. At the very least, every single person's life was disrupted, and people generally experienced some other type of significant shift or loss associated with COVID-19.

Trust is the guiding principle on which several leadership models, such as servant leadership and situational leadership (both of which follow relationship-based principles), are deeply rooted. As trust is the driving force for organizations, it is a foundational element of leadership theories and is of extreme importance. This is especially true in crises since organizational resilience is built on psychological trust and safety (Ahern & Loh, 2020). To move through the crisis and build strong relationships, employees must feel they can trust their leadership.

Last and equally important is the organization's ability to move through and beyond a crisis. An organization's resilience is key here. As defined by Dirani and colleagues (2020), an organization must use resiliency to move beyond the crisis to a place better than it was before the crisis. Leaders also should adopt an agile and adaptive mindset, be innovative and creative, and adapt to any future challenges (Dirani et al., 2020). Resiliency is what moves an organization through a crisis and creates sustainability. Without resiliency, organizations may become stagnant. Worse, they may not survive. Leaders who can build relationships and trust are the "prerequisites of organizational resiliency" (Salehi et al., 2021, p. 13).

Some agree with A. P. Barton that a crisis can generate a burning platform that is the opportunity to drive transformational change (as cited in Kaul et al., 2020). This has certainly been the case in many industries where organizations have turned crises into opportunities. Examples of this include the medical field, which adopted long-overdue technology to support telemedicine. Another example is education, where virtual learning

has been integrated into the didactic experience. However, these findings suggest that further consideration should be placed on proactive approaches to environmental stimuli. Industries should be poised to accommodate the unforeseeable.

Conclusion

The aforementioned elements are essential for HR organizations and leaders to understand, cultivate, and use to prepare for the next major crisis. As many organizational leaders work to predict the daily operations and futures of their businesses, the conversation inevitably shifts toward the most critical enabler of all—having the most experienced, operationalized, and professional individuals as part of one's organization. Charles Darwin (1859) in *The Origin of Species* postulated that it is not the smartest or strongest of a species that survives but rather the segment of the most adaptable species. He was right. Today, upskilling will be imperative. Employees and employers must be open to change, as Darwin suggests, by adopting new processes and creating action plans, among other things.

These literature findings suggest that employers (with HR paving the way) must be willing to adapt to the needs of today's employees. Monitored teleworking options are a viable strategy, as it will allow employers to begin this work arrangement, closely monitoring the employee before loosening the reigns. In situations where this is not a viable option due to poor performance, the institutions can sever their losses with minimal financial impact or revert employees to brick-and-mortar style employment. Leaders must also have proactive stances in getting up-front employee mental health and well-being systems in place such as the EAP. Leaders that employ these services demonstrate that their employees are important and worth the strategic investment. These major tenets/pillars, coupled with upskilling, are paramount when addressing the crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic thrust on the globe. Without this knowledge, businesses are at risk of encountering more of the Great Resignation—employee and customer attrition—if they do not meet employee needs. Without employees and customers, a business cannot succeed.

Additional research should focus specifically on measuring and studying those organizations that were most successful and weathered the COVID-19 pandemic tsunami. Such research could identify those key leadership characteristics that guide organizations through crises and position them for competitive advantage and success. As Kaul et al. (2020) stated, "The progressive leader will identify new paradigms and opportunities that present themselves as a result of such a crisis" (p. 811). As we continue to move through the COVID-19 crisis, analyses must also continue. As Dirani et al. (2020) said, "It is impossible to know what the new world will look like, but its shape will depend on the decisions leaders make now" (p. 380).

One of the most salient findings HRM practitioners appear to have learned during the COVID-19 pandemic is the need to increase skills and technical knowledge for all employees where appropriate. Cultivating this prolific practice gives organizations the advantage of increased business acumen and efficiency. HR and senior leadership must collectively engage in strategic workforce planning, including digital and workforce transformation, as this will help businesses manage change and increase performance along with productivity. According to new research (Rasskazova et al., 2019), HR departments will become more strategic in embracing new opportunities through technologies and supporting organizations in their goals and objectives. Organizations and HR Departments that cultivate some of these strategies and curate well-thought-out business plans will be more organized and ready to face the next public health emergency.

References

Adam, J. P., Khazaka, M., Charikhi, F., Clervil, M., Hout, D. D., Jebailey, J., Pascal, O., Morin, J., & Langevin, M. C. (2021). Management of human resources of a pharmacy department during the COVID-19 pandemic: take-aways from the first wave. *Research in Social and Administrative Pharmacy*, *17*(1), 1990–1996. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sapharm.2020.10.014

Ahern, S., & Loh, E. (2020). Leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic: building and sustaining trust in times of uncertainty. *BMJ Leader*, *5*(4), 266-269. http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/leader-2020-000271

Azizi, M. R., Atlasi, R., Ziapour, A., Abbas, J., & Naemi, R. (2021). Innovative human resources strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic narrative review approach. *Heliyon*, *7*(6), E07233. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07233

Baldwin, R., & di Mauro, B. W. (2020). *Mitigating the COVID economic crisis: Act fast and do whatever it takes*. London: CEPR Press. https://direitoentreciencias.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Mitigating-the-COVID-Economic-Crisis-Act-Fast-and-Do-Whatever-It-Takes-Edited-by-Richard-Baldwin-and-Beatrice-Weder-di-Mauro.pdf

Barton, A.P. (1902). Washington News Letters, *8*(1). https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081641916&view=1up&seq=407&skin=2021&q1=opportunity%20in%20every%20difficulty

Bersin, J. (2013). Employee retention now a big issue: why the tide has turned. *Bersin by Deloitte*, *16*, 1-4. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20130816200159-131079-employee-retention-now-a-big-issue-why-the-tide-has-turned

Bersin, J. (2017). Employee learning enters the digital age. *HR Magazine, 62*(6), 59–60.

Bratianu, C., & Bejinaru, R. (2021). COVID-19 induced emergent knowledge strategies. *Knowledge and Process Management*, *28*(1), 11–17. https://doi.org/10.1002/kpm.1656

Carbone, S. R. (2020). Flattening the curve of mental ill-health: the importance of primary prevention in managing health impacts of COVID-19. *Mental Health & Prevention*, *19*, 200185. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhp.2020.200185

CDC. (2022). Coronavirus disease 2019 (covid-19). *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.* https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html

Church, A. H., & Ezama, S. (2020). Digitalization drives the new face of engagement. *The People & Strategy*, *43*(3), 28–32. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Allan-Church/publication/342591973_Digitalization_Drives_the_New_Face_of_Engagement/links/5efc7e7492851c52d60cb56c/Digitalization-Drives-the-New-Face-of-Engagement.pdf

Darwin, C., & Kebler, L. (1859). On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life. J. Murray.

Denis, J. L., Côté, N., Fleury, C., Currie, G., & Spyridonidis, D. (2021). Global health and innovation: a panoramic view on health human resources in the COVID-19 pandemic context. *The International Journal of Health Planning and Management*, *36*(S1), 58–70. https://doi.org/10.1002/hpm.3129

Dirani, K. M., Abadi, M., Alizadeh, A., Barhate, B., Garza, R. C., Gunasekara, N., Ibrahim, G., & Majzun, Z. (2020). Leadership competencies and the essential role of human resource development in times of crisis: a response to COVID-19 pandemic. *Human Resources Development International*, *23*(4), 380–394, https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2020.1780078

Dongarwar, D., Yusuf, K. K, Maiyegun, S. O., Ibrahimi, S., Ikedionwu, C., & Salihu, H. M. (2020). COVID-19 and neuro-behavioral economics: a conceptual framework to improve physical and mental health among remote workers. *International Journal of Maternal and Child Health and AIDS (IJMA)*, *9*(3), 360–363. https://doi.org/10.21106/ijma.399

Figueroa, C. A., Harrison, R., Chauhan, A., & Meyer, L. (2019). Priorities and challenges for health leadership and workforce management globally: a rapid review. *BMC Health Services Research*, *19*(1), 239. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-019-4080-7

Forster, B. B., Patlas, M. N., & Lexa, F. J. (2020). Crisis leadership during and following COVID-19. *Canadian Association of Radiologists Journal*, *71*(4), 421–422. https://doi.org/10.1177/0846537120926752

Gittleman, M. (2022, July). The "great resignation" in perspective: Monthly labor review. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*.* https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2022/article/the-great-resignation-in-perspective.htm

Giorgi, G., Lecca, L. I., Alessa, F., Finstad, G. L., Bondanini, G., Lulli, L. G., & Mucci, N. (2020). COVID-19-related mental health effects in the workplace: a narrative review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *17*(21), 7857. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17217857

Grigore, O. M. (2020). Factors contributing to work-related absenteeism during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, *8*(4), 401–418. http://zbw.eu/econis-archiv/bitstream/11159/5015/1/1745110860.pdf

Hamouche, S. (2020). COVID-19 and employees' mental health: stressors, moderators and agenda for organizational actions. *Emerald Open Research*, *2*, 15. https://doi.org/10.35241/emeraldopenres.13550.1

Horsch, A., Lalor, J., & Downe, S. (2020). Moral and mental health challenges faced by maternity staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychology Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, *12*(S1), S141–S142. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000629

Ibarra, P. (2020, May). Part 2: Building a talent-centric workforce. *Public Management*. https://gettingbetterallthetime.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Ibarra-Bldg-a-Talent-Centric-Workforce.pdf

Jones, M., Versace, V., Lyle, D., & Walsh, S. (2021). Return of the unexpected: rural workforce recruitment and retention in the era of COVID-19. *The Australian Journal of Rural Health*, *29*(5), 612–616. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12817

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. (1959, April 12). Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy, convocation of the United Negro College Fund, Indianapolis, Indiana, April 12, 1959. *JFK Library.* https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/indianapolis-in-19590412#:~:text=When%20written%20in%20Chinese%2C%20the,of%20military%20science%20and%20technology

Kaul, V., Shah, V. H., & El-Serag, H. (2020). Leadership during crisis: lessons and applications from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Gastroenterology*, *159*(3), 809–812. https://doi.org/10.1053/j.gastro.2020.04.076

Lagowska, U., Sobral, F., & Furtado, L. M. G. P. (2020). Leadership under crises: a research agenda for the post-COVID 19 era. *Brazilian Administration Review*, *17*(2). https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-7692bar2020200062

Meister, J. C., & Brown, R. H. (2020). Hiring and recruitment: 21 HR jobs of the future. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2020/08/21-hr-jobs-of-the-future

Navarra, K. (2022, April 11). The real costs of recruitment. *SHRM*. https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/the-real-costs-of-recruitment.aspx

Necula, R., & Micu, A. (2021). Approaching the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspective of human capital management and risk management in the European Union. *The USV Annals of Economics and Public Administration*, *21*(1), 96-105 http://www.annals.seap.usv.ro/index.php/annals/article/view/1318/1054

NVivo®. (2022). Unlock insights in your data with the best qualitative data analysis software. QSR International. https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home

Paycor. (2022). HCM solutions: Paycor empowers leaders to build winning teams. Paycor, Inc. https://www.paycor.com/

Powers, K. (2019). *Workplace psychology: Issues and application*. Chemeketa Press. https://workplacepsychology.pressbooks.com/

Rasskazova, A., Koroleva, E., & Rasskazov, S. (2019, March). Digital transformation: statistical evaluation of success factors of an ICO-campaign. In *IOP conference series: Materials science and engineering* (Vol. 497, No. 1, p. 012087). IOP Publishing. https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/497/1/012087/pdf

Salehi, A. M., Khazaei, S., Masumi, M., Shavandi, F., Kavand, M., Jenabi, E., & Khatiban, M. (2021). Reinforcement and maintenance of human resources for health systems during long-term crises: a systematic review of systematic reviews. *Emergency Medicine International*. https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/9613443

Sinek, S. (2012). If you don't understand people, you don't understand business. *Erno Hannink*. https://www.ernohannink.com/if-you-don't-understand-people-you-don't-understand-busines

Sheather, J., & Slattery, D. (2021, October 18). The great resignation - how do we support and retain staff already stretched to their limit? *BMJ*, *375*, 2533 http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n2533

Talbert, P. Y. (2020). Strategies for effective leadership and the benefits of polarity leadership in higher education. *Canyon Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, *8*(1), 50–60.

EEOC. (2022). *Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*. https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/title-vii-civil-rights-act-1964

U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2022). *Labor Statistics*. https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/number-of-quits-at-all-time-high-in-november-2021.htm

Vinberg, S., & Danielsson, P. (2021). Managers of micro-sized enterprises and Covid-19: impact on business operations, work-life balance, and well-being. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, *80*(1), 1959700. https://doi.org/10.1080/22423982.2021.1959700

WHO. (2021). *WHO coronavirus (COVID-19) dashboard*. World Health Organization. https://covid19.who.int/

Wilson, J. M., Lee, J., Fitzgerald, H. N., Oosterhoff, B., Sevi, B., & Shook, N. J. (2020). Job insecurity and financial concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic are associated with worse mental health. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, *62*(9), 686–691. https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000001962

Wooten, L. P., & James, E. H. (2008). Linking crisis management and leadership competencies: the role of human resources development. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *10*(3), 352–379. https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422308316450

Yu, J., Park, J., & Hyun, S. S. (2021). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on employees' work stress, well-being, mental health, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee-customer identification. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, *30*(5), 529–548, https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2021.1867283