

The effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Human Resource Management: Future Organizational Directions

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a far-reaching impact on how U.S. employees should be managed, including where and when they work. This study intends to (1) explain the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and human resource management (HRM), (2) discuss HR challenges being impacted by the pandemic, and (3) suggests innovative and creative HR strategies that address those HR challenges in post pandemic era. This study argues that American organizations will not return to the pre-pandemic work situation and that the current “new normal” situation requires them to rethink and redefine their HR policies and practices. The implications and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; impact; work-life balance; remote work; HR; HRM; U.S.

I. Introduction

A myriad of external and internal factors influences human resource (HR) outcomes, including competence, motivation, and retention. External factors may include political, economic, legal, sociocultural, technological, and labor market aspects, whereas internal factors generally refer to management style, financial strength, technological and physical resources, organizational structure, and culture. Although organizations may have little or no control over external factors, they tend to have more control over internal dynamics. One of the external factors that has had a profound impact on organizations and their workforce is the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which can spread through airborne transmission.

COVID-19 took the world by complete surprise in early 2020, disturbing and changing lives in ways never imagined or dealt with before. Its effects include disruption, complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty across organizations. Moreover, it has substantially impacted the workplace, particularly HR policies and practices (Cooke, Dickmann, & Parry, 2022; Adikaram, Naotunna, & Priyankara, 2021). First, the U.S. experienced record unemployment in March 2020. This was followed by an extraordinary mass exodus of work from home (WFH) in March 2020. Between mid-2021 and early 2022, the “Great Resignation” occurred. Finally, since mid-2022, there has been a shift to “quite quitting” and then “loud quitting” (Detert, 2023; Morrison-Beedy, 2022), as will be discussed later. The pandemic has drastically altered how organizations function and manage their workforces.

On the one hand, the pandemic led to the closure of many businesses, economic downturns, job losses, deaths, and resignations; on the other hand, it created a challenging and complex environment for managers and HR professionals. Despite the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines in late 2020, millions of U.S. workers remained hesitant to return to their workplaces (Susik, 2021; Kalogiannidis, 2021).

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Since then, American organizations have found recruiting, engaging, and retaining qualified employees challenging. Taylor (2022:6) remarked, “Month after month, for about a year, about 10 million jobs were not filled in the U.S. because employees were quitting their jobs in droves.” By September 2023, there were about 9.6 million vacant positions in the U.S. (The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Such situations require creative and innovative HR strategies that help organizations improve their ability to recruit, motivate, and retain a capable workforce.

Although many studies have been conducted on COVID-19’s effects on different issues, such as recruitment and retention (Collings et al., 2021; Vahdat, 2022), burnout (Gigauri, 2020), resignation (Allman, 2021; Tessema et al., 2022), flexible work arrangements (Azeem & Kotey, 2021), “quite quitting” (Detert, 2023; Klotz & Bolino, 2022), “loud quitting” (Detert, 2023; Harter, 2023), economy (Pak et al., 2020), mental health (Hamouche, 2020b; Pfefferbaum & North, 2020), and supply chains (Barman, Das, & De, 2021), there is a paucity of studies that explain the link between COVID-19 and HRM as a whole and the associated HR challenges. This study aims to address this research gap. Specifically, this study aims to (1) explain the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and, (2) discuss HR challenges being impacted by the pandemic, and (3) suggest innovative and creative HR strategies that address those HR challenges in post pandemic era.

This study consists of four parts. After the introduction, part two reviews the extant literature and develops a conceptual framework that explains the link between COVID-19 and various HR-related issues. Part three describes the research methodology used in this study. Part four discusses the important aspects of this study. The final section discusses the study's implications and presents conclusions and future research directions.

II. Literature review

As mentioned above, external factors such as COVID-19 significantly impact the performance of an organization in general and its HRM policies and practices in particular. Organizations must cooperate with people (Tessema & Soeters, 2006). The existing literature recognizes HR as the essential asset of any organization (Gerhart & Feng, 2021; Huselid, 1995). HRs are organizations’ most critical assets and sources of sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Huselid, 1995). To have effective HRs, organizations need to have effective HRM, which is a process of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling of attracting, hiring, training/developing, motivating, retaining human resources (Verhulst & DeCenzo, 2022) and is concerned with the effective management of human aspect in an organization (Phillips, 2022). An organization is likely to have an effective HRM if it can effectively implement HR functions (e.g., staffing, training and development, employee performance evaluation, pay and benefits, and workplace safety & health). In effectively implementing HR functions, organizations also need to have effective HR policies and practices.

2.1. Factors explaining the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and HRM

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on HRM, raising the question: How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact HRM? After reviewing the extant literature, we identified the following five factors that can help explain the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and HRM.

2.1.1. The pandemic increased work from home (WFH)

In March 2020, the U.S. government issued a mandatory lockdown. Consequently, millions of U.S. workers were obliged to work from home, that is, organizations willingly or unwillingly permitted their workers to work from home, and many of them have found that they enjoy the WFH option. Working from home helped them realize the advantages of WFH work, such as lower commute time and expenses, comfort from working from home, flexibility to balance work and personal obligations, and improved well-being. In late 2020, COVID-19 vaccine was introduced, and employers were expecting employees to return to workplace in full time. However, most of those employees who worked from home were reluctant to return to the workplace full-time because they benefited from WFH. Some of the benefits of WFH are lower commute time and expenses, comfort from working from home, flexibility to balance work and personal responsibilities, and improved well-being (Kazi & Hastwell, 2021; Taylor, 2020). For instance, in September 2021, about 45% of workers worked from home to some degree & not interested in returning to workplace full-time (Maurer, 2021); in September 2022, about 27 percent of workers worked remotely to some degree (The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022); and in September 2023, about 25 of workers work from home to some degree (The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

So, in the U.S., between 2020 and 2023, WFH increased five folds, that is, increased from 5 percent to 25 percent (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2023). Managing remotely working employees is more challenging than managing those who work in-person. Hence, the increase in the number of WFH has added HR challenges facing organizations.

2.1.2. The pandemic increased employee resignation

Employees resignation is an inevitable phenomenon as employees always resign for many reasons (e.g., retirement, career change, illnesses, and better opportunities). However, the magnitude of the employee resignations during the pandemic was not normal. In the first year of the pandemic, most U.S. workers were sheltered and opted not to leave their jobs because of fear of the unknown- uncertainty of the economy. In mid-2021, however, many workers felt empowered to resign and look for better opportunities. According to Kaplan (2021), the year 2020 enabled workers to reassess the extent to which their work was fulfilling. Cook (2021) further underlined that the pandemic gave U.S. workers a chance to reconsider their lives, careers, jobs, and priorities. Accordingly, millions of U.S. workers resigned to retire, or change careers, or join another organization that better supported their needs and preferences. For instance, while about 48 million workers quit their jobs in 2021, about 51 million workers quit their jobs in 2022, (The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). The increase in employee resignation also increased the three types of costs associated with it: Employee separation, replacement, and training.

2.1.3. The pandemic increased employee disengagement and job dissatisfaction

Employee disengagement and job satisfaction were issues even before the pandemic. However, the pandemic increased employee disengagement and job satisfaction. For example, while about 50 percent of U.S. workers were “quiet quitters,” in 2022, about 18 percent of U.S. workers were “loud quitters” in 2023 (Harter, 2023). The above figures are overwhelming and indicate the magnitude of employees’ job dissatisfaction and disengagement. “Quite quitting” and “loud quitting” are popular buzzwords that refer to employee disengagement, which is a common HR challenge in today’s workforce. “Quite quitting” is a type of disengagement where workers perform the minimum work requirements (scale down their efforts) and are psychologically disconnected from their job (Detert, 2023) and occurs when workers put in the least amount of effort to keep their jobs by not going above and beyond what their organizations might expect of them. They do so because they feel that although they do too much work, they are not rewarded properly for the effort put forth (Harter, 2023). Quite quitters perceive there is inequity between the amount of work they do and the rewards they receive for their work. Some of the examples of “quite quitting” are as follows: refusing to work overtime, refusing to work outside of their job description, refusing to volunteer for extra tasks, less willing to have citizenship behaviors, refusing to speak up in meetings except addressed directly, and increasing absenteeism and the number of sick days (Klotz & Bolino, 2022). On the other hand, “loud quitting” is a form of disengagement, and employees are open about their dissatisfaction and disengagement, are louder about their dissatisfaction and openly express their dissatisfaction, and desire for change and their purpose to leave. They are actively disengaged, and are not afraid to voice their concern, complain, and express their feelings. Unlike, quite quitters, loud quitters tend to complain more loudly and directly refuse to do duties that they do not believe necessary (Harter, 2023). It can be argued that “loud quitting” is worse than “quite quitting.” Hence, organizations need to look for trends of job dissatisfaction, disenchantment, and disengagement, and identify the root causes of those disengagement and dissatisfaction. While engaged workers contribute positively to the organizational bottom-line, unengaged workers negatively impact the organizational bottom line. For instance, while organizations with engaged employees have 23 percent higher profit than those with unengaged employees, unengaged workers cost the world \$8.8 trillion in lost productivity (Pendell, 2023). Therefore, employee disengagement and job dissatisfaction have added to HR challenges facing organizations.

2.1.4. The pandemic increased employee stress levels

The pandemic has aggravated the stress levels of U.S. workers (APA, 2021; Hamouche, 2020a; McNeil, 2021; Zielinski, 2021) because of the following issues: First, many employees felt uncertain about the future (e.g., layoffs, bankruptcy, and pay cuts). Second, many workers have lost coworkers due to COVID-19-related death, illness, and turnover. Third, many people have lost normal social connections. Fourth, many workers face an increased workload. Fifth, workers are obliged to receive vaccines or wear masks. Sixth, many workers are unable to achieve a healthy work-life balance. Workers are more likely to feel stressed and frustrated in circumstances of uncertainty or danger (Chen, 2021; Kumar, Kumar, Aggarwal, & Yeap, 2021). Prior studies also reveal that workers’ stress, anxiety, and depression are common mental health problems at workplace (Hamouche, 2020a; Zielinski, 2020).

Workers' mental health problems are one of the chief causes of absence, and the costs of those workers who have mental health problems but still come to work (presenteeism) are even greater. Thus, an increase in workers' stress levels has added to the HR challenges.

2.1.5. The pandemic increased recruiting challenging

Recruitment had been one of the top HR challenges even before the pandemic. However, as the pandemic increased employees' expectations and demands, recruitment challenges have been aggravated. The past two years, the labor market has been tight and become an employee-driven market where the unemployment rate was 50-year low (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). For instance, while in September 2022, there were about 10.7 million open jobs in the U.S. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), in September 2023, there were about 9.6 million open jobs in the U.S. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Such kind of labor market has provided U.S. workers with many job opportunities and made recruitment the most challenging HR function. The scope and complexity of recruitment and retention has increased.

2.2. HR strategies in post-pandemic

Those five factors have had significant effect on HRM because they increased the HR challenges facing organizations, especially their ability to effectively hire, retain, and motivate their workforce. The question is: How could organizations respond to those challenges? We identified five HR strategies that can help organizations respond to those HR challenges in the post pandemic era.

2.2.1. Providing FWAs

One of the HR strategies that would help improve HR outcomes in post-pandemic is to provide FWAs, which refer to work schedule options (e.g., in-person, fully WFH, hybrids, compressed workweeks, and flexible schedules) that enhance employees' flexibility at workplace. The pandemic has changed where, how, and when we work as well as our perception of the conventional work schedule (Chamberlain, 2021; Zielinski, 2021). As employees' desire for flexibility increased, organizations need to assess their workers' desires regarding where, when, and how to work and try to accommodate their preferences. This is because when workers are provided with FWAs, they tend to be healthier, happy, less stressed, and more productive (Microsoft, 2021; Sammer, 2021; Tyler, 2022). Prior studies have also revealed that organizations that provide FWAs were found to have reasonable quantity and quality for goods and services (Kazi & Hastwell, 2021; Seth, 2021). Hence, whenever possible, organizations need to provide FWAs. They must also rethink and redefine their HR policies and practices as they adapt to how people work best.

2.2.2. Offering attractive pay and benefits

Another HR strategy that could help improve HR outcomes in post-pandemic as well as in the current tight labor market is offering competitive salaries, hourly wages, and employee benefits. Failure to provide these services can adversely affect individual and organizational performance (Grimaldi, 2021; Parker & Horowitz, 2022; Susik, 2021; Tyler, 2022). Especially, for hard to fill positions and high performing employees, organizations need to give due consideration. Organizations also need to avoid one-size-fits-all benefit programs.

2.2.3. Having effective e-HRM

Effective e-HRM has had a far-reaching impact on HR outcomes. Existing evidence suggests that e-HRM, such as technology-based recruitment and selection such as recruiting software, social media channels, interactive technologies such as video interview, gamification of recruitment, HR analytics, and recruitment Chatbot (Tessema et al., 2020), virtual onboarding (Chen, 2021), virtual training (Zielinski, 2022), and virtual socialization (Ladika 2020), provide organizations with competitive advantages (Bondarouk, et al., 2017). Hence, organizations must pay attention to e-HRM, which is highly impacted by technological advances.

2.2.4. Providing proper organizational support

Since the pandemic adversely affected workers' physical and psychological well-being (Hamouche, 2020a; Kumar et al., 2021), the need for offering proper organizational support should be given the attention they deserve. So, providing proper support to employees is a great HR strategy that would aid organizations in attracting,

motivating, and retaining workers in post pandemic era. Organizations that accommodate their workers' needs are more likely to have better HR outcomes. In other words, individuals are more willing to join, exert extra effort, and stay for an extended period with an organization when they receive the support they need. Some noteworthy examples of organizational support that can be provided to employees are as follows:

*To help workers balance their work and personal lives. During the pandemic, employees' desire to integrate their work and personal lives has increased (Maurer, 2021; Hirsch, 2021). To help employees balance their work and personal obligations better, organizations must create flexible scheduling options, allow employees to take time off from work if needed, and offer opportunities to work from home (Maurer, 2021; Tyler, 2022). Such measures require organizations to align their HR policies and programs accordingly.

*To help workers obtain effective EAPs. During the pandemic, workers' personal problems (e.g., substance abuse, mental and emotional health concerns, and financial and legal issues) have increased (APA, 2021; Tyler, 2022). Hence, having effective EAPs can help reduce employees' problems, which, in turn, improves their well-being and productivity. EAPs refer to programs that help employees with personal problems such as emotional and mental health concerns, financial and legal issues, alcohol or substance abuse, and family relationships (Verhulst & DeCenzo, 2022, p. 355).

*To help workers have virtual socialization. Since the pandemic has diminished social interaction, organizations need to provide their workforce opportunities to virtually socialize (e.g., virtual parties, non-business communication, and pre/post-meeting chats), as these can increase their job satisfaction by enabling them to stay connected and bond with their colleagues (Ladika 2020; Zeidner, 2020).

*To help workers get effective employee wellness programs. During the pandemic, workers' physical and mental health has deteriorated (Fournier, 2021; McNeil, 2021; Sammer, 2021). For instance, of the 93% of workers who reported struggling with their well-being in 2022, 73% linked their struggle to the pandemic (APA, 2022). Hence, organizations need to provide workers with wellness programs that help enhance their mental, physical, and emotional well-being (Huo, Boxall, & Cheung, 2020).

*To help workers get proper treatment and supervision. Given the many stresses and challenges employees face during the pandemic, organizations must treat their workers with respect and dignity (Telford, 2022; Tessema et al., 2022). As underlined by Burkus (2017), organizations must consider their employees' critical assets and prioritize them. Hence, it is necessary to care for employee well-being, as it substantially influences HR outcomes.

*To help workers by providing sufficient paid leave. During the pandemic, employee challenges have increased due to mental and physical health problems, isolation and quarantine of family members, homeschooling, the inability to maintain a healthy work-life balance, school lockdowns, and a lack of daycare services (Carucci, 2021; Telford, 2022). Many employees also have had chronic illnesses. Therefore, organizations need to offer employees more paid leave (Ladika, 2020), which also requires changing organizational leave policies.

*To help employees increase work engagement and job satisfaction. During the pandemic, employee disengagement and job dissatisfaction have increased (Harter, 2023; Telford, 2022). Given the negative impacts of poor employee engagement and dissatisfaction, organizations need to take actions that can enhance employee engagement and satisfaction, such as helping them feel connected to their teams, love their jobs, and have positive feelings about their organizations.

*To help workers get a reverse mentoring program. During the pandemic, millions of workers have been working from home and are now required to work in person. Providing a reverse mentoring program to those working from home can play a vital role in readjusting, learning from one another, communicating, and collaborating. In a reverse mentoring partnership, colleagues "pair up," regardless of seniority, to learn from one another. This can benefit the careers of both parties through the sharing of their expertise. This can help bridge generational and hierarchical gaps and improve communication. This program can help bridge the generational gap and create a more collaborative workplace culture in which employees at all levels are empowered to contribute to the company's post-COVID recovery and growth (Tylor, 2022).

*To help remote workers obtain the proper IT infrastructure and training. As the number of workers who work from home has increased, the need to help them obtain proper IT support (Sammer, 2021; Zielinski, 2021) is crucial. Employees working remotely must be provided with the necessary technical support (e.g., training, virtual office spaces, email, instant messaging systems, and dedicated work phones) to successfully and comfortably complete their tasks. Furthermore, organizations need to revise their HR and IT policies (Saxena, Bagga, & Gupta, 2021).

2.2.5. Providing a safe and healthy workplace

Although workers desire to work in a safe and healthy workplace, the pandemic has increased employees' desire for a healthy and safe workplace. The pandemic increased employees' awareness of the importance of making workplace safe and healthy (Subramony et al., 2022). During the pandemic, employees' concerns regarding workplace safety and health have increased (CDC, 2021; Sheather & Slattery, 2021).

Officially, the pandemic ended on May 11, 2023; however, the COVID-19 virus is still with us in that we are shifting from the pandemic era (the unrestricted spread of the COVID-19 virus) to the endemic chapter of the virus (healthcare institutions are not overwhelmed). Therefore, U.S. organizations need to develop creative and innovative ways of following the guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Occupation Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements associated with COVID-19 and other workplace health and safety issues. During the pandemic, workers' COVID-19-related concerns have increased (Telford, 2022; Tyler, 2022). Listening to and addressing employees' concerns with COVID-19 and other health and safety issues promptly is essential. During the pandemic, millions of employees did not receive timely and relevant COVID-19-related information (Tyler, 2022). However, AI-powered legal and regulatory compliance tools can help address this issue (Sheather & Slattery, 2021). These tools use advanced algorithms to scan and analyze vast amounts of legal and regulatory data, identify relevant laws and regulations, and provide real-time guidance on compliance requirements. They can also help organizations stay up to date on changes in laws and regulations related to COVID-19 and other emerging issues (Collings, 2021). During the pandemic, millions of U.S. workers lack awareness of COVID-19 (Alonso, 2021). Thus, organizations must increase worker awareness by inviting experts to provide advice and reliable and objective information concerning COVID-19, vaccines, and other measures. In the past, organizations tried to make the workplace safe and healthy for moral and legal reasons. However, making the workplace healthy and safe can have economic benefits (Harbert, 2021) and can improve organizations' ability to attract, retain, and motivate employees.

2.3. A framework for explaining the link between the pandemic and HRM

We developed a conceptual framework (Figure 1), which is a representation of the relationships a researcher expects to see among different factors included in the study. Our framework, therefore, represents the relationship between the pandemic and HRM, on the one hand; and the HR challenges being impacted by the pandemic and HR strategies that can address those HR challenges in post pandemic era.

In developing our framework, first we took some ideas from three theoretical perspectives/approaches, namely universalistic, contingency, and configurational, which have different explanations of the HRM-performance relationship. For example, the universalistic approach assumes that companies with the best HR practices will perform better anytime and anywhere (e.g., Delery & Doty, 1996); the contingency approach assumes that organizations with HR practices that are dependent on the context of the situation will have higher performance (e.g., MacDuffie, 1995); and the configurational approach assumes that organizations with HR practices that best fit their strategies (vertical fit) and are consistent among themselves (horizontal fit) will have higher performance (Delery & Doty, 1996). A literature review indicates that (1) there is empirical support for each of the three main theoretical perspectives; (2) they have some sort of theoretical basis in contingency theory, human capital theory, and resource-based theory (Pauwe, 2004; Youndt et al., 1996); (3) they have some limitations; and (4) the best framework should attempt to maximize the advantages of the three perspectives (Guest, 1997).

Research has shown that the context in which workers are managed is influenced by both internal and external factors (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2022; Phillips, 2022). However, this study focused on the impact of pandemic on HRM. To explain this link, as well as HR strategies in response to the pandemic, we constructed a conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1. The conceptual framework is based on the following assumptions:

*External factors (COVID-19 pandemic- A) affect HR functions (B), which in turn impact HR outcomes (C-employee competence, motivation, and retention), which subsequently affect employee performance.

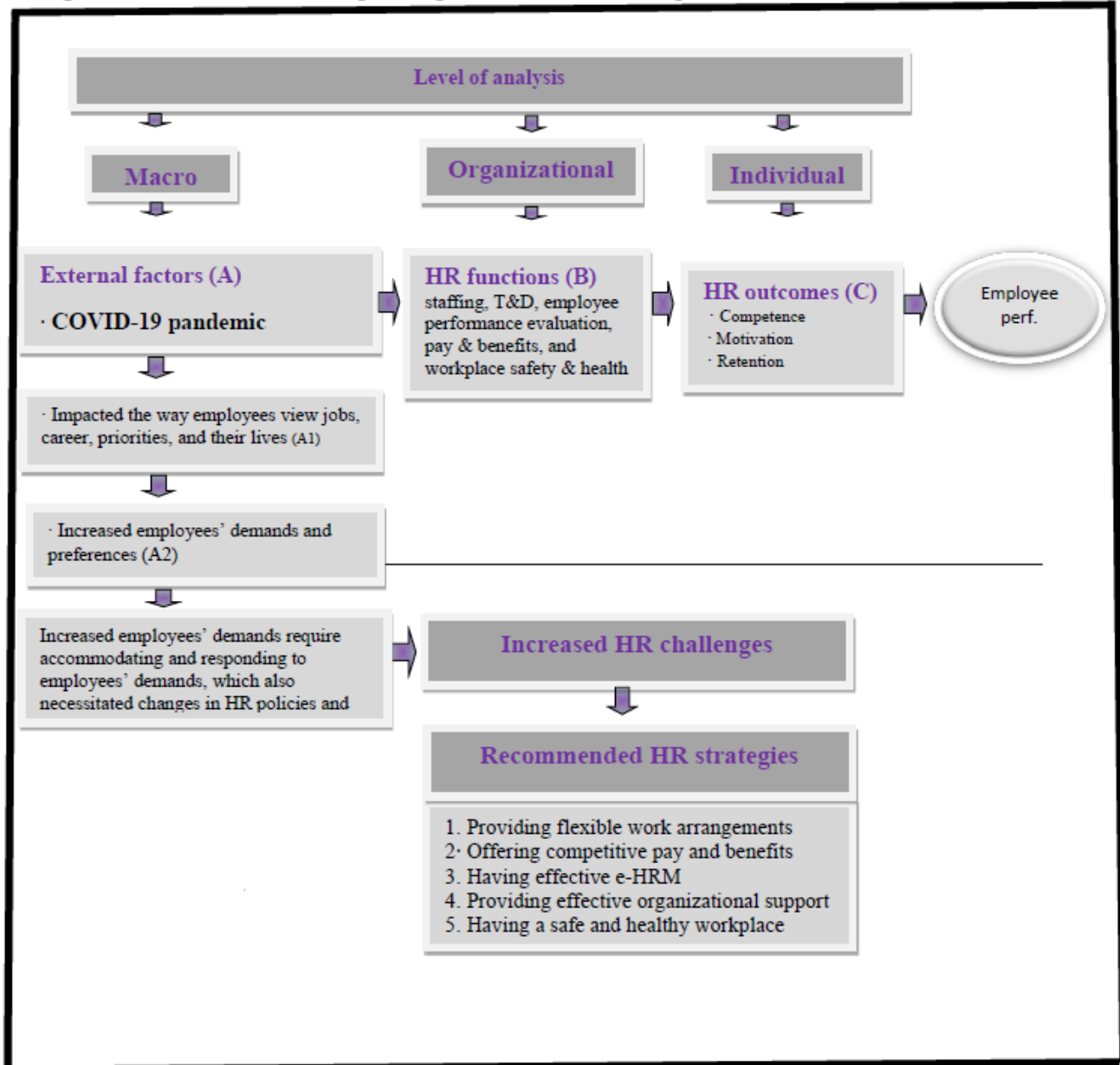
*The effectiveness of HR outcomes depends on the effectiveness of HR functions (e.g., staffing, training & development, employee performance evaluation, pay and benefits, and workplace health and safety) (Paauwe, 2004).

*The COVID-19 pandemic increased HR challenges, which in turn adversely impacted HR outcomes.

*The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the way employees viewed jobs, careers, their lives, and priorities (A1), which in turn, affected their demands and preferences (A2). Changes in employee demands and preferences require accommodating and responding to employees' demands, which also necessitated changes in HR policies and practices (A3). *The five suggested HR strategies help address HR challenges impacted by the pandemic. The more the suggested HR strategies are effectively implemented, the more significant the impact HR functions will have on HR outcomes.

*HRM effectiveness is influenced at three levels: macro, which refers to external factors, organizational, which refers to organizational factors, and individual, which refers to employee characteristics. However, the main emphasis of this study is on the external factor (COVID-19 pandemic) and organizational factors (HR functions). Obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic and HR functions cannot be analyzed ignoring different HR issues at individual level.

Figure 1: A framework for explaining the link between the pandemic and HRM



III. Research methods

Research methodology conceptualizes the problem under study and the research questions to be investigated and provides tools for doing research and obtaining useful information (Ghauri, Gronhaug, & Kristianslund, 1995). Hence, which method(s) to use depend(s) on the research problem and its objectives. This study used secondary sources and the authors’ observations and experiences. The article search was conducted using Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar Web of Science. We used combinations of the following words/phrases:

HR-performance relationship, external factors and HRM, 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,” and COVID-19 and the labor market. We identified 68 articles that enhanced our understanding of the link between COVID-19 and HRM.

Accordingly, we developed a conceptual framework that explains the link between COVID-19 and HRM and HR strategies, which can address the HR challenges facing U.S. organizations in post-pandemic.

IV. Findings and discussions

As per the objectives of the current study, we explained the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and HRM, discussed HR challenges being impacted by the pandemic, and suggested innovative and creative HR strategies that address those HR challenges in post pandemic era. We also constructed a framework (Figure 1).

The framework assumes external factors such as the pandemic had adverse effect on HR functions, which in turn negatively impacted HR outcomes. In explaining the link between the pandemic and HRM, this study identifies five factors, namely the increase in the number of employees who work from home, the increase in employee resignation, the increase in the number of employees who are disengaged and dissatisfied, the increase in employee stress levels, and the increase in recruiting challenging. These factors increased the HR challenges facing the U.S. organizations.

The pandemic provided U.S. workers a chance to reconsider their lives, careers, and priorities (Cook, 2021; Maurer, 2021). The year 2020 enabled the U.S. workers to evaluate whether their work was fulfilling, and many of them concluded that it was not (Kaplan, 2021; Maurer, 2021). Accordingly, many U.S. workers either resigned to retire, change careers, or join another organization that better supported their needs and preferences, on the one hand; those who did not resign increased their demand for organizational support, on the other hand. Therefore, U.S. workers' opinions on the risk of turnover have been changed (Tessema et al., 2022). Thus, the dual impact of the increase in worker demands and preferences and the number of resignations have increased the HR challenges facing organizations.

This study underscores the profound impact of the pandemic on how U.S. employees should be managed, including where and when they work. An important finding is that, primarily because of the pandemic, many organizations' HR policies and procedures lack relevance to the realities of the American workplace. For instance, many elements of the conventional approaches to HR that were previously considered appropriate may no longer be appropriate in post-pandemic and thus should be adjusted and updated appropriately. Organizations must adapt to or remain behind.

Over the past three years, thousands of articles related to COVID-19 have been published. They highlighted different aspects of employees and organizations (e.g., 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 such as work-from-home and hybrid, and COVID-19 and "quite quitting"). However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has provided a comprehensive framework explaining the link between COVID-19 and HRM. Unlike other frameworks, our framework explains the link between COVID-19, HR practices, and HR outcomes and contains five HR strategies that can address the challenges managers and HR professionals face in the post-pandemic period. The framework can help organizations understand how the pandemic impacts employees' perceptions of jobs, careers, lives, and priorities, which in turn influences HR policies and practices, and recommends that they consider five HR strategies. When organizations consider the proposed HR strategies, their ability to attract, motivate, and retain capable employees tends to increase.

Another issue that COVID-19 brought to the forefront was labor shortages. Millions of American employees have quit their jobs over the past three years for different reasons (e.g., looking for better-paid and flexible jobs, COVID-19-related health issues, COVID-19-related fear, retirement, caring for their families, becoming entrepreneurs, and continuing education). In contrast, millions of American employees, who do not resign, have become "quite quitters" and "loud quitters". In addition, the current unemployment rate is 50 years low remains (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Given the crisis and its magnitude, organizational decision-makers should think outside the box and seek to understand the hearts and minds of their employees, which also requires them to respond to employees' shifting demands and preferences. Existing evidence suggests that organizations that can transform their corporate culture and meet employees' demands and expectations survived and thrived during the pandemic. Hence, organizations must continue to learn to adapt and address employees' new demands and expectations because failing to meet them could have adverse consequences.

It could be for organizations benefit to experiment new HR policies (best practices) on a small scale and adjust them accordingly. It is all about trial and error and making adjustments along the way. It would be wise to conduct a pilot study of the proposed HR strategies and compare their benefits and costs before they are fully

implemented. 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).

V. Implications, conclusions, and directions for future research

The framework can be useful for diagnosing and understanding the link between the pandemic and HRM. It also highlights HR challenges and five HR strategies that can help address those HR challenges in the post-pandemic era. The suggested HR strategies can be used to pinpoint HR problem areas to which organizational resources should be directed. This study does not intend to suggest a one-size-fits-all situation but rather aims to bring HR issues mainly arising from the pandemic to the attention of organizational leaders and decision-makers and recommend that they customize them to their specific environments. On the one hand, the proposed HR strategies can help an organization attract, motivate, and retain a productive workforce; on the other hand, they can make employees willing to join the organization, exert more effort toward its goals, and stay for an extended period.

The underlying question was how to implement the proposed HR strategies. One way to put them into effect is through an approach comprising two elements: integration and eradication. With the eradication component of the approach, an organization needs to eliminate some of the conventional HR policies and practices (e.g., rigid work schedules & leave policies) that may hinder organizational efforts to attract, motivate, and retain a significant section of the workforce. In contrast, the integration component of the approach requires organizations to introduce new HR policies and practices by identifying and responding to employees' demands and preferences (see Figure 1) to accomplish the same. To this end, organizations need to collect input from their workforce regularly and decide what is conducive to implementing the proposed HR measures and what represents a threat to such an attempt in their distinctive work environments. Organizations must properly recognize and respond to employee demands. Organizations should frequently conduct surveys and exit interviews to understand how employees feel, their demands and expectations, and why they quit their jobs during and post the pandemic.

This study contributes to the literature on the link between the pandemic and HRM. This study is timely, relevant, and has merit because it can augment prior studies on the link between the pandemic and HRM. On the one hand, the proposed framework can help HR managers and professionals improve their understanding of how the pandemic has impacted HRM and how to adjust and update their HR policies. On the other hand, the framework can help researchers conduct empirical research on the link between the pandemic and HRM- providing a useful framework for further research on this topic.

Although this study makes significant contributions, it also has some limitations (e.g., it focused only on the American context, which affects the generalization of the findings) that could be addressed in future research. Specifically, research is required to examine the pandemic's impact on HRM in other developed and developing countries or compare the American case with other countries. Finally, future research should examine the impact of the pandemic on HRM at the organizational level (as a case study) to deepen our understanding of its impact on HRM.

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