COVID-19 and the Workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights a brief overview

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Abstract - The world's response to COVID-19 has resulted in the most rapid change of the workplace. Working from home has become the new normal, and we have gone from digitizing the relationship between firm and customer to digitizing the relationship between employer and employee. We have been catapulted forward, fast-tracking trends such as automation, digitalization and innovation. Companies are at a crossroads, those that capitalize on post-COVID opportunities will find themselves in a good position to retain their talent and attract people when the situation stabilizes. By contrast, those that fail to change will be left behind, exposing their employees to increased risks of financial distress, facing layoffs and closures. This article tries to bring insight brief overview of impact of COVID-19 at work place.

Keywords – Workplace, COVID-19, Worker, Digitalization.

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 impacts on workers and workplaces across the world have been dramatic. We present a broad review of prior research rooted in work and organizational psychology, and related fields, for making sense of the implications for employees, teams, and work organizations. Our review and preview of relevant literatures focuses on: (i) emerging changes in work practices (e.g., working from home, virtual teams) and (ii) economic and social-psychological impacts (e.g., unemployment, mental well-being). In addition, we examine the potential moderating factors of age, race and ethnicity, gender, family status, personality, and cultural differences to generate disparate effects. Illustrating the benefits of team science, this broad-scope overview provides an integrative approach for considering the implications of COVID-19 for work and organizations while also identifying issues for future research and insights to inform solutions.

There are some outcomes and implications to manage employees at work place during COVID-19 as given below.

Support for onsite staff

- Most of the organizations have enforced a work from home for the safety and well-being of employees; however critical sectors under essential services continue to operate with reduced workforce, such as healthcare, energy, oil and gas, banking, media.

- These organizations are taking necessary measures to provide support for the on-site workers which includes the following – Distribution of sanitizers, masks and necessary Personal Protective Equipment's (PPEs),

based on the type of role – Multiple time slots during lunch and break hours to minimize the rush – Fumigation and deep cleaning of individual workspace after every shift operation and daily fumigation of transport buses – Spacing out the employees in warehouses and workstations to ensure social distancing – posters and mailers highlighting social distancing best practices – Provision of healthy food and vitamin supplements to boost immunity.

Support for remote workers

- As higher percentage of employees work from home, there is an increasing need to extended support to them in order to ascertain business continuity and employee welfare.

Some of the practices which can be adopted by organizations are:

- **Technical Support –** provision of hotlines for the technical support related to remote working.
- **Communication-** with most remote workers managing their household priorities, clearly communicate Do's and Don'ts of remote working their time effectively.
- **Flexible working** – parents dependent on daycares centres and household support would find work from home even more challenging. Organisations may look at alternate shifts, change in schedule, dialling down the work and allowing day offs.

Employee well-being

- Psychological well-beings: organizations should focus on leveraging employees assistance programs for employees to manage their personal and work-related

time and build resilience. Multiple organizations are setting up 'HR connects' and counselling help lines to address challenges beginning from elevated stress and anxiety levels.

- Physical well-being: Organizations needs to focus on providing guidance on health and fitness by promoting home-workout routines, regular and sufficient breaks, and ergonomics of work from home.
- Financial assistance: Managing personal finances being a critical element for the employees, both long-term and short-term financial planning can be an added support provided by the organizations.

Keeping employees engaged during uncertain times

To win in the market place, organizations must first win in the workplace. In the current scenario and uncertain times, there is a spike in stress, anxiety and burnout levels among the employees. These calls for rethinking employee's engagement strategy to keep workforce engaged and motivated in order to enable them to remain productive. As reflected by the survey data, more than 75 percent of the organizations have redefined their employee engagement and organization communication strategies to ensure high engagement of their workforce in COVID-19. Mentioned below are some of the key observations from the survey:

- The top three most used mediums today are leadership briefings, virtual team meetings and teleconferences, indicating that organizations are aware of the prevailing stress and anxiety levels of employees. They are using various mediums to communicate and engage employees and reassure them of the steps being taken to overcome the crisis.
- Organizations are choosing not to differentiate among engagement mediums for critical and non-critical workforce at this point of time, thus giving equal opportunity and support to all employees.
- Virtual meeting has emerged as the most common form of communication on a daily basis. On the other hand, static pulse surveys are used most frequently on bi-weekly and monthly basis. However, only select organizations are using AI- enabled pulse surveys or employee listening surveys. This clearly indicates lack of preparedness with regards to use of advance technology for connecting with employees.

Tools used to engage employees differently

- **Organization sensing**: information is key to managing and formulating action. Increasing need for organizations to sense real time what their employees are 'feeling' and thinking especially during COVID-19.
- **Strengthen organization values:** it becomes even more important to align organization values with employee values. Reinforcing the organization values and positive behaviours will enable the organization to overcome this crisis smoothly.

- Provide adequate well-being measures to keep employees healthy, productive and engaged. In the current scenario and for the future post COVID-19, AI and ML-based digital technology will play a key role in employee engagement. Managing employee emotions is a key aspect that organization engagement teams and business managers will need to address increasingly, in order to retain productivity, quality of work and business continuity.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Governmental programs, mainly financial security programs, help to reduce the incidence of psychological disorder during pandemics (Mihashi et al., 2009). They are important factors to take into consideration in future strategies for mass isolation during pandemics (Mihashi et al., 2009). For example, countries that have a high level of COVID-19 infection such as France, Spain and the UK have implemented emergency packages that include direct payouts to employees; loans and guarantees for companies to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic (Mallet & Dombey, 2020), which will help individuals to maintain an income during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the presence of an effective mental health system can mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 on individuals' mental health (Qiu et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020a; Zhou et al., 2020). Shultz et al. (2015) argue that the absence of mental health and psychosocial support systems, paired with an absence of well-trained mental health professionals, have increased the risks of psychological distress during Ebola. Prioritization of investment like the Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility launched by the World Bank Group aids the development of sustainable health systems (Bitanihirwe, 2016). In fact, during and immediately after the pandemic outbreak, psychosocial support is crucial for quarantined people and health workers (Zhang et al., 2020a). During the COVID-19 outbreak in China mental health services have been provided using various channels like hotlines, online consultations, online courses (Gao et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020) and elemental health services (Zhou et al., 2020).

According to Xiang et al. (2020), mental health care for patients and health workers affected by COVID-19 has been under-addressed. The authors argued that although emergency psychological crisis interventions based on the SARS outbreak has been launched on January 26, 2020, in China, to provide psychological support during COVID-19, most health professionals working in isolation units and hospitals have not received training in how to provide mental health care. [1]

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[1] https://emeraldopenresearch.com/articles/2-15

III. CONCLUSION

The novelty of the COVID-19 and its potential negative impact on employees' mental health urge this type of review. The main goal of this paper is to provide the necessary information to prevent or mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on worker management. I consider that the quality of the literature reviewed in this paper helps to achieve this goal, though the long-term implications of COVID-19 are currently unknown, there is little reason to believe its impact on organizational work life will be short-lived. As health experts have cautioned, not only are the effects of the current pandemic far from over (Hixon, 2020), but the risk of future health crises of this far-reaching nature are almost guaranteed (Desmond Hellmann, 2020). Accordingly, our focus must be forward thinking, building on the assumption that the grand challenge we currently face is not a singular, anomalous event, but rather constitutes a "new reality" that offers new opportunities to which organizational alike will need and want to remain attentive. Toward this end, the current discussion provides a step in that direction by highlighting some implications of COVID-19 for employee adjustment and well-being of worker.

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