Human Resource Management Development in the Face of Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: The novel coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic, has caused numerous unprecedented changes recorded globally in all spheres of life especially in the work place. This has implications and influences on the companies and human resource management (HRM). Organizations have had to respond speedily by reviewing many operational matters and strategies so as to be able to manage the effects of the pandemic. Human resource management (HRM) plays the essential role of helping organisations navigate through both the iffy present and unpredictable future caused by the pandemic lockdown by managing people to cope with stress and to continue working, even remotely, when applicable, so that businesses can go on with their operations. This paper embraced analytical discussion of secondary data and using self-determination theory as its theoretical framework, it assessed the implication of HRM; having knowledge of the effects of autonomy, competence, and interrelatedness in their dealings with employees on sustained HRM development in the pandemic era. The aim of this research is to look into notable human resource management practices developed in the quest to accommodate and tackle the magnitude of HRM challenges faced by organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges encountered by employers and employees in imbibing them. The research recommended that HRM should help employees in their quest to develop their competences through trainings, consulting, and coaching as this will help in accomplishing the organizations' goals and vision in the post COVID-19 pandemic era. An empirical research in this area is advocated to aid long-term HR policy.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Human Resource Management, Pandemic, Self-Determination Theory

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic globally impacted hashly on every sphere of life. Organizations and their human resources have had to navigate through the harsh impacts of the pandemic by reviewing many operational matters and strategies not only to be able to effectively manage the effects of the pandemic (Austin-Egole & Iheriohanma, 2021) but to equally guarantee that both parties - management and employees - are well served beyond the COVID-19 crises period. According to the International Labour Organization, ILO (2020), the cynicism associated with the lag period of the pandemic and the disruption of human resource activities may require firms to reorganize for business continuity. The quickening of the digitalisation processes globally is one of the notable disturbances of the global pandemic (Gigauri, 2020) and it has created a need for employees to learn new skills that enhance their employability capacity in the digital space (Sheppard, 2020).

Boxall and Purcell (2000) posit that human resource management (HRM) includes anything and everything connected with the management of employment relationships in an organization. Therefore, in this COVID-19 pandemic era, there is need for HR managers to re-modify, re-establish and develop new practices and strategies in line with the digitalisation trend that will enable employees to use advanced technologies as well as update their digital skills since HRM plays the dual role of facilitating and supporting the transformation of the organizations and are equally saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that the employees are retained by upgrading their skills and abilities (Parry & Battista, 2019).

The objective of this article is to look into both the challenges encountered by HRM as well as notable developments in HRM practices for tackling these challenges in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Library research anchored on analytical discussion is the methodology adopted in this investigation. Materials from journals as well as textbooks were analysed particularly in content form in line with the objective of the study. This method adopted is apt for this type of an evaluative and discursive investigation in the social and management sciences (Oke & Ibrahim, 2020).

1.1 Covid-19 in Brief

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) a severe acute respiratory syndrome with a global spread according to World Health Organisation WHO (2020), is caused by SARS-COV2 virus which was first detected in Wuhan, China in December 19, 2019. Its symptoms include fatigue, fever and respiratory symptoms such as sore throat, cough, shortness of breath as well as loss of taste and smell and development of skin rashes as reported by some people. The virus is said to spread through contact with small droplets from an infected person and has high mortality rate. The WHO coronavirus (COVID-19) dashboard of 3:34pm CEST, 7 April 2021, recorded that globally, there have been 132,046,206 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2,867,242 deaths, reported to WHO. Furthermore, WHO COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update of 4th April 2021 at 10 am CEST stated that globally, new COVID-19 cases rose for a sixth consecutive week, with over 4 million new cases, the number of new deaths is also increasing by 11% which is over 71 000 new deaths when compared with the report of the previous week (Figure 1).
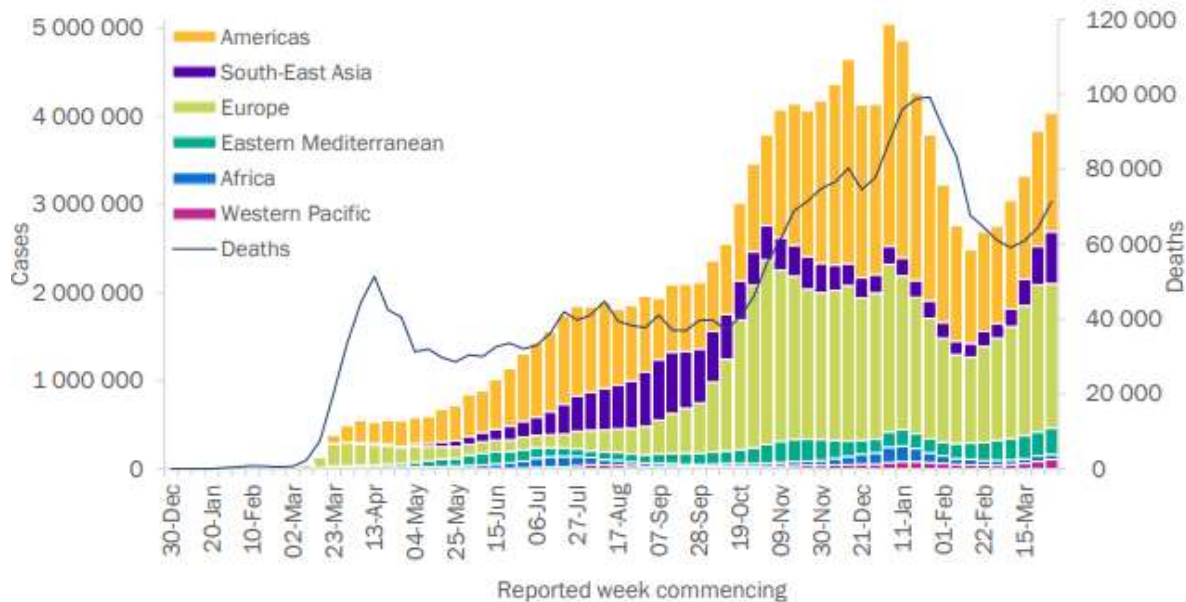

Figure 1. COVID-19 cases reported weekly by WHO Region, and global deaths, as of 4 April 2021
Source: WHO COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update of 4th April, 2020.

From the above report, it is evident that the pandemic is still much raging, disrupting organizations and their human resources and causing organizations to work under stress as a result of situational novelty (Akkermans, Richardson & raimer (2020) and thus the dynamism of HR systems in the areas of learning, innovation, adaptation and reintegration of existing human resource practices and procedures is required to deal with the growing concern of all sectors across the world (Delali, Yaa, & Cedric (2020).

1.2 Human Resource Management (HRM)

To Boxall and Purcell (2000), HRM includes any-and everything connected with the management of employment relationships in an organization. Anything and everything in the above definition according to Osibanjo and Adeniji (2012), describes the wider range of issues including such policies as employment contract as well as numerous other employees' involvements and participation in areas indirectly covered by the employment contract thereby ensuring suitable work life. Four key dimensions to HRM as postulated by Guest (1987) and cited in Osibanjo and Adeniji (2012) are as follows

1. Commitment: Employees are not only expected to identify the interests and goals of the organizations but to equally be aligned and committed in achieving those goals.

2. Flexibility: Employees are expected to willingly adapt to any changes within the organizational structure, without any discord or preconception.

3. Quality: The attainment of high level performance by an organization is dependent on the quality of members of staff and management of such an organization.

4. Integration: This entails matching of human resources strategies to the needs of the business strategy.

Although managers in organizations such as college deans, matrons and even sales managers are all regarded as HR managers, their overall effectiveness and efficiency is dependent on how the organizations HR system is both organized and managed. Therefore, it is pertinent for every organization, medium or large to create and equip HR departments with HR specialists that can conveniently handle HR activities. These HR activities according to whatishumanresource.com, include the holistic process of recruiting, selecting, inducting employees, providing orientation, imparting training and development, appraising the performance of employees as well as deciding compensation and benefits provision, motivation of employees, maintaining proper relations with both employees and their trade unions, ensuring employees safety, welfare and health measures are in compliance with labour laws of the land and finally following the Orders / Judgements of the concerned High Court and Supreme Court, where applicable.

Figure 2. Human resource management HRM Process
Source: http://www.whatishumanresource.com/human-resource-management

1.3 Challenges Faced by HRM in the Face of the Pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees have literally been forced to rely on one type of flexible work arrangement (FWA): employees working from home. Flexible, non-standard or alternative work arrangements, as the case may be, are fundamentally choices that allow an employee to work outside the traditional bounds of a standard organization of work with respect to such different possibilities as amount, distribution of working time and place of work (Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma & Nwokorie 2020). Because this shift from working in the office to working from home has been involuntary, unplanned, continues over a lengthy period and entails that entire households be house-bound, there is every likelihood that employees will experience both increased work hours as well as increased work-life imbalance. Thus, increased work hours as well as work-life imbalance of employees as a result of the fusing of work and private life during remote working from home are some of the core challenges HRM is facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Peasley, Hochstein, Britton, Srivastava, & Stewart, 2020). Adamovic, (2018) and Chen and Fulmer (2018) both advocate for persuading employees to imbibe healthy work practices such as working within regular hours and taking regular work-breaks which will help them to disconnect from work. The pandemic offers managers the opportunity to explore how to implement flexible work arrangements that can enhance the health and safety of employees well into the future, therefore, HR managers need to respond to this challenge by arranging virtual meetings or online relationships to maintain the motivation and productivity of employees (Singer-Velush, Sherman, & Anderson, 2020) because communicating clearly and managing work expectations will help employees to maintain both their family and work responsibilities.

Another major challenge witnessed in the face of the pandemic is that most of the employees do not possess the requisite knowledge in technologies for the various online tools required for remote working and this indirectly resulted in other HR challenges such as high turnover from dismissals, cuts in salaries and granting of unpaid leaves. The psychological stress, fear and job insecurity

resulting from these challenges for the workforce is so high leading to decrease in the degree of loyalty to the organisations as well as notable demotivation which definitely affects the company's quality of service or products both in the short and/or medium-term. Furthermore, when the employees leave companies, the knowledge, experience, skills and internal communications is lost and organisational culture suffers eventually.

Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, and Zimmermann (2020) aver that the COVID-19 pandemic altered the life style of a lot of international business travellers and globally mobile employees; stay-at-home restrictions and virtual meetings have replaced their frequent travel business dinners not forgetting the hotel accommodation. This has resulted in performance challenges aggravated by stress caused by the demands of virtual global work and long work hours in not very conducive remote working conditions. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic according to Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, and Zimmermann (2020), has led to increased cross-border distance problems (e.g., as the result of travel bans and reduced international mobility), as well as to new intra-firm distancing challenges imposed upon previously co-located employees. The physical distancing challenge on the positive note offers HRM some insight into the unanticipated benefits of a virtual workforce – a type of workforce that, quite possibly, will influence the 'new normal' of the post- COVID-19 world (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann (2020); Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma, & Iheanacho (2021).

Another important challenge from the impact of COVID-19 on the employee is career shock. Nantwi and Boateng (2020) define career shock as a disruptive event which though outside the control of the employee still affects his/her career by impacting either positively or negatively on it with varying degrees of intensities, frequencies and predictability as such experienced by employees in pandemics. HRM should take the lead in helping organisations navigate through these uncertainties, taking into consideration the needs of developing skills as well as maintaining mental wellbeing of employees. It is therefore pertinent for companies planning for the future need to adjust their focus on business continuity, supporting organisational health as well as for employees' health and safety (Gigauri (2020).

Table 1: Challenges caused by the pandemic crisis

Challenging areas to organisations	Challenges to Employees	Challenges to HRM
- Corporate Brand/ Image - Organisational Culture/ Organisational values - Uncertainty/ Crisis Management - Business closure / Suspended operations - Regulations/ Imposed Fines - Financial difficulties - Flexibility - Digitalisation	- Stress - Unemployment - Unpaid leave - Adaptability to remote working - Lack of Knowledge in Online tools	- Managing panic - Avoiding dismissals - Retaining employees - Remote / online Management - Lack of Knowledge in Technologies - Lack of crisis Management skills and knowledge - New safety regulations

Source: Adopted from Gigauri, 2020.

1.4 Empirical Analysis

Narayandas, Hebbar, and Liangliang (2020) in the course of conducting 20 in-depth cum in-person interviews, as well as a vast survey of more than 350 senior executives, to ascertain how the Chinese corporate world has adapted, innovated, survived and even thrived through this uncertain COVID-19 pandemic time and came up with some lessons for leaders in the rest of the world amongst which are a. Adoption of new modes of communication; b) Acceleration for digital transformation; c) Re-organization for digital transformation; d) Encouraging speedy internal and external collaboration and e) Formalizing and enabling remote work. In another

vein, Singer-Velush, Sherman and Anderson (2020), in their own survey on the employees of Microsoft, pulled data from within a 350-person department to find out what impact the work-from-home mandate was having on their workplace and found out that the major difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic bordered on business continuity, employee wellbeing, and customer orientation. These recent surveys show that some employers have made reasonable efforts at adopting new policies and strategies to help employees adjust in the workplace in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SELF DETERMINATION THEORY (SDT)

Self-determination according to Cherry (2021), is an important concept in psychology that refers to a person's ability to make choices and manage their own life. Self-determination theory emerged from the work of psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. The theory as propounded by Ryan and Deci (2000) proposes that people would rather have the feeling that they are in control of their actions so much so that anything that will make an earlier relished task seem more like an obligation than a freely chosen activity will erode motivation. Cherry (2021) asserts that the first notion of self-determination theory is that people are actively directed toward growth and gaining expertise over challenges and taking in new experiences are crucial for developing a well-integrated sense of self. Deci , Olafsen and Ryan (2017) further state that internal sources of motivation also known as intrinsic motivation such as a need to gain knowledge or independence another focal point of self-determination theory. Self - determination theory also proposes that in addition to being driven by a need for autonomy (the need for people to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals) such as part time working and freelancing, people equally seek ways to achieve competence (gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills) as well as have positive connections or relatedness to others (the need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people (Cherry, 2021).

The self-determination theory has its major connotation relating to intrinsic rewards gotten out of work – basically the feeling of fulfilment an employee gets as a result of engaging in the work one loves to do. Bono and Judge (2003) are of the view that employees who work toward organizational goals for intrinsic reasons are usually more satisfied with their jobs and according to Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma and Nwokorie (2020), perform better because they feel like they are better fitted into their organization. This is in agreement with Cherry (2020) view that in the workplace, people who feel that they are able to have a positive effect at work tend to feel more engaged and motivated. Hence, there is need to make the work interesting, provide recognition and support employee growth and development. As Berkery, Morley, Tiernan, Purtill, and Parry (2017) point out, it is possible that employees will increase their efforts if their chosen flexible arrangements help them manage their work-life balance by reducing levels of stress, exhaustion and/or burnout. SDT was selected as a conceptual framework because it is an empirically-validated approach that not only identifies factors that promote sustained motivation, behaviour change and wellbeing over time (Ryan, Patrick, Deci, and Williams, (2008); Peters, Calvo and Ryan, (2018), it equally validates the assertion that behaviour change is much more effective and sustainable when people are autonomously motivated (Ng, Ntoumanis, Thøgersen-Ntoumani, Deci, Ryan, Duda, and Williams, (2012) and that autonomy supportive climate facilitates satisfaction of the basic psychological needs and respects choice (Ryan, Patrick, Deci and Williams, (2008). This COVID-19 pandemic requires adherence to several measures, some of which are needed for personal protection against the infection (e.g., hand hygiene, avoiding direct contact with an infected person) while others such as staying at home and physical distancing are required for the protection of the society as a whole as well as for maintaining/sustaining businesses and the economies of organisations. Therefore, knowledge of the effects of autonomy, competence, and interrelatedness will help HR managers in their dealings with employees and invariably help to sustain if not increase productivity during this pandemic era.

2.1 Roadmap to HRM Development in the Pandemic ERA

Jobs are significantly being transformed and there is notable huge competition presently in the market in this pandemic era and so it is pertinent that strategies relating to crisis management, business continuity, and HRM processes be reviewed and revised in line with both the situation on ground and further unforeseen circumstances. Hence, Gigauri (2020) opines that organizations need both HR managers who are very knowledgeable in crisis management as well as highly developed people with not only the relevant knowledge but those with special skills who can adapt quickly to the environment, are receptive to innovations, have the ability to learn, master new competences and equally possess creative innovative skills. There should therefore be joint effort between top-management and HRM in designing strategies to deal with the crisis focusing on flexibility and adaptability since remote working has invariably come to stay. There is equally need to develop 'what if' scenarios that can be beneficial for organizations in preparing

for future uncertainties and for HRM to put emphasis on emotional intelligence in order to make appropriate decisions on how to take care of the employees who have their own needs or difficulties caused by the pandemic.

Considering the significant central role played by organisational culture during the pandemic, it is necessary that HRM engages in frequent communication and close connection with employees. An organisation can overcome difficulties brought by the pandemic easier if HR leadership does not only encourage and engage the workers but takes the step further to keep them up-to-date, as well as take into account their opinions.

Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke and Zimmermann (2020) aver that the field of International Human Resource Management (IHRM) has long understood that when employees are in novel or uncertain contexts, they experience such stress as these expressed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in immense unfamiliarity and uncertainty that is affecting the mental health of many people around the world (World Health Organization, 2020). Even as the health risks of the pandemic begin to wane in some countries with the recent availability of the vaccine, the new ways of working remotely and the fears around the global credit crunch will continue to produce a state of unpredictability. Based on knowledge from the IHRM literature, Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke and Zimmermann (2020) highlighted a number of selections, training, and support practices as guiding factors for developing HRM in the face of the pandemic.

2.1.1 Selection

Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black and Ferzandi (2006) aver that some people are naturally better than others at managing stress and uncertainty, enabling them to make better decisions and work more effectively across countries and cultures. Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) assert that employees with resilience do not only bounce back after stressful situations but they find positive meaning from them as well. Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann (2020) on their part are of the view that employees with natural curiosity are known to be able to be more open-minded and creative, thrive in situations of anxiety and uncertainty and adapt better to novel situations (Hagtvedt, Dossinger, Harrison, & Huang, 2019; Kashdan, Sherman, Yarbro, & Funder, 2013). Going further, Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke and Zimmermann (2020) pointed out that in this period of global stress and uncertainty, there is need for organizations to look for these three evaluative cultural agility competencies in their employees: tolerance for ambiguity, resilience, and curiosity for all employees. This is because employees working, even virtually, with clients, vendors, or colleagues will now, more than ever, need these competencies to be effective. Therefore, selection is key to enable organizations assess agile talent who will be most effective in situations of growing novelty and uncertainty.

2.1.2 Training

Training would be well-received at this time when every employee is experiencing a similar stressor. Deci, Olafsen, and Ryan (2017) aver that the self-determination theory provides considerable confirmation that one of our basic human motivators is the need for competence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been observed by Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke and Zimmermann (2020) that the lack of professional encouragement while working from home is promoting additional "self-directed knowledge-seeking to satisfy the need to learn, grow, and demonstrate competence". For instance, Forbes (2020) noted that LinkedIn Learning courses have seen a tremendous increase in usage since the start of stay-at-home orders. Companies should use this opportunity to actively harness the growing interest in self-directed learning witnessed at this time to invest in the skill development of employees. At such a time as this when employees' desire to learn, grow, and demonstrate competence is more intense than normal, organizations that offer access to, or reimburse, employees' online training according to Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke and Zimmermann (2020), will not only achieve a clear win–win but will simultaneously stimulate employee motivation, since they will increase talent capability.

2.1.3 Support

Takeuchi, Wang, Marinova, and Yao (2009) posit that just as an individual's comfort or fit within a given environment can affect their success so can an organizational support positively affect an employee's adaptation in a new surrounding. With the uncertainty of both global work and current COVID-19 pandemic, though the issues for which support is needed might vary depending on the person's work-life issues, organizational support will always remain critical (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). Organizations are advised to offer support practices such as webinars on resilience, tutorials on mindfulness (De Cieri, Shea, Cooper, and Oldenburg, 2019), employee assistance programs, and virtual counselling services to help mitigate stress particularly for employees who engage in virtual work as they face additional stress.

2.1.4 Communication and support for health and safety

To Dirani, Abadi, Alizadeh, Barhate, Ibrahim, Garza, Gunasekara and Majzun (2020), crisis communication is a fundamental part of crisis management involving frequent unreserved communications with employees about the up to the minute state of the business. Regular information dissemination from team leaders, taking standpoints as well as establishing the well-being of those impacted by the pandemic, is one of the very core responsibilities of the leaders at this pandemic and business lock down era. Clear and consistent communication from HR managers about possible health risks and available health resources is very important as it has been noted to be an important barrier against stress experienced by employees as a result of their jobs (Stroppa & Spiess, 2011; Kraimer, Bolino, & Mead, 2016). This knowledge is especially applicable to working from home situation as a result of the pandemic.

2.2 Human Resource Management Development in the Face of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically interrupted workflow in all sectors of the economy. With social, economic and health systems almost on the brink of caving in, it is somewhat impossible to know what the new world will look like, but its outcome will definitely depend on the decisions taken by leaders now (Dirani, Abadi, Alizadeh, Barhate, Ibrahim, Garza, Gunasekara & Majzun (2020). Managements and employers are particularly challenged with decisions on how to deal with service backlog and demands. Carnevale and Hatak (2020) noted that while HRM has a significant role to play in assisting employees to overcome the difficulties encountered as a result of the unexpected changes in the workplace as well as in the society, organizations need to expedite both their response and adaption measures to the alterations and manage the workforce accordingly. While doing so, it is of utmost importance that HR managers bear in mind that employees respond differently in crisis situations with their reactions varying from acceptance of the change situation to minor discomfort, anger, fear, frustration and at times even full blown resistance to the change situation (Smollan, Sayers, & Matheny 2010). Naudé (2012) avers that during unstable times, such as the pandemic era, conscious goal planning should be directed towards retaining high performers and using their skills to preserve a high level of productivity. With the acceleration of the digitalisation processes, Sheppard (2020) opines that organisations need to begin to adopt technologies that are platform-based and to develop novel business models. Furthermore, a lot of regulations aimed at preventing the spread of the COVID-19 equally resulted in the suspension and re-organization of a lot of economic and human resource activities. These are some of the issues to be considered in the wake of developing human resource management in the face of the pandemic.

Electronic human resource management (EHRM) can be said to be one of the areas of Human resource management (HRM) that has developed more in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic because according to Sheppard (2020), digital and integrated workforce skills are what are required to move to the virtual work. Nenwsssani and Raj (2013) defined electronic human resource management (EHRM) as the processing and transmission of digitalized HR information while Looise and van Riemsdijk (2004) aver that it is a way of carrying out HR policies, practices and strategies in organizations through conscientious and direct support of and with the full use of web-technology based channels. EHRM varies widely in scope; it can either be a simple web-based system to access Human Resource (HR) related documents (Sagum, 2015) or a fully integrated, organization-wide electronic network of HRM-related data, information, services, databases, tools, applications, and transactions that are generally accessible at any time by the employees, managers, and HRM professionals (Hussain, Wallace and Cornelius, 2007). Record keeping and information dissemination handled by HR departments is now done electronically with the use of the internet. HRM with the aid of technology has made both the working process more flexible (Dirani, Abadi, Alizadeh, Barhate, Ibrahim, Garza, Gunasekara and Majzun, (2020) and working from alternate locations a reality as well as an available option though with its attendant stress associated with the removal of boundaries between work and family (Giurge & Bohns, 2020).

Dirani, et al (2020) assert that both facing and addressing the challenges of a complex crisis like the current COVID-19 pandemic requires more than leaders acting alone and that relying on traditional notions of leadership such as charismatic, top-down, or authoritative leadership approaches is no longer enough to victoriously steer the challenges of such complex crises and unpredictable environments. Therefore, HRM should tap onto the collective leadership potential of everyone in the organization and utilize team delegation to come up with efficient roadmaps to achieving goals and responding to the crisis. The sense of ownership that would result from distributing and sharing the leadership responsibility is indispensable as it will accord the employees the opportunity to strive to achieve competence (gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills) as well as have positive connections or relatedness to others which is in line with the theoretical framework of the study.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new way for workplace management. The main challenges brought about by the pandemic can be summed up to include unplanned change in work environment with its attendant stress and stressors, unreliable/distorted information dissemination at some points, situational novelty, unclear and shifting goals, as well as ill-structured situations. Human resource management (HRM) is saddled with playing the essential role of helping organisation navigate through the dramatic changes caused by the challenges from COVID-19 pandemic by developing new policies and strategies to tackle such challenges head-on. Organizations that want to survive crisis situations must allow their HRM to develop the necessary policies and strategies that give space to healthy communication, interactive decision making, and strategic planning in a flexible atmosphere that is agile and open and allows employees access to increase their competence and interrelated and not alienate them.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is need for HR managers to know how to improve the wellbeing of employees doing virtual work in crisis times taking into consideration personal stress.
2. HRM should help employees in their quest to develop their competences through trainings, consulting, and coaching as this will help in accomplishing the organizations' goals and vision.

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