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Strategic Human Resource Planning: The Case Study of Intercontinental Hotel and Resorts and the Laying-Off Of Workers during Covid-19:.

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has adversely affected business operation of many businesses and institution all over Lusaka and Zambia as a whole. Because of this the Zambia economy has experienced slowdown in its economic activities due to lack of production and investment in the economy due to the impact of covid-19 which has affected a lot of international and local hotels companies in Zambia. According to Patrick and Wilson (2020) they have been a reduction in hospitality business in the country this is due to a reduction in the disposable income by consumers and global flight restrictions due to covid-19 in the last six months and this has negatively affected tourism which in turn has also affected hotels, lodges and casino businesses. As Ian and Lee (2020) noted that in order companies to protect themselves from financial distress, most hospitality companies have opted to reduce the numbers of workers by forced retirement and redundancy with the aim of protecting the business from closing down, and this has been the case with intercontinental hotels Lusaka Zambia. Research survey conducted by PWC (2020) indicated that 70% hospitality companies were partially closed while 25% of businesses were totally closed in Lusaka only and that only 5% reported to have maintained normal operations. The transport, catering, education, and accommodation sectors were also impacted by the covid-19 in Zambia. As the effects of COVID-19 spread across the entire world, the primary focus for human resource management is the safety of their people. Strategic human resource planning has help hotel industry to cope with the ever-changing landscape of traveler expectation and also good management of labor to avoid mishandling of labor related issues which can be a risk to the branding of the hotel chains (Davidson, 2015). Its cardinal that before going forward that we define some of these terms; According to Freddie (2014) defined Strategic human resource planning as an Integrating human resource management strategies and systems to achieve the overall mission, strategies, and success of the firm while meeting the needs of employees and other stakeholders. COVID-19 has been defined by World Health Organization (2020) as an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered strain of corona virus, a type of virus known to cause respiratory infections in humans. On the other hand Frankton and Michael (2020) supported and gave his view that, this new strain was unknown before December 2019, when an outbreak of a pneumonia of unidentified cause emerged in Wuhan, China on September 4, 2020.

Key Words: Covid-19, Hospitality, Strategic Human Resource

1.0 An Overview Of Intercontinental Hotels During The Outbreak Of Covid-19 Which Led To Laying Off Of Workers

InterContinental Hotels and Resorts is a multinational global hotel chain and *It has over 180 hotels located* in more than sixty countries across the globe and it has been in operation for over seventy years (InterContinental Hotels, 2020). The Intercontinental brand is one of the world's top luxury hotel and resort brands. Despite this world recognition, early this year, particularly on 9th April 2020, intercontinental Hotels and Resorts Lusaka decided to *layoff over 200 workers* and this was done as *an international strategy in coping with the effects of COVID-19* (Patrick, 2020).

However, with this critical situation at hand, according to InterContinental Hotels (2020) it was asserted that intercontinental hotel amid resorts was trying to *protect the businesses* from further decline not only in Zambia but also other globally chains and therefore, it was regarded as a *global layoff strategy on cutting cost*. According to David (2014) the *hospitality industry* in Zambia was among the worst industry after the mining industry to be hit by covid-19 following a drastic drop in tourist entries in the country and the depreciation of the kwacha.

Following the layoff of 200 workers, The *Zambia congress of trade union* criticized the company human resource management due to *lack of communication* with the trade union and *lack of strategic human resource planning* in the company. Based on the article by Abraham and David (2014) he noted that, if a business lacks communication with the major trade unions they will be critical problems in most business and these problems will come from lack of *full presentation of employees* and lack of strategic human resource planning in any company and this can result into the company to *suffer from low engagement, low turnover and low motivation among the staff*. It was also noted by Bryan and Martinez (2016) that when they is lack of communication within the company, it usually opens up the door for misinterpretation and for questioning motives and intent which can act as a barrier to strategic human resource planning.

Example: Intercontinental Hotel Lusaka Reported Case On Poor Human Resource.

- In the complaint letter addressed to the President, the workers alleged that between September 2017 and 2018; more than 80 staff had left the hotel due to frustrations instigated

by the general manager. In that same year the director of human resource was also forced to resign.

- Out of the four staff that were in human resource all have left and only the training manager was the one acting as human resource. (Lusaka Times, 2019)

2.0 The Advantages Of Strategic Human Resource Planning During Covid-19 To Intercontinental Hotel To Avoid Lay Off Workers

A. Brings About Predictability

According to Allan (2012) every business in the world usually do face uncertainties economic climate, market conditions and supply chain breakdown issues. The benefit of strategic human resource planning for intercontinental hotels and resorts could have provided with what employees needed to do a good job and stay with the hotel over time lessens. As Hawking et al (2004) suggested that, the hotel could have used strategic human resource planning be reducing layoff by providing extra degree of certainty in scheduling, handling and staffing the workload than firing 200 workers at a go which was unfair.

Classen, (2002) believed that predictability in strategic human resource planning usually helps the company to assess the industry based on the company strength, weaknesses and opportunities and this helps human resource personnel to critically access the problem and the industry to avoid rushing out in laying-off workers if the problem is a short-lived problem.

Intercontinental hotels and resorts could have used *predictability* has a human resource strategic tool in planning to be able *to predict any uncertainties and risks* that may affect the warfare of the employees.

B. Example

Hospitality companies such as *Taj Pamodzi Hotel, Best Western plus Lusaka grand hotel* and other small lodges have reported to have leadoff some workers due to slow business. Commercial banks such as first national bank, *Cavmount Bank, Zambia National Commercial Bank* and *ABSA* reported to have predicted more workers in different branches to contact Covid-19 but without intention of laying-off workers.

C. Helps Increasing Retention.

As Okpara and Wynn (2008) put it that Strategic human resource planning helps to increase retention. It was observed early by Earl and Mather (2020) that, in the current crisis of covid-19, it is important to show your employees that you value them enough to invest time and resources in giving them the tools they need to grow and they're more likely to stay with your company over time evening during difficult times when business is low. On the other hand Allan (2012) agreed and supported that strategic human resource planning as a strategic tool of increasing retention among companies will make employees jobs to be more interesting and that it will also show them that you value their work and their tenure.

Now, coming to the case of *intercontinental hotel and resorts*, it is clear that intercontinental hotel did not had a strategic human resource plan that will help to avoid putting workers on redundancy and subsequently firing them. The hotel didn't consider the value of its employees during the covid-19 period as the human resource department in the Lusaka hotel was fragmented.

According to Patrick and Wilson (2020) the most obvious solution that any company could have done to avoid laying off workers during the covid-19 would be to cover salaried workers under the COVID-19 plans and those not only salary under unemployment insurance.

Example

- The **Zambian government** in April decided for immediate recruitment of 400 doctors and 3,000 paramedics in order to scale up response against covid-19 (GRZ, 2020).
- These measures were looked upon by the medical association of Zambia as public strategic human resource measures of retaining workers from who lost their jobs in private clinics and hospital and also a strategic move to mitigate the growing unemployment rate of trained and qualified personnel in the health sector.
- This move had a multiplier effect to other sectors that opted to recruit more workers than laying-off.

D. Contributes In Building Skills

One of the benefits of human resource strategic planning that intercontinental hotel and resorts could have used to avoid the layoff of workers is the employment of skills and capacity building among workers during the time they are not fully working. Authors like Germano (2018)

explained that, human resource planning through skills building helps business staff to do their jobs better.

If intercontinental hotel could have employed strategic human resource planning in the management of COVID-19 it could have opted to have invest time and skills in providing education necessary to build skills and increase capacity in dealing with the pandemic even if the business was slow as it was a temporary shutdown. With the view of this intercontinental hotels and resorts could have been able to achieve more high-quality work with the workers and the people rather than having to rely on outside employees with the aim of laying off workers which could have been avoided at all cost.

Example

- A good example of a company that has used Covid-19 in skill building is the *bank of Zambia (BoZ), securities and exchange commission Zambia (SEC) and pension and insurance authority (PIA)* through their joint messaging campaigns and virtual online meetings on different topics with respect to the consideration of the impact of covid-19 on the financial institution and how these financial institution human resource should deal with these issues.

3.0 The Disadvantages Of Strategic Human Resource Planning During Covid-19 To Intercontinental Hotel To Avoid Lay Off Workers

A. Increase In Expense

AS Frankton and Michael (2020) pointed out that employing strategic human resource planning during business uncertainties may costs money or may need huge capital injection into the business to train and invest in the staff. As Okpara and Wynn (2008) supported and also argued that, Whether the business is paying for diverting and dedicated training employee hours from responsibilities that are more likely to directly increase the business incoming revenue, strategic human resource planning may likely decrease the business bottom line in the short term before it increases the business profits in the long term.

As Allan (2012) research argued, that elevating the cost of human resource management and planning during difficult times where the business sales are low and operations are down can

overcome internal resistance to change and may thus be an important instrument for articulating the need for change.

Example

- **Zambia Sugar plc** covid-19 stress report classified overall operational risk to be high based on their risk analysis as Operations Risk - Cane Supply disruption (Low risk), Annual factory maintenance (high risk), Logistics and supply chain (high risk), Labor supply (Medium risk), Materials (Packaging, Lubricants, chemicals high risk but it was assured that during this covid-19 these business will continue to operate and no workers will be lay-off by the company.
- **Tangy Drinks Limited** workers were layed-off due to increase in expenses and low business during the covid-19 lockdowns. The workers were protesting due to poor handling of the laying of workers on Tuesday 29th October 2020.

B. Unpredictability

Although strategic human resource planning has the potential to give intercontinental hotel and resorts a greater degree of stability by building the skills of the workforce than laying them off during covid-19 period, there is no guarantee that the intercontinental hotel and resorts workers who have been trained by the company will stay with the company long enough for the company to reap the benefits of investment after the covid-19 pandemic when it's over or when the economy is opened.

Example

- **Pamodzi** Covid-19 stress report asserted that the companies through its human resource department, the business already have implemented a strategic human resource plan and a continuity plan place to meet any human resource needs, operational issues and natural disasters which is reviewed and trained by all executives to meet the necessity due to unpredictability and uncertainties (Pamodzi, 2020).
- **Standard Chartered Bank** human resource Covid-19 stress report asserted that with the ongoing shocks to the supply and demand side of labor, there is potential for further market disruptions. Institutions and individuals maybe experiencing liquidity stress, including

limited access to credit but it's not known its impact on the employee's productivity and laying-off workers is not an option (SCB, 2020).

C. Illusion Of Certainty

According to Henry and Coulter (2007) strategic human resource planning can make the company workforce better able to do their jobs during critical business and economical periods. He further noted in his research Henry and Coulter (2016) that companies may put up a good strategic human resource planning framework in order to train its personnel to perform functions that become obsolete as the company and the industry evolve. This can give a false sense of security especially to the employers and may prevent them from reacting quickly enough to developments.

An illusion of certainty can come about if they is lack of proper strategic framework of the company companied with poor human resource management. COVID-19 impacts on intercontinental hotel and resorts business has been due to global shutdown and this has lowered tourist coming to the country which has affected the overall operational processes putting strain on operational risks, Striking the right balance between cost cutting and smooth operations, Regulatory and business focus on operational resilience

4.0 How Intercontinental Hotel Should Have Improved Their Human Resource Planning Process To Avoid Layoff

There are four general broad steps involved in the human resource planning process that intercontinental hotel could have used to improved and avoid the layoff of workers. These general steps needs to be taken in sequence in order to arrive at the end goal, which is to develop a strategy that enables the hotel to successfully find and retain enough qualified employees to meet the company's needs during the covid-19 pandemic.

a) Assessing The Current Human Resource Capacity Of Intercontinental Hotel

Intercontinental hotel and resorts first step of human resource planning was to identify the hotels current human resources supply. Therefore, the human resource department studies the strength of the company based on the number of their skills employees, qualifications, positions, performance levels and benefits. According to Les and Abharium (2005) The company's demand

for labor will be based on a number of both macro- and micro-level factors including the geopolitical relations, economy, government and regulatory policy, industry growth, consumer preferences competitive factors, and trends in technology. Therefore, these assumptions need to be factored into the hotel's strategic planning process during and after covid-19 and provide broad guidance as to the quantity of labor and types of expertise that will be required over the planning horizon.

b) Stressing Human Resource Importance To Intercontinental Hotel

Intercontinental hotel and resorts second step of human resource planning was to stress human resource importance during the covid-19 pandemic and after the pandemic. As Lewis and Heckman (2006) asserted, one of the establishment principles of Human Resource planning stresses the importance of human resources in the organization or company. In hotel business, human resource is usually overlooked.

Human resource is an area of expertise that Zambian hospitality industry lacks. Most Zambian Lodges and hotel owners usually feels like they have entire control and monopoly when it comes to the people they manage and hire but that is not the case, in a proper managed company or business were human resource is always regarded to be the most important department or section in the company because of its cardinal roles in recruitment, performance , training, motivation, building and maintaining the company culture, improved business communication across the company as noted, that Good communication mitigates conflict, misunderstandings, increases employee engagement, forms the basis for better client relationships, encourages innovation and creativity and helps to build a positive culture (Mubanga, 2019).

When it comes to intercontinental hotel and resorts, the human resource could have played a significant role to avoid the laying off of 200 workers by engaging leadership that understands the impact of a functional human resources department which was the best way to adhere to this principle.

c) Gap Analysis (Human Resource Internal Controls)

Intercontinental hotel and resorts could have considered employing the gap analysis when the covid-19 pandemic emerges in order to assess and examine the current performance for the

purpose of identifying differences between the current state of intercontinental and where it could like to be despite the pandemic. According to Lewis and Heckman (2006) defined gap analysis as a technique that is used assess the differences in performance between a business units or department information systems to determine whether business requirements are being met and if not and what steps should be taken to ensure they are met successfully.

This analysis helps if strategic human resource planning was used by intercontinental hotel and resorts during the covid-19 lockdown, it would have been used to plan for growth, project hiring needs for future workforce, understand the skills and experience in your current workforce, and develop strategies for overcoming the gap between the two than laying off over 200 workers at once including key employees that will create a skill shortage in the business after the pandemic.

A Human Resource gap analysis can help intercontinental hotel and resorts to stay in front of changes in the workforce, both with growth and downsizing. Instead of hiring or firing reactively, the hotel can plan ahead and take careful action at the right time. Les and Abhari (2005) Operating this way makes it easier to grow responsibly; ensuring that each position is needed and the workforce is meeting the company's evolving needs.

d) Developing And Implementation Of A Human Resource Plan

Lack of proper strategic human resource planning was the major cause of poor handling of labor problems during the covid-19 pandemic due to critical failure in developing and implementing of a human resource strategy that can help to deal with covid-19 response in order to avoid the need to lay off 200 workers.

According to Okpara and Wynn (2008) There are five human resource strategies that any business may take advantage of in order to meet its needs for the future and these strategies are restructuring strategies, training and development strategies, recruitment strategies, outsourcing strategies, collaboration strategies, restructuring strategies, reducing staff either by attrition or termination, regrouping tasks to create well designed jobs, reorganizing work units to be more effective.

5.0 Other Strategic Human Resource Planning Mechanism That Intercontinental Hotel Could Have Used To Handle The Issue

i. Talent Management

The intercontinental hotel and resorts could have ensured that talent management is considered to be the most important element in the planning of human resource and that employee's layoff could have been done in a more strategic manner to avoid losing employees that have great skill and experience in the hospitality business and to keep such employees as they are key people in the company and the business success. As Mubanga (2019) put it that talent management will ensure that the talented and well-motivated people required by the company to meet future and present needs are available.

ii. Job And Work Design (Part-Time)

Through an *integrated human resource management plan*, the intercontinental hotel and resorts could have handled the layoff better during the covid-19 by Providing workers with stimulating and interesting work and gives them the autonomy and flexibility to perform their jobs well even when the business is not doing well financially.

As Martine et al (2020) in his research indicated that, every workers jobs should be designed in such a way that it provides employees to only be engaged on part-time basis whilst still waiting for covid-19 restriction to be removed and after that workers can gain back their fulltime working schedules. Freddie (2014) when jobs are enhances it will bring about job satisfaction and flexibility, which encourages high performance and productivity even in time of great uncertainty.

iii. Working Environment

PWC (2020) most companies who had lay off workers during the covid-19 period went against their business core values, secure employment, good leadership, work life balance and managing diversity. Intercontinental hotel and resorts could have come up with proper strategic human resource planning by embedding covid-19 response measures and developing the big idea and a clear vision and a set of integrated values and makes the hotel a great place to work even when it's operational due to the pandemic.

iv. Learning And Development Enlarges

It was more important for intercontinental hotel that during the covid-19 lockdown period, it would have taken advantage of the situation specifically by developing skill base and the levels of competence needed in the workforce so that it match other competitors in the industry than laying off over 200 workers which has causes a lot of backlash from the public.

As Stephen and Michael (2020) advised and supported that, during the covid-19 pandemic it's important that companies through their human resource management system needs to encourage discretionary learning, which usually happens when workers actively seek to acquire the knowledge and skills that promote the companies' objectives.

Intercontinental hotel and resorts needed to developed a human resource strategy of learning which will bring about self-managed learning as well as coaching, mentoring and training workers to flourish during business struggles in this covid-19 period so that the hotel is able to handle more serious cases in future that may come.

v. Increasing Motivation, Commitment And Role Engagement

Intercontinental hotel and resorts through the human resource department could have *encourages management* to identify themselves with and act upon the *core values of the company* and willingly to contribute to the achievement of the *company's goals*.

Intercontinental hotel and resorts Laying-off or putting workers on redundancy could have been avoided if *the human resource could have developed a climate of cooperation and trust, clarifying the psychological contract within the company during the covid-19 period*.

vi. Attracting, Developing And Retaining High Quality People

One of the major functions of human resource management is *attracting, developing and retaining of high qualified people*. As Okpara and Wynn (2008) noted that, strategic human resource planning matches people to the *operational and strategic* needs of the organization. What intercontinental hotel and resorts could have done to manage the problem, it could have Provided for the *acquisition, development and retention of talented employees* who can deliver superior productivity, performance, innovation, flexibility, innovation and high levels of customer service and who fit the culture and the strategic requirements of the organization.

vii. Prove Reward Management

Intercontinental hotel and resorts need to develop *commitment, motivation, job engagement and discretionary behavior* by valuing and rewarding people in accordance with their contribution even in times of covid-19 pandemic and been able to provide job security to its workers.

viii. Increase High-Performance Among Management

Intercontinental hotel and resorts need to Develops a *performance culture* that encourages high performance in such areas as productivity, quality, and levels of customer service, growth, and profits and, ultimately, the delivery of increased shareholder value.

Empowers employees to exhibit the *discretionary behaviors* most closely associated with higher business performance such as risk taking, innovation, knowledge sharing and establishing trust between managers and subordinates (DeNisi and Griffin, 2005).

6.0 How Strategic Human Resource Planning Will Impacts On Intercontinental Hotel Performance If It Was Implemented During And After The Covid-19 Crisis.

A. Corporate Strategy

The strategic human resource planning could have impacted intercontinental hotel performance if it was implemented during and also after the covid-19 crisis on *corporate strategy*. In Zambia Companies with a high commitment strategy had significantly higher levels of both quality and productivity than those without a control strategy during the covid-19 crisis (Mubanga, 2020).

According to Huselid (1995) *Productivity* is influenced by *financial performance, employee skills, employee motivation, organizational structures and culture*. If intercontinental hotel and resorts had a better corporate strategy it could have not lay off workers because the hotel corporate strategy could have completely collapse and the values on the index locally, economically and statistically could have reduced the levels of performance.

B. People (Employees)

The strategic human resource planning would have impacted intercontinental hotel performance if it was implemented during and after the covid-19 crisis on the employees in a more positive way. Based on the research by Huselid (1995) Outcomes of a number of researches were

analyzed to assess the strategic human resource planning and its impact on employee's value of high performance work systems during a general or national crisis. The research further concluded that increased in employees high performance systems make an impact as long as they are embedded in the human resource management infrastructure.

This could have been the case with intercontinental hotel and resorts if a strategic human resource planning was integrated into the culture and management of human resource, laying off 200 workers could have been strategically been avoided. The research carried out by PWC (2020) in June examined the link between company's culture and business performance and the use of a number of human resource practices and two practices were particularly considered to be more significant and these are the acquisition and development of employee skills and job design including flexibility, responsibility, variety and the use of formal teams.

C. Culture

It was observed by Mubanga (2020) the most successful hotels and lodges in Zambia namely *Taj Pamondzi hotel, Radisson blue hotel, Lusaka grad hotel and Paris Hilton hotel* during covid-19 lockdown had what the researchers called the big idea. These hotels and lodges most of them had a *clear vision, objectives and a set of values* that were embedded, measured and managed during the crisis period of covid-19. These hotels and lodge were concerned with sustaining flexibility and performance unlike intercontinental hotel and resorts.

It is now clear that between positive attitudes towards human resource strategic policies and practices brings about *motivation, levels of satisfaction, commitment and high operational performance* (Hawking et al (2004). Intercontinental hotel and resorts lack of human resource framework and practice implementation was the major lacking factor in handling of covid-19 and subsequently the laying off of workers. As Davidson (2015) agreed and supported that, **Improved in culture** in linking people management to business performance and this is primarily the task of line managers.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendation that intercontinental hotel and resorts needs to consider in the implementation of strategic human resource planning in this covid-19 period to avoid the next layoff of workers:

- i. Increase manpower development, frequent motivation and Professionalism which are the cardinal drive towards successful hotel business during the covid-19 crisis.
- ii. The need by the hotel management particularly the human resource managers to carry out regular training to ensure staff professionalism both full time and part-time workers.
- iii. Improve Business environment both internally and externally by making efficient choices about human resource practices that consistently support the hotel overall strategy. In order to achieve this competitive advantage even after laying off, the hotel can still come up with more productive correlated objectives to human resource management practices which can be used with different competitive strategies to stay and remain in business.
- iv. Improve communication between the human resource department and the workers to avoid organizational power and politics that can destroy the reputation of the hotel.

7.0 Conclusion

Against a mixed pattern of importance of strategic human resource planning in covid-19 crisis, hotel and businesses human resource management have strived to perform according to the objectives that created for. However, much more requires to be done to sustain the path of development in employees' job security, employee relations and strategic plan that have since problem from reoccurring in the future.

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