

# Changes in Role of Human Resource Managers During “Covid- 19”

Khushbu Keshri (Research Scholar)<sup>1</sup>

Department of Commerce  
Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi

Ashok Kumar Mishra (Professor)<sup>2</sup>

Department of Commerce and Management Studies  
Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi

**Abstract:-** The coronavirus pandemic brought the unpredictable change in the working pattern of the organization and the most vulnerable department which impacted badly is the Human resource department. The “Corona virus” puts disaster plans in mind of all business leaders. Large scale outbreaks of such dangerous disease, threaten employees directly as individuals and cumulatively as a workforce. The top priority for HR is to consider employees first, the threat of corona virus creates uncertainty, panic and impatient- mostly in the case if employees got exposed at work (Wiles, 2020). There was not any business function that has not been significantly impacted by the pandemic and it induced companies to make changes to stay operational. One function that has shifted dramatically was the objective and methods to maintain human resource. The role of HR professionals as well as routine task performed by him has shifted significantly, because of the dramatic growth of “Remote work” in response to “Covid- 19 Pandemics” (Eightfold, Feb 2021). The goal of the study is to describe the changes in emergent HR practices and the challenges faced by HR manager during the pandemic and corrective actions taken to combat the challenges. The recent change bring by the worldwide pandemic has imposed organization to accelerate transformation from onsite work to digital operations. Human resource management has a crucial role to play in supporting organisations in their efforts to stay in business while also assisting employees in utilising digital platforms to access their employment (Iza Gigauri,2020).

**Keywords:-** Covid- 19, Work Life Balance, Challenges, Hybrid Workforce, Moonlighting.

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to Director General of WHO as on 30 January 2020, the outbreak of novel corona virus (2019-ncov) forced to constitutes a public “Health of International Concern (PHEIC)” as per the advice of “international Health Regulation (IHR)” as per advice of “Emergency Committee” (WHO India report). The first report on the new corona virus (SARS- cov2) by the world health organisation (WHO) dates from 21 January 2020 and refers to information which came from the WHO office in China regarding cases of atypical pneumonia of unknown cause, detected in the city of Wuhan (Goncalves, 2021). At the time, the deep lack of knowledge about this virus, combined with the lack of a vaccine or cure for “COVID- 19”, made

strict containment measures necessary which was varying from country to country. The uncertainty of “COVID- 19” situation makes HR job harder even the pandemic has elevated the importance of HR professionals with in organizations as never before. During the “Lockdown” human resource manager need to acknowledge and appreciate that people have put in extra efforts and hard work with no boundaries of day and time. Due to the restrictions on in-person meetings, many people have successfully moved to online video conferencing systems (Economic times, 2020). HR will emerge from the corona virus pandemic as a stronger influencer but now it must play its role in building a blended “Hybrid workforce”. This crisis has brought human resource professionals across the country together to not just plan, but implement employee welfare activities to an extent that has never been done before.

Most HR professionals would agree that this crisis has been an eye-opener for many reasons. While employees lay their trust in managers to help them out, managers also do the same. However, those HR teams that rise to the occasion will be integral in leading and guiding businesses through the storm.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

HRM needs to enable business continuity and ensure work life balance. Extraordinary changes caused by “COVID- 19” have enforced companies around the globe to accelerate transition to digital business process. Human resource management is in the centre of these transformations helping organization to navigate in the vague and unforeseeable future (Gigauri 2020).

In order to continue working efficiently and creating value under these new circumstances, organisation need to understand, accept and support their employees’ specific situation and needs. Working remotely under these circumstances means adapting to a new environment, battling a new set of distractions as well as experiencing a fusion of work and private life (Deloitte)

According to Sheppard, “The “Covid- 19” has accelerated digital transformation for businesses, and many people globally now need the requisite technological abilities in order to work remotely. Businesses should introduce and use platform-based technology and create business models that will help them adapt to future changes and turbulence (Sheppard 2020).

According to Carnevale and Hatak, Managers have to quickly enter the "unknown unknowns" as they work to assist their workforce in adapting to and coping with the radical changes taking place in the work and social environment, the "COVID- 19" pandemic has created a particularly challenging environment for human resource management (HRM). Employees, for instance, who formerly worked exclusively or primarily inside the physical borders of their organisation must now swiftly adapt to remote work settings. (Carnevale & Hatak 2020)

According to Goncalves et al, Managers had to make their decision in a very short period of a time i.e., the decision about who should stay at work and who should go home, how and where people could be moved into digital space and what the priorities are and how those priorities are and how those priorities can best be communicated to employees. Individuals, cities, economics, countries and continents have experienced the sock of "Lockdown" and the fear of unknowing. (Goncalves et al. 2021)

According to Lewis "As face-to-face collaboration is replaced with e-mail and videoconferencing; HR managers have to do difficult work under difficult circumstances. The corona virus pandemic has disrupted organizations and caused human resources managers to think differently about their role as they adjusted to social distancing practices and a new work environment that they may never have imagined. To prevent the spread of the corona virus, companies have switched to a remote work model at a rate and scale they've never experienced (Lewis 2020)

According to Caligiuri et al. "The crisis presents a fresh chance to examine the foundations of online collaboration. To test the limits of virtual collaboration, IHRM (International Human Resource Management) researchers could use the current condition of widespread virtual working as an "extreme case scenario". This will help the managers to examine whether the strategy or technique they were created for the collaboration is successful or not, while working virtually (Caligiuri et al. 2020).

According to Chadee et al. "The effectiveness of HR practises is crucial for organisations, especially during "Covid- 19" crises. As a preventive measure for controlling the risks connected with rising HR difficulties and their effects on business, firms must develop a contingency plan (Chadee et al. 2021).

According to Zhong "The "COVID- 19" pandemic has created emerging HR issues and will continue to create new challenges for HR practices. There are 9 HR issues - Employee wellbeing, Flexible workforce, remote work, job loss, Human capital, Human resource development, leadership, performance and communication (Zhong 2021).

According to Akkermans et al. "A disruptive and extraordinary incident that brings on by circumstances outside the scope of a person's control and that prompts intentional reflection about one's profession is referred to as a "Career Shock." The "Covid- 19" pandemic might be

viewed as a "career shock" because it negatively affected people's employment and professional lives (Akkermans et al. 2020).

According to Collings et al. It compelled businesses all across the world to change the way work is planned and organised. For the great majority of employees, "COVID-19" has altered the way they experience their jobs. The possibility of conflicts developing between staff groupings has also grown (Collings et al. 2021).

According to Shahi and Neloy "Due to the pandemic and substantial emerging concerns that are becoming key issues in managing an organisation, HRM was experiencing immense change. Different organisations are juggling their arrangements and potential outcomes during this pandemic and looking for innovations, a new style of leadership, and changing HR practises behaviour (Shahi et al. 2020)

#### ➤ Objective of the Study

- To find out the challenges faced by a Human resource manager
- To study the impact of Covid Pandemic on employee work life balance
- To find out the steps taken by HR managers to overcome the adverse effect of "Pandemic"
- How HR manager can help companies in digital transformation during "Covid- 19".

#### ➤ HR challenges during Pandemic-

The way of doing business has changed in the same way the way of managing human resource has changed. It is the sole responsibility of the human resource manager to drive the change needed through collaborative technology to maintain a productive and engaged the virtual workforce that doesn't get lost due to pandemic. New business models, exponential technology, agile ways of working and regulation are constantly changing the way organisation work. According to write Philippe Gomes (UK and Ireland country manager, Powell Software) and Marine Fournier (International HR manager at Powell Software), HR emerged as a stronger influencer from the sever and long-lasting disruption of coronavirus pandemic but now its role in building a blended "hybrid workforce" make his job more complex. According to Sharma and Kumar, Human resource department was primarily responsible for re-establishing organisational culture as businesses struggle to adapt to the post-pandemic environment (Sharma & Kumar 2020).

Most of the HR professionals have accepted that the pandemic has made their role more challenging than earlier. Challenges Human resource managers were facing during pandemic varies from location to location, the size of business, sector as well as the development stage of the country. But the one thing which was clear is that all businesses were impacted badly and they had to change their working strategy to maintain themselves. That was crucial time for HR personnel to change strategy in order to support work from home and to meet the challenges of digitization.

- *Difficulty in training of Human resource to work remotely,*
- *Concern about the health and well-being of employees,*
- *To keep the employees motivated,*
- *To keep employee engaged,*
- *To retain the employees while the demands of goods and services are declining,*
- *To re-establish work life balance,*
- *To overcome anxiety,*
- *To adhere with Legal restrictions and government guidelines,*
- *Lack of knowledge of teleworking*

➤ *Reasons behind challenges*

Success or failure of any organisation truly depends on human capital, therefore management of human resource become a crucial part for Human Resource manager due to digitisation of workplace.

- *Virtual Recruitment*

In order to follow the government guideline for “COVID- 19” as well as for safety point of view now a day companies are opting virtual recruitment technique over to traditional technique of recruitment. Virtual recruitment refers to the process of hiring an employee that takes place virtually rather than face to face recruitment. In this process the recruiters totally rely on technology they are using for virtual recruitment to evaluate applicants remotely like video conferencing, Online job portals, Telly conferencing, virtual events etc. It has recently been observed that today’s generation prefers those organizations which are updated or advance in terms of technology.

- *Employee Engagement*

During the work from home scenario, senior management who did not have remote working measures in place at the pandemic outset had to find a way to manage their team’s performance from home. Human resource managers were consistently evolving some innovative, creativity and effective ways to engage the employees in a healthier way during that difficult time.

- *Performance Management*

Performance management is the process of ensuring that a set of activities and output meets an organisation’s goals in an effective and efficient manner as well as the individual goal of employees should also be achieved. During the “Covid- 19” it becomes very difficult for the HR manger to maximise the employee’s performance efficiency through remote working.

- *Training Through Online Learning Module*

Employees training is important for the growth of the employee as well as of organisation. HR professionals are opting online training and learning programs during “Covid-19” to update their employees with recent trends and technologies. E-learning platform treat every employee differently because every employee is different in terms of skill, knowledge, interest. It gives everyone equal opportunity of development. With the help of employee training software, all workers can enjoy a consistent learning

experience whenever they need and from anywhere. Some are Trainual, Thinkific, Eduflow, 360 Learning, Absorb “LMS” etc.

- *Moonlighting*

Moonlighting is having a second job, typically secretly at night in addition to one’s regular employment which does not have any relation with main job. People Moonlight to earn more, to enhance their skill, to fight boredom, to utilize their time. It is clear that due to changing conditions moonlighting cannot be stopped but it should be regulated and controlled by the Human Resource Managers.

- *Government Imposed “Lockdown”*

Government made some rules and guidelines for the country which has to be followed by each and every one. No one could go outside unless until it was very necessary. Therefore, it was very difficult for the managers to communicate with the employees.

- *Adverse Impact on Productivity of Employees*

At the time of “Covid- 19” moral of the employees was down due to this; they were not able to balance their work and life which further leads to reduction in level of productivity.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative analysis is conducted in 2022-2023 and population of study is HR Managers from different industries like commerce, IT, banking, pharmaceuticals, packaging mining and coal etc. A questionnaire was prepared based on the objective of the paper about the effect of Pandemic on the organisation and challenges HR managers have faced. It contained multiple choice of questions based on change in HR functions and the corrective steps taken by the Hr managers to overcome the negative effect of pandemic.

At the stage of the analysis, the collected data through the expert interview were interpreted and analysed with the approach of qualitative content analysis.

A. *Data Analysis and Finding-*

At this stage to know the reason of changes and consequences, a questionnaire is formed with 20 questions. It was sent to the HR managers as google form and 111 responses were collected. A descriptive analysis is done through SPSS.

Table 1 Awareness of Technology

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Not Aware At All	2	1.8
	Less Aware	12	10.8
	Neutral	8	7.2
	Aware	60	54.1
	Highly Aware	29	26.1
	Total	111	100.0

Awareness of technology during pandemic has been checked as per data received out of 111, 29 HR managers are highly aware, 60 HR managers are aware, 8 HR managers are neutral, 12 are less aware and 2 are not aware at all and the mean is 3.92. Therefore, we can say that during the pandemic maximum HR managers were aware of the use of technology.

Table 2 and Figure 1 show that out of 111 HR managers only 39 have digital strategy or proper plan to fill the digital gap, 42 were working on their plan and 30 HR managers didn't have any proper plan to a fill digital gap during pandemic. Most of the HR (37.84% HR) were planning on how to fill the digital gap during pandemic.

Table 2 Strategy to Fill Digital Gap

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	30	27.0
	Was Working on it	42	37.8
	Yes	39	35.1
	Total	111	100.0

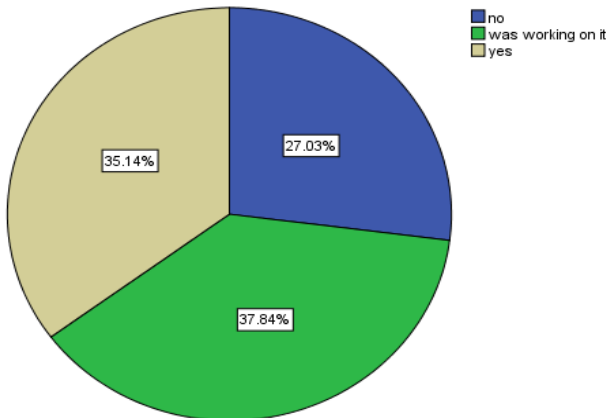


Fig 1 Strategy to Fill Digital Gap

Table 3 shows out of 111 HR managers, 61 HR managers have proper safeguard to minimise risk of adaption of technology, 26 were working on risk minimisation and 24 HR managers didn't have safeguard to minimize the risk that accompanies the adaption of technology. Thus, on the basis of the study we can say that most of the HR managers had safeguard to minimise risk.

Table 3 Safeguard to Minimise Risk

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	24	21.6
	Was Working On It	26	23.4
	Yes	61	55.0
	Total	111	100.0

Figure 2 represents percent of the employees who are tech savvy during pandemic. Out of 111, 18 hr managers said that 20% - 40% employees are tech savvy, 41 HR managers said that 40 - 60% employees are tech savvy, 37 HR managers said that 60% - 80% employees are tech savvy, only 15 HR said that 80% and above employees are tech savvy.

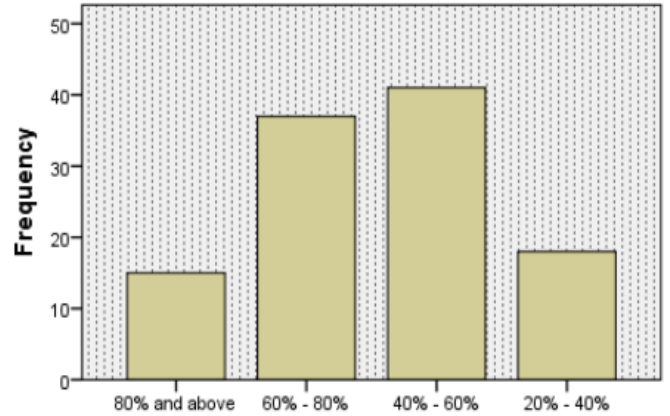


Fig 2 Percent of the Employees who were Tech-Savvy

Table 4 represents view of 111 HR managers about competitive advantage of technology. The mean is 4.23 thus we can state that maximum HR managers are agreed that technology facilities help them to win against the competition.

Table 4 Competitive Advantage of Technology

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	3.6	3.6
	Neutral	7	6.3	6.3
	Agree	60	54.1	54.1
	Strongly Agree	40	36.0	36.0
	Total	111	100.0	100.0

Table 5 shows percent of HR managers about the need of infrastructure support during pandemic. Mean is 1.83 therefore we can conclude that many HR managers has accepted that they were needed infrastructure support during pandemic. Figure 3 represents the types of infrastructure such as trained employees, dedicated digital platform, Wi-Fi connection they were needed during pandemic.

Table 5 The Need of Infrastructure Support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	No	19	17.1	17.1
	Yes	92	82.9	82.9
	Total	111	100.0	100.0

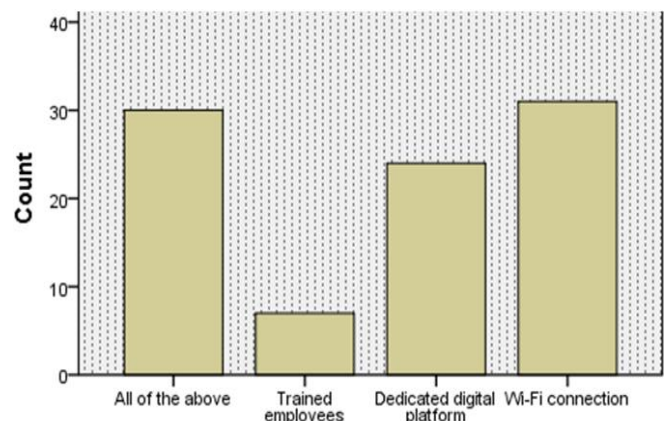


Fig 3 Types of Infrastructure Support

Table 6 represent how much % of HR managers were provided training to their employees. Mean is 1.94 so we can say that maximum HR has accepted that they were provided training to the employees regarding “Work from home”.

Table 6 Provided Training Work from Home

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No Need of Training	39	35.1
	Little Bit	40	36.0
	Yes	32	28.8
	Total	111	100.0

Figure 4 represents the type of technical support HR managers were needed during pandemic. As per sample collected maximum HR managers needed both technical and financial support during pandemic.

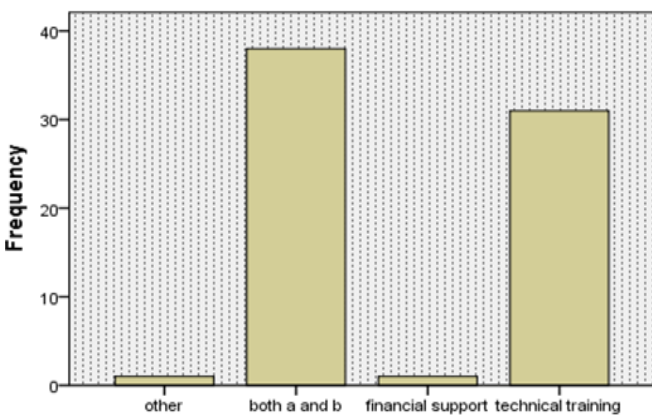


Fig 4 Types of Support Needed

Figure 5 shows which role of HR managers affected and changed due to pandemic. Roles are employee related health and wellbeing decisions, developing employees related contingency plans, employee related policy decision and involvement in company decision.

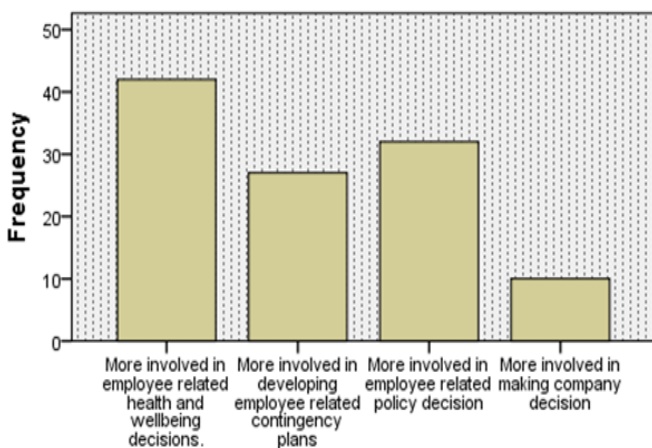


Fig 5 Change in HR Role

Figure 6 depicts the area of concern for HR managers during pandemic. There are 4 areas of concern, but most of the HR managers (45%) were concern about to warn employees regarding adverse health complications.

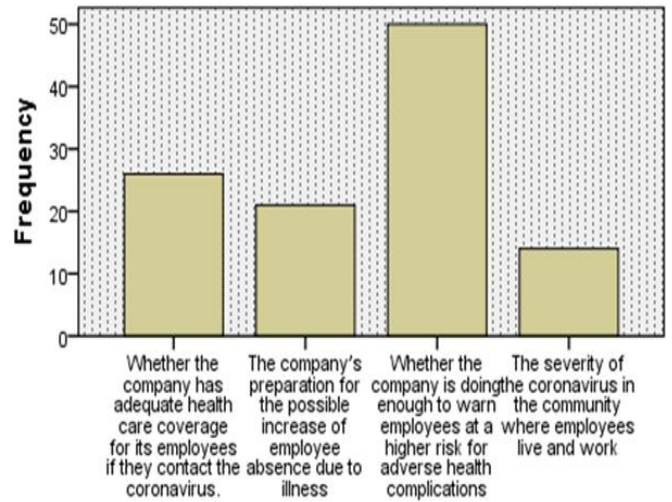


Fig 6 Business Concern During the

Figure 7 represents the association between the effects of pandemic on productivity and measures taken by the HR managers to improve the productivity of the employee at that time. Pandemic affected productivity negatively therefore it became very much important for the HR to take corrective measures to maintain the productivity of the employees. Maximum HR managers adopted the support of technology to reverse the negative effect pandemic on employee productivity.

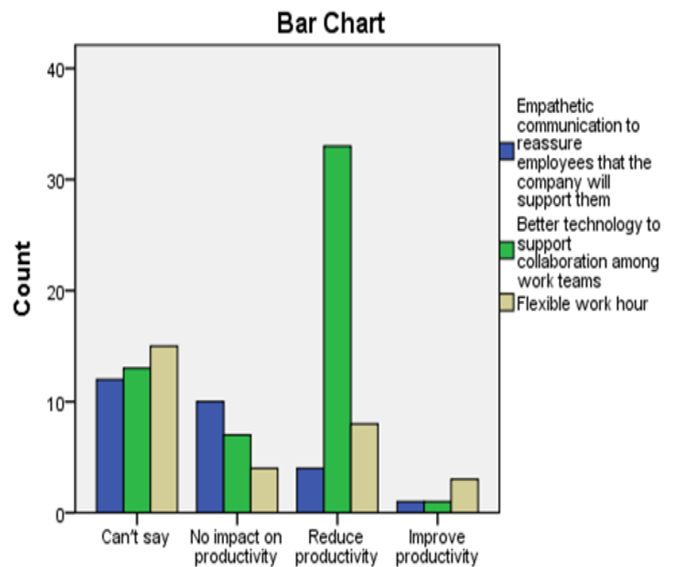


Fig 7 Association between Productivity and Measures taken to Improve Productivity

Figure 8 represents the areas of HR manager functions that are negatively affected by telecommunication during pandemic i.e., telecommunication is more with employees who have children, it also leads to chance of security breaches and connection failures and collaboration worst. According to Maximum Managers According to maximum HR managers (59.5%), the biggest issue is to build harmonious relation among employees while following remote working.

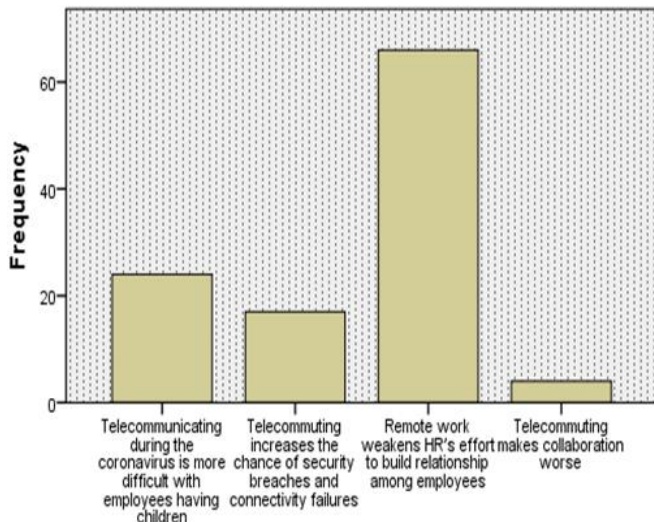


Fig 8 The Area Got Affected Negatively due to Remote Work

Table 7 depicts the challenges faced by HR managers. 63 HR managers have revealed that the biggest challenge was to maintain the strong corporate culture without the in-person work environment. During the pandemic everyone was working from home, therefore to maintain a proper corporate culture was quite difficult.

Table 7 Challenges Faced by HR Managers

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Reducing fear and anxiety among remote workers	14	12.6
	Addressing issues and building trust among employees	14	12.6
	Communicating with remote workers	20	18.0
	Maintaining the strong corporate culture without the in- person work environment	63	56.8
	Total	111	100.0

Figure 9 depicts the easiness to maintain the employee moral during the pandemic. Mean is  $2.99 < 3$  that means HR managers were agreed that during pandemic it was easy to maintain the employee's moral.

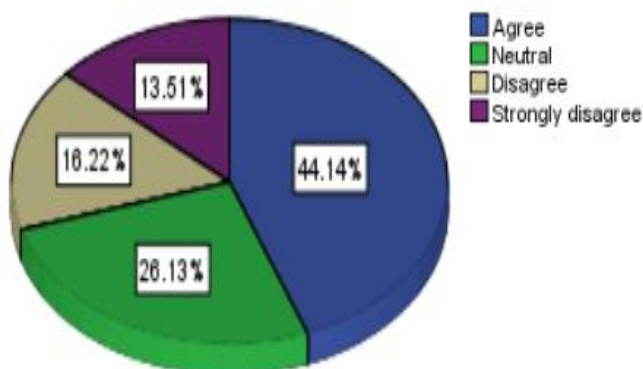


Fig 9 Easiness to Maintain the Employee's Moral

Figure no. 10 represents assurance given to the facility staff/office members to make them feel safe at work. 95 HR managers have accepted that they have provided all the facilities such as PPE kit and mask, Sanitisation kit, social distancing at work place.

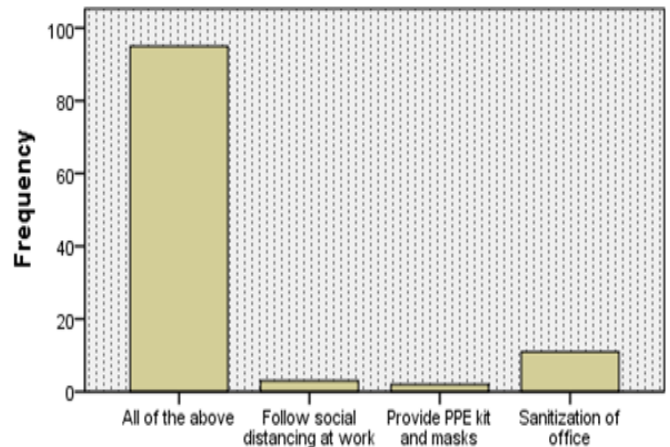


Fig 10 Assurance given to Staff Facility Members

Figure no. 11 represents job cuts done by HR managers due to pandemic. Maximum HR managers has separated 20% - 30% of the employees during the pandemic. Only 4 HR managers has separated 50% and above employees.

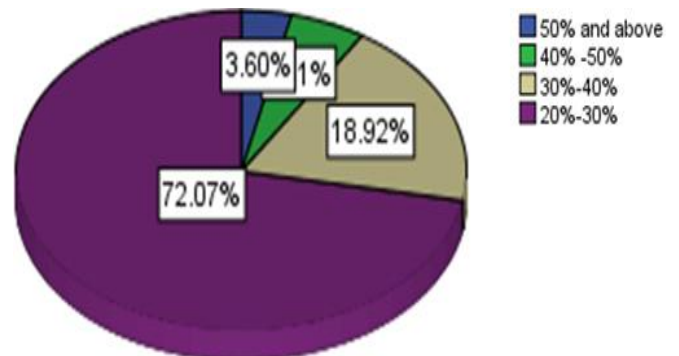


Fig 11 Job Cuts During Pandemic

Figure 12 represents the occurrence of moonlighting experienced by the HR managers during pandemic. 51 HR managers were worried about the rising cases of moonlighting because this was effective the productivity of the employees at work.

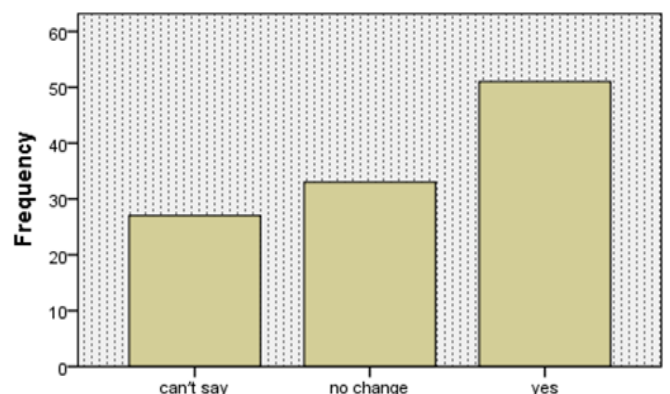


Fig 12 Cases of Moonlighting"

Figure no. 13 represents the measures, taken by the HR managers to overcome the problem of moonlighting. Most HR managers preferred to use proper rules and guidelines to prevent the employee from moonlighting.

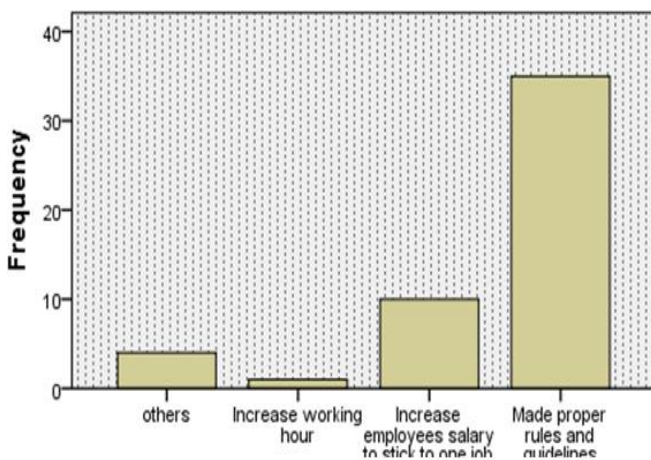


Fig 13 Corrective Measures for Moonlighting

#### IV. FINDING AND SUGGESTION

HRM process which get affected and gone through with maximum changes is to maintain organisational culture and safety & health of employees. Role of HR has been changed due to pandemic because the concept of digitalisation of work and work from home was totally new for most of the organisation. Human resource department was primarily responsible for re-establishing organisational culture as businesses struggle to adapt to the post-pandemic environment. The pandemic condition has not only introduced challenges but also opportunities for aspiring HR professionals to work as transformational leaders in diverse companies' HRM sectors. HR managers should support to adjust to the new scenario. Here are some ways that can help the HR managers in restructuring their HR role and to meet changing conditions,

- Strengthening organisational value
- To understand employee's need
- To support employees whenever they needed
- Counselling to stabilise employee's mental health
- Educating and training the work force
- Framing new guidelines as per pandemic
- Provide assistance to the employee to maintain "work life balance"

#### V. CONCLUSION

The pandemic and its intense effects on business have forced the organisation to put more emphasis on digital transformation of human capital as well as health and safety of them in order to continue the business. We emphasise the crucial role that HR is playing in achieving operational and strategic success in "Covid- 19". Before the pandemic, it had been considered unimaginable that anyone could manage remote workers while balancing work and family responsibilities. Many organisations had never even heard of the idea of managing staff without on-site supervision.

Businesses are remodelled for creating sustainability in business. This will drive a change to create a winning workplace of the future. The "COVID- 19" outbreak has a lasting impact on organisational working practises and culture, and it will probably continue to do so in the future. Recovery from a pandemic includes not only economic growth but also employees' psychological and physical rehabilitation.

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. Wiles, J (2020, November 18). Ten Questions for an HR Pandemic Plan <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/10-questions-for-an-hr-pandemic-plan>
- [2]. How has the Pandemic Changed the role of Human Resources from Eightfold AI <https://eightfold.ai/blog/pandemic-role-of-human-resources/>
- [3]. Gigauri, I. (2020). Effects of "Covid- 19" on Human Resource Management from the Perspective of Digitalization and Work-life-balance. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Economy*, (4 (31)).
- [4]. Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), Situation Report 1 as on 31 January 2020, published by World Health Organisation India <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/wrindia/india-situation-report-1.pdf>
- [5]. Jade, S. (2020) , Changing Role of HR Post-Pandemic from ETHR World <https://hr.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/workplace-4-0/changing-role-of-hr-postpandemic/77463603>
- [6]. Carnevale, J. B., & Hatak, I. (2020). Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of "COVID-19": Implications for human resource management. *Journal of business research*, 116, 183-187.
- [7]. Sheppard, B. (2020, May 18). A guide to thriving in the post- "COVID- 19" workplace, from World Economic Forum: [https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/workers-thrive-"](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/workers-thrive-)Covid- 19"-19-skills/
- [8]. Remote Collaboration, Facing the Challenges of "Covid- 19" from Deloitte [https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/de/Documents/human-capital/Remote-Collaboration-"](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/de/Documents/human-capital/Remote-Collaboration-)COVID- 19"-19.pdf
- [9]. Goncalves, S. P., Santos, J. V. D., Silva, I. S., Veloso, A., Brandão, C., & Moura, R. (2021). "COVID- 19" and people management: the view of human resource managers. *Administrative Sciences*, 11(3), 69.
- [10]. Lewis, N. (2020, April 22). HR managers Rethink their Role During the Coronavirus Pandemic from SHRM <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-news/pages/hr-managers-rethink-their-work-coronavirus-pandemic.aspx>
- [11]. Caligiuri, P., De Cieri, H., Minbaeva, D., Verbeke, A., & Zimmermann, A. (2020). International HRM insights for navigating the "COVID- 19" pandemic: Implications for future research and practice. *Journal of international business studies*, 51, 697-713.

- [12]. Chadee, D., Ren, S., & Tang, G. (2021). Is digital technology the magic bullet for performing work at home? Lessons learned for post “COVID- 19” recovery in hospitality management. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 92, 102718.
- [13]. Zhong, Y., Li, Y., Ding, J., & Liao, Y. (2021). Risk management: Exploring emerging Human Resource issues during the “COVID- 19” pandemic. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 14(5), 228.
- [14]. Akkermans, J., Richardson, J., & Kraimer, M. L. (2020). The “Covid- 19” crisis as a career shock: Implications for careers and vocational behavior. *Journal of vocational behavior*, 119, 103434.
- [15]. Collings, D. G., McMackin, J., Nyberg, A. J., & Wright, P. M. (2021). Strategic human resource management and “COVID- 19”: Emerging challenges and research opportunities. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(5), 1378.
- [16]. Shahi, K., & Neloy, H. (2020). Global transition of HR practices in “Covid- 19” pandemic situation: a systematic review through 5P's model of HRM. *Management and Human Resource Research Journal*, 9(6), 50-57.
- [17]. Sharma, N. K., & Kumar, N. (2022). Post-Pandemic Human Resource Management: Challenges and Opportunities. *Poonam Shodh Rachna*