Impact of COVID-19 on Human Resource Management: A Perspective on Digitalization and Work-Life Balance

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Abstract:-

The COVID-19 outbreak has compelled organizations across the global environment to shift towards digital business processes, throwing the organization into a paradigm shift. Many of these changes are driven by human resource management (HRM), leading organizations through today's challenges toward a future that includes remote work and flexibility. This paper will establish how, in the context of crises, the Human Resource Management department is central to accommodating the requirements posed by difficulties in managing workforces while at the same time maintaining operations and overseeing its employees' physical and emotional needs.As organizations embrace digital, remote and flexible work environments, developing new policies, flexible work arrangements, and technology and staff support structures becomes critical. This puts pressure on HRM to reconsider the conventional framework and devise an effective new approach that will fit the new working trends. This study identifies and discusses the significant areas of concern for HRM regarding the new normal resulting from the high adoption of remote work and the impact of COVID-19 on human resources. Responding to the insights from the interviews with the specialists working in the Human Resources department in Pakistan, it is possible to identify the need for emerging fresh regulation addressing the new trends regarding hybrid work organization and the ongoing environmental changes. Based on the learning, implementing these new dynamics will enable the HRM to navigate the organization

into a new efficiency era, increase organizational continuity during crises, and improve employee satisfaction in a post-COVID-19 environment..

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Digitalisation, Work-Life Balance, COVID-19.

Introduction:

Organizations are encountering heightened unpredictability as they address contemporary "grand challenges," which are significant difficulties that transcend national, economic, or societal boundaries (Eisenhardt, Graebner, &Soneshein, 2016). The latest alterations prompted by the global pandemic (COVID-19) have compelled enterprises to transition to digital operations. Human Resource Management is crucial in facilitating employees' utilization of virtual frameworks to access their work while aiding organizations in maintaining seamless corporate operations.

Workers in the digital age need to improve or learn new skills. This study evaluates how the recent disaster has affected communities and business continuity. This study aims to investigate the changes within Pakistani organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative research approach will examine how businesses handled the COVID-19 lockdown, digitalisation and worker welfare throughout the crisis, and how COVID-19 affected HRM procedures. Consequently, an expert interview methodology was employed ("Coronavirus (COVID-19)", 2020). The research questions were formulated with an open-minded approach to investigate the transition to digitalization, particularly its rapidity within Pakistani organizations and its impact on the daily lives of employees.

The current primary focus of COVID-19 presents a significant opportunity for business researchers to align their investigative efforts and generate actionable insights to assist organizations in addressing a critical contemporary issue ("Coronavirus (COVID-19)", 2020). This study paper is a scientific endeavor to identify research gaps in Human Resource Management, aiming to facilitate future empirical investigations by utilizing desk research methodology. Two of the four research gaps that have been discovered are factual, one is

theoretical, and the other is methodological. Subsequent investigations could be designed and carried out to rectify these identified shortcomings.

The research inquiries for this publication are as follows:

RQ1: In what ways did the COVID-19 issue impact Human Resource Management, generally and specifically within Pakistani corporations?

RQ2: How can remote work effectively respond to the COVID-19 crisis, and how can Human Resource Management facilitate organizations' digital transformation?

RQ3: How did human resource management address the tragedy in Pakistan, and how did it facilitate employee flexibility in response to contemporary realities?

This article intends to succinctly outline the challenges and opportunities that the global COVID-19 epidemic poses for human resource management, along with pertinent avenues for future research. The ramifications of COVID-19 will be extensive; nevertheless, we will concentrate on particular concerns related to employee coordination and well-being within the present work environment. (Kristof-Brown &Guay, 2011)

2. Literature Review

2.1 History of Human Resource Management:-

The foundation for Human Resource Management (HRM) was established in the latter part of the 19th century. However, the subject has developed drastically in the past hundred years because of changes in education, society, politics, and technological advancements. The history of HRM has centered on a continuous attempt to provide management solutions that also protect the employee. This relationship has often raised a lot of controversy, mainly regarding the fit between the organizational output objectives and the condition of the workforce. The present work identified that a range of activities oriented toward enhancing the cooperation of management and employees influenced the evolution of HRM practices over the decades. The college has also endeavored to promote unity in the working environment by focusing on productivity demands while ensuring employees' quality of worker welfare and job

contentedness. Whenever a change in the work environment or new technologies have been discovered, ways of relying on HRM are more effective.

2.2 Challenges and Implications of Human Resource Management Arising from COVID-19:-

The onset of COVID-19 adversely impacts all facets of global societies. Human Resource Management pertains to the processes of recruitment, management, and development of personnel within organizations. The epidemic has significantly affected it, resulting in substantial challenges for managers and HR professionals. Global collaboration across several sectors has mitigated specific potential effects of COVID-19 through vaccine innovation and workplace health and safety protocols. Despite the ongoing COVID-19 dilemma, pre-pandemic human resource management approaches have significantly enhanced the global capacity to endure a worldwide pandemic. (Mondy&Martocchio, 2016).

2.3 Contemporary Remote Employment:

Experts recognized the challenges of remote work during the COVID-19 lockdown. Engaged individuals focus on their jobs for around 7-8 hours; however, remote work introduces significant distractions, including childcare and household responsibilities, necessitating that employees fulfill their obligations during the evening. The transition to online work resulted in workload issues since numerous jobs of government sector personnel migrated online and necessitated remote engagement (Schuster et al., 2020). Employees may need to acquire new tasks with minimal direct supervision. These variables may lead to issues with expectations.

Furthermore, managers need help to enquire about existing work policies, communication practices, and the adaptation of meetings to the new paradigm of remote work. The swift shift of personnel to remote work epitomized the events of spring 2020. Millions of employees have effectively vacated the workplace to telecommute. The technological procedures were facilitated by video conferencing systems, such as Zoom, which link employees with colleagues, clients, and customers. McElgunn, 2020.

2.4 The function of Human Resource Management in Pakistan following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pakistan possesses high-quality people resources that are diligent and productive yet significantly less demanding than those in affluent nations. Pakistani enterprises have adopted a remote work style at an unprecedented rate and scale to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. Pakistani enterprises promptly revised their remote work policies to introduce varied work hours and flexibility hitherto unoffered to employees. From a Pakistani corporate standpoint, a mechanism exists for governmental financial assistance and long-term, low-interest loans. (GCCI, 2020).

Methodology:-

This study employs a qualitative approach with an inductive methodology to investigate the views and experiences of human resource management professionals during and during the COVID-19 epidemic. The research is guided by a phenomenological design, employing theoretical sampling for participant selection.

The qualitative method facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the pandemic's effects on Human Resource Management (HRM), elucidating the intricate viewpoints of industry specialists. Semi-structured interviews featuring open-ended questions facilitate participants' articulation of their perspectives, opinions, and insights, rendering this methodology particularly appropriate for the study's aims.

The interviews entailed face-to-face dialogues with specialists through online video platforms like Zoom or WhatsApp. They were conducted solely in English, guaranteeing uniformity in communication. Utilizing these methodologies, the research encompasses many experiences and perceptions, enhancing the overall understanding of the evolving function of HRM amid the worldwide pandemic. Conducting a comprehensive interview with an individual expert ranges from 15 to 20 minutes. The interview was scheduled in advance. The expert was requested to permit video recording during the Zoom or WhatsApp video call for further transcription. The semi-structured interview adhered to a comparable framework, facilitating data comparability

and maintaining the interviews within the confines of the subject matter. All inquiries were open-ended. After the interview, the last inquiry addresses supplementary comments or viewpoints deemed significant to the investigation. The interview guide has nine questions addressing six primary subjects.

Table no.1 Interview Protocol/Theme

Section	Topic
➤	General inquiries about the expert's specific field of experience and areas of expertise
➤	Discussion on the effects of COVID-19 on businesses and challenges in human resource management
➤	Examination of changes brought by the pandemic, such as work-life balance and digital transformation
➤	Insights on how companies are adapting to COVID-19 from an HR management perspective
➤	Professional advice and suggestions for HR Managers on the future direction of HRM
➤	Additional thoughts or viewpoints, if relevant

The inquiries in sections 3 and 4 are examined within the context of this manuscript. Experts enquire about opinions regarding the significant transformations in corporate structures and human resource management prompted by the epidemic, the organization's reaction to these unforeseen developments, and whether opportunities for Pakistani enterprises are being assessed.

Data Analysis Methods:

NVivo 10 has been employed for various qualitative data analysis techniques, including transcribing video-recorded interviews, thematic analysis, data coding, cluster analysis, and word frequency analysis. Cluster Analysis Based on Code Similarity denotes the frequency with which scholars have classified the node utilizing diverse references. Themes with analogous coding are close, while those with divergent coding are far apart. Ozkan (2017) asserted that NVivo is

exceptionally advantageous for data organization and analysis; nonetheless, the onus of data structuring, coding, and analysis ultimately lies with the researcher.

The NVivo Text Analysis features enable the identification of subjects and the examination of language usage inside the project. A text search query analyses themes or explores individuals' discussions around a particular issue. Diverse graphs, such as tree maps, have been utilized to present the results and their analysis. Word frequency analysis, text search, and metrics coding inquiries have been employed to examine the differing impacts of energy shortages on the everyday routines of persons in Pakistan..

Figure 1. Word tag cloud

Figure 1 illustrates the Word Tag Cloud, which displays several themes in differing sizes based on their frequency of occurrence. The Word Tag Cloud is beneficial for thematic analysis since it enables the recognition of supplementary themes in our research using a tag cloud diagram.

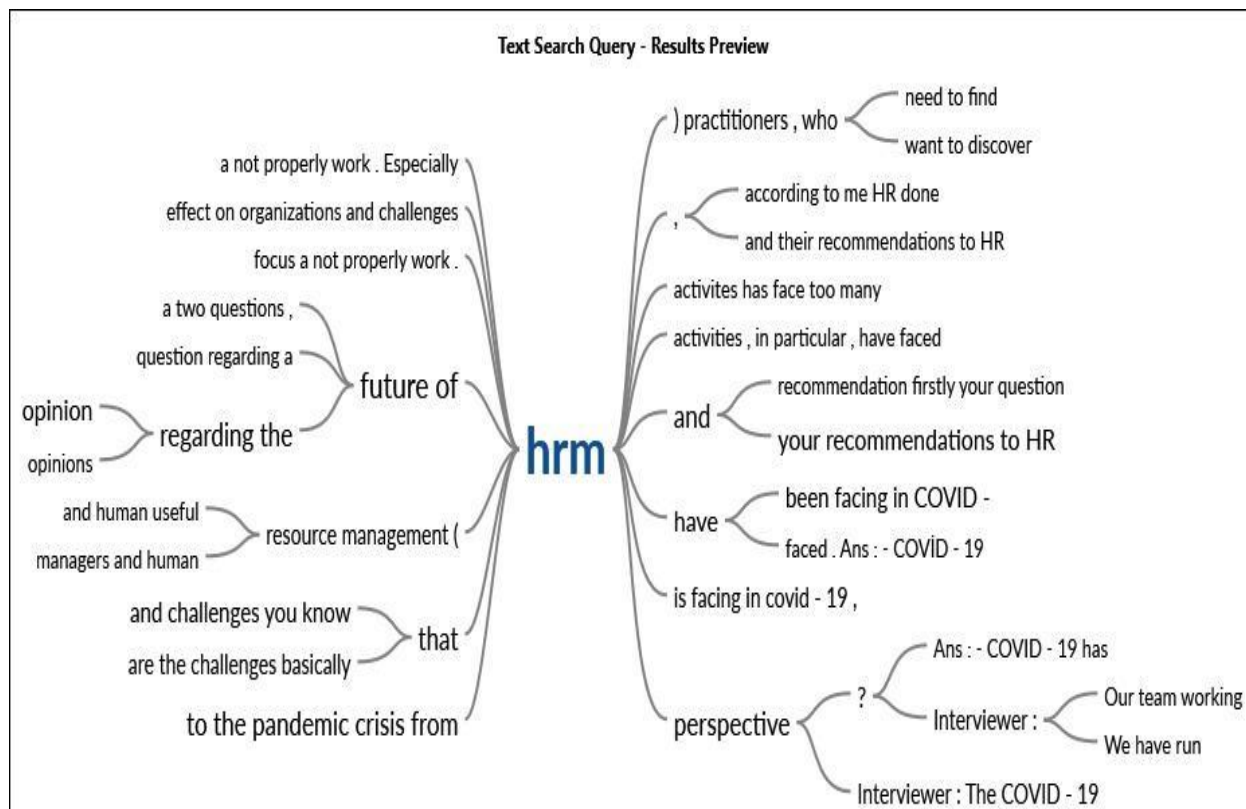Figure 1 illustrates many themes such as "Digital," "COVID-19," "Balance," "Pandemic," and "HRM".

Figure 2: Word tree map

Figure 2 presents the Word Tree Map, which illustrates the relationships of a central term with several conversational patterns. The principal term in this investigation is "load-shedding." The Word TreeMap is used to analyze novel concepts and their interconnections with other subjects.

Figure 3. Treemap

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON HR MANAGEMENT- Treemap

Figure 3 illustrates the Word Tree Map used to depict various ramifications of electricity shortages. Figure 5 demonstrates that the pandemic, environment, crisis, employees, work, resources, and health are the primary effects of COVID-19 on Human Resource Management, as these themes are cited more frequently than other repercussions of COVID-19 on HRM. The recruitment, functions, and duties have been acknowledged as having minimal effects of COVID-19 on Human Resource Management.
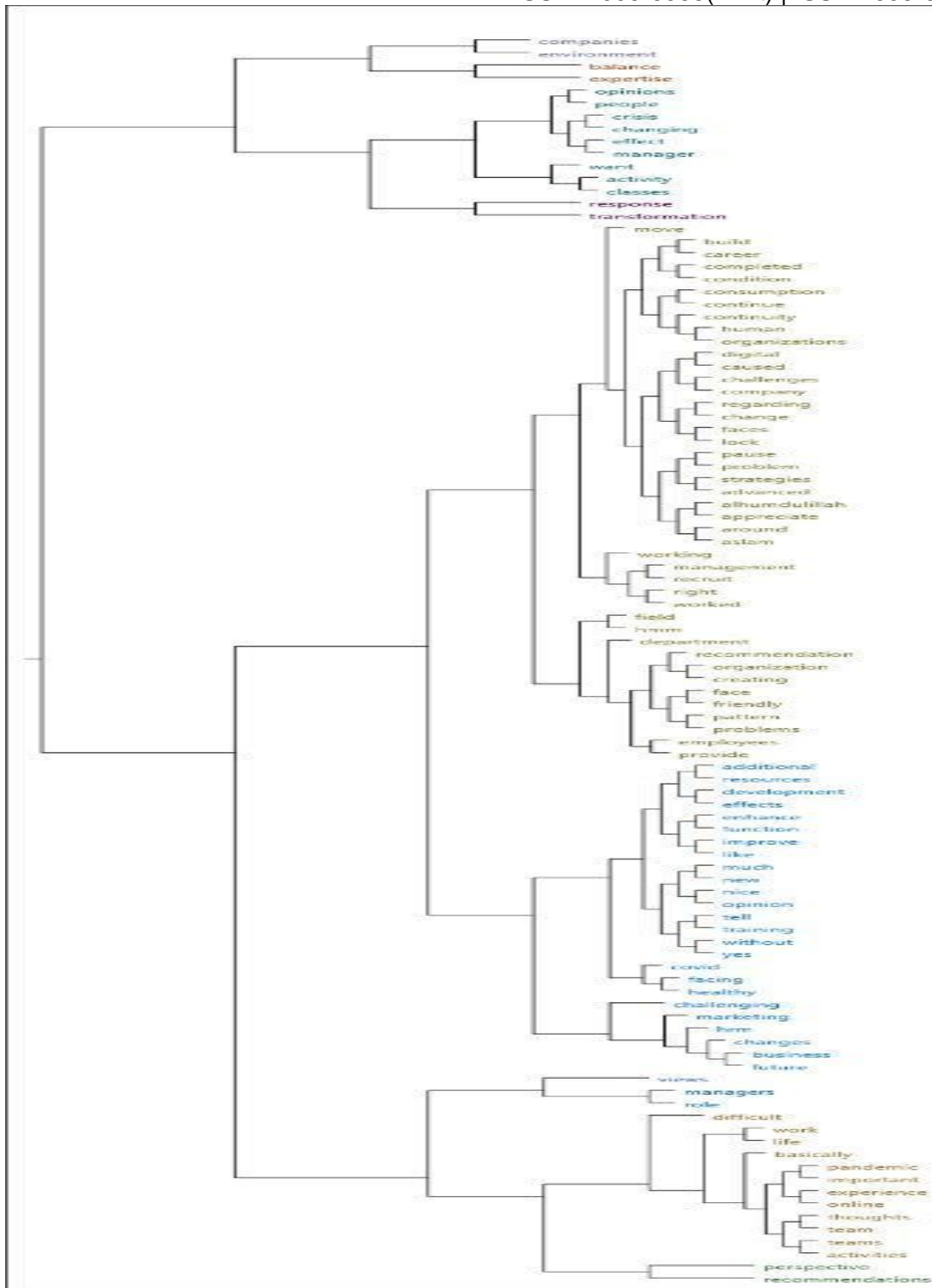
Figure 4. Cluster analysis

Conclusion:-

The recent COVID-19 crisis has become the focus of investigation for different fields and aspects of organizational study; this research investigates the effects of COVID-19 on human resource management (HRM), digital transformation, and work-life balance difficulties. In order to explore these issues even further, qualitative interviews were conducted with organizational representatives, specifically to gain knowledge of the responses of the organizations and the role of HRM during the crisis. The advice and recommendations are based on the success stories and background of the experts. Therefore, the assessment involved comparisons followed by interpretation, discussions and conclusion making based on the results.The study pointed to recognizable trends in the effects of the crisis, primarily related to HRM's treatment of employees. Some witnesses pointed out that work demands continued into what would generally be considered personal time. It was established among Pakistani employees that despite having a regular full-time job, they had to work at night, so they had no time to relax. In turn, it was suggested that online meetings be excluded on specific days as a solution.

Applying the change by recognizing the new work landscape, such as introducing the lockdown that enhanced remote working, became significant. There was agreement that communication could achieve a speedy change depending on the situation that prevailed. The study also recommended that HR managers give employees more freedom since they can accomplish their tasks independently. Furthermore, there must be a focus on health and safety conditions for successfully establishing the organizational culture and a long-term brand, with great attention to working time management in a new digital environment.

Future Research:

Information from this quantitative survey will be obtained from an expert interview questionnaire to be developed for a quantitative survey of HR managers. The survey design will allow identifying all the positive and negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses, staff, teams, and the HRM system within Pakistan. Further, collecting statistical evidence on how

digitalization and working remotely influenced the employees' behavior, their families, and the rest of society would be helpful on its own.

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