



Curtin University

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND COVID-19: WHAT DO PRACTITIONERS HAVE TO SAY?

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact, not only on work and organizations, but on societies and economies around the globe. It has stimulated a great deal of thought and study relating to the impact on work, working and organizational life. In this report, we outline findings from 136 survey responses of HR leaders, managers, professionals and others with organizational responsibility for people management.

In addition, we conducted 39 interviews. The information acquired from these interviews is currently being analyzed.

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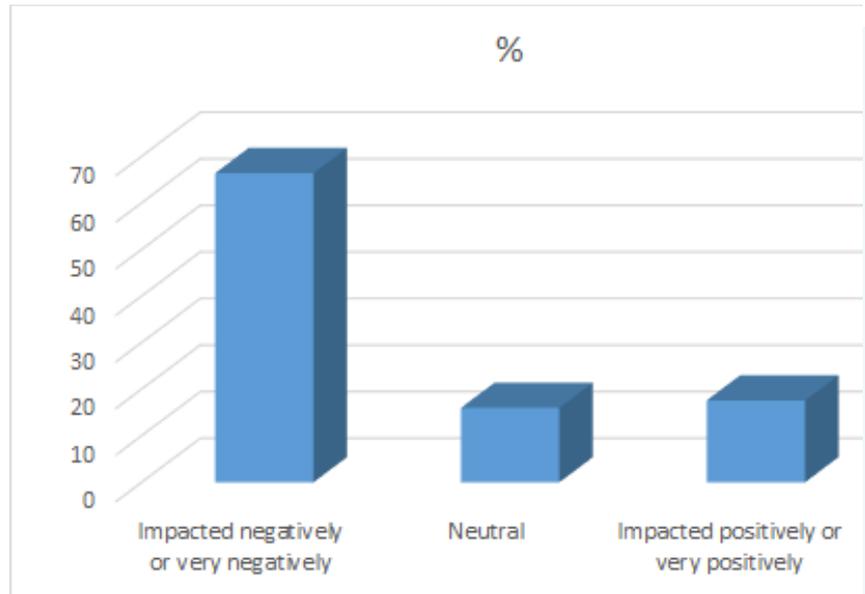
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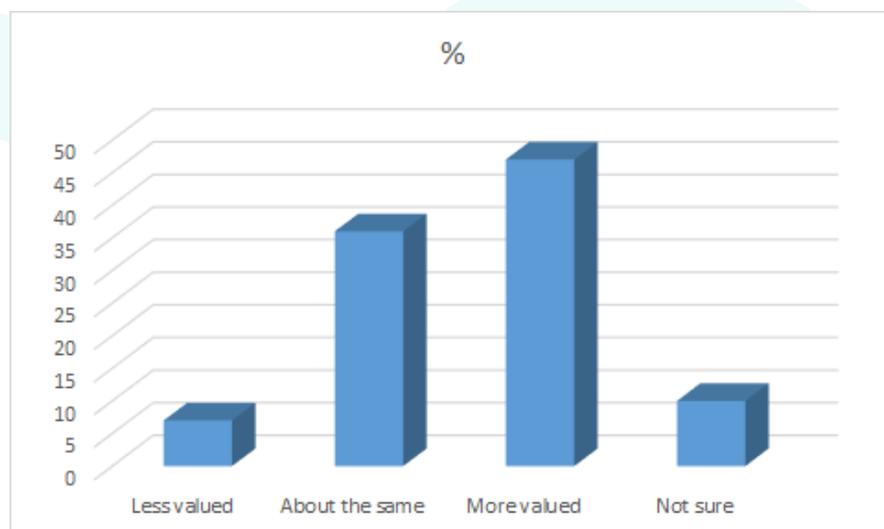
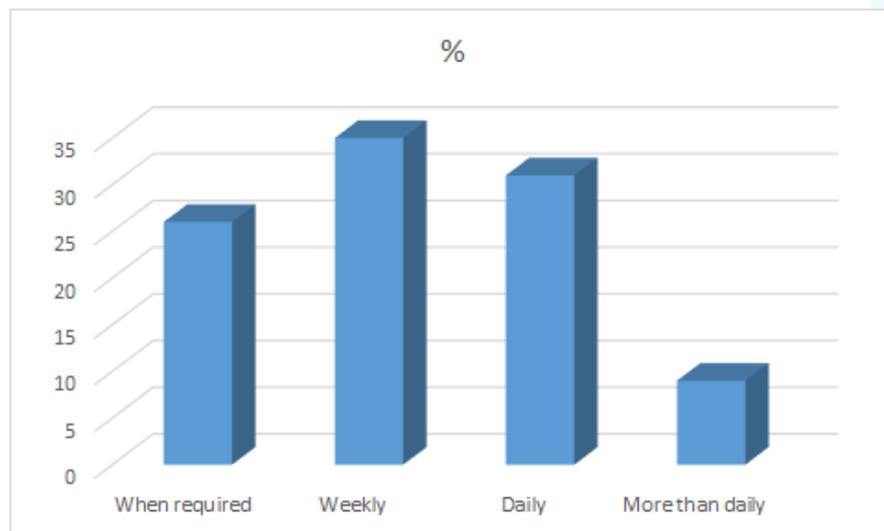
Impact on business

Over 66% of respondents indicated that their business/organization had been negatively or very negatively impacted by COVID-19. Those which had been impacted positively or very positively were in very specific sectors, e.g., finance, banking, health.



Frequency of meetings between HR and Senior Leadership

COVID-19 had a major impact on work and working arrangements. Our respondents reported two important general outcomes for HR as a consequence of the impact on work. First, HR were perceived as critical to organizational responses to the pandemic and, second, they were now considered more important by senior leadership and were in regular contact with them regarding the organizational response to the pandemic. 47% of respondents indicated that as a consequence of COVID-19 and the importance of the response around work and working, they perceived they were now more valued by the leadership team.



Changes to work and working practices

In response to the impact of the pandemic, organizations have taken a number of steps to maintain business continuity. The most obvious of which has been *remote working*. Other important responses in the early stages of COVID-19 were *hiring freezes, reducing contingent workforces and unpaid leave*. In certain sectors, however, as the impact of the pandemic has persisted and worsened, *standowns, non-renewal of fixed contracts and redundancies* became more prominent. *Government subsidies* have also been fully utilized by businesses as they struggle to stay solvent.

45% of our respondents reported that they were using remote working for the first time. In such situations, the need for a speedy response under circumstances where organizations had no experience of remote working, implies a critical role for HR. 55% of our respondents indicated that their organization had to enhance the use of remote working beyond those employees who had traditionally been enabled to do it.

Work and remote working

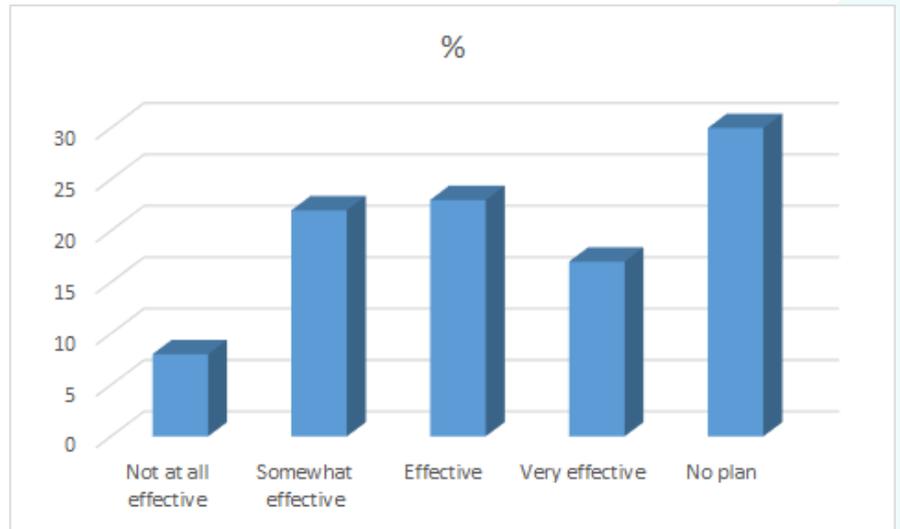
In Australia generally and, Western Australia specifically, COVID-19 has been generally managed effectively. While in the early stages of the pandemic remote working became the norm, as restrictions have eased people have returned to offices. There is little doubt, however, that the return to the office is now balanced against more remote working. Our data shows that for many organizations most work could be undertaken remotely. Aided by technology, that organizations speedily introduced if they were not 'tech ready', all work that did not require people to have 'face time' was performed remotely.

It is clear from our data that HR teams had to facilitate and organize a huge variety of remote working challenges, while they were, themselves, also working remotely. It is also clear from our data that many HR departments and people were having to do this with no previous experience of organizational remote working. The need for speed and agility in HR response for business continuity was essential and, in most instances, this challenge was met.

More specifically, the challenges HR faced included: reviews of technology capability, review of workloads, management of performance and productivity, mechanisms of communication, health and well-being.

HR continuity plan

We asked respondents, whose organizations had a HR continuity plan, whether it had been effective. 40% indicated that the plan was effective or very effective. Only 8% indicated that the HR continuity plan was not at all effective but 30% of respondents indicated that they had no plan for HR continuity under crisis or any other situations.



Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems

We asked our participants to identify the 5 most important problems they had to deal with when the pandemic struck. The qualitative detail is enhanced through the interviews, which will be reported in future articles. A key overarching issue was the need for **speed and agility** in responding to the pandemic.

Speed though, was tempered by systemic, structural, cultural and individual reactions to the impact of the pandemic. While responses needed to be fast, they needed to be measured and proportionate. Not an easy balance to achieve. In the list below we highlight the areas where HR professionals had to focus their attention in supporting business continuity as the pandemic progressed, across all sectors of the economy.

1. A broad range of **staff issues and practices**.
2. Mental health and well-being.
3. Organizing remote working.
4. Communication.
5. Performance management.
6. Technology capability.
7. Staff uncertainty.
8. Business continuity
9. Leadership capability.
10. Staff engagement.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems:

1. Staff issues and practices

As might be expected, participants identified a broad range of issues that needed to be addressed quickly as a consequence of the pandemic. A number of them are grouped together here in point 1. Our participants highlighted how quickly levels of *motivation and morale* decreased when the extent of the COVID-19 problem became understood. They also noted the problem of enforcing *social distancing* among staff. They had to review a wide-range of existing *HR and organizational policies*, for example, leave and pay, which required speedy change and development as a consequence of the pandemic. *Recruitment*, which in most organizations continued as the pandemic took hold, had to be moved on-line. *Redundancies and terminations* were decisions that were made speedily in the context of the assessment of changing *workloads* and whether certain jobs and positions were still needed. This was combined with the urgency to ensure that key employees were *retained and or redeployed*. Overall, HR professionals had to consider the full range of HR systems, policies, practices, people and programs to ensure that changes were made in line with the need for business continuity. They also needed to make changes in a context of existing and changing law and government policy.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems:

2. Mental health and well-being

Mental health and overall employee well-being has been an important concern for organizations in recent years. Increased pressure of work and stress, insecurity, uncertainty and balancing elements of a whole life have led to concerns about the mental health and well-being of employees. COVID-19 has exacerbated these issues and created others. Our respondents highlighted mental health and well-being as a serious problem deriving from the pandemic. Job insecurity and uncertainty, the fear of catching the virus, social isolation and lack of physical exercise all contributed to the increases in tension and stress. HR professionals were central to efforts to deal with these problems as the pandemic progressed. There has been an enhancement of employee support through EAP programs and attempts to maintain social connections through technology. Government supported programs have assisted in reducing uncertainty and insecurity for some employees but, for very many others, the pandemic has caused psychological, relationship and financial hardship. It is important to discover more fully the experience of HR professionals in dealing with health and well-being issues in the pandemic in order to highlight the principles as to how best to deal with them in the future.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems:

3. Organizing remote working

COVID-19 was an unexpected shock. In the specific context of work and working, it initiated an enormous exodus from offices to remote working, usually in the home. Remote working was critical for business continuity and, as such, was the focus of HR attention at the very beginning of the pandemic. Our participants indicated this was a far from easy task. Decisions needed to be made about who *should and could work remotely*; *whether appropriate technology was in place*; *OHS in the remote environment*; *company confidentiality*. In addition and, as we outline in other sections below, various aspects of the HR system, policies and practices needed to be revised and reviewed, sometimes in discussion with trade unions. These included: *the management of workloads*; *the supervision of staff*; *meeting arrangements*; *the relevance of workplace policies*; *tech capability of staff*; *managing performance and productivity*. As previously noted, decisions about such issues had to be made quickly and were often made with a high degree of risk and uncertainty. This was particularly the case for organizations with no or very little experience of remote working and, who had no HR continuity plans.

The move to remote working and home working more specifically creates the issue of the integration of *work life and domestic life spaces*. This issue has been well-researched and raises the issue as to how the home space can be set up to support a suitable work space as well as a domestic one. Performance and productivity in remote working will require that the spatial context is appropriately managed. This may be something in which HR has been reticent to become involved, yet it will be an ongoing issue. Moreover, for those with family obligations that need to be managed (when schools are closed and more generally) and those who live alone (and in isolation), there are many additional concerns.

While our survey did not capture the deep stress and anxiety associated with these efforts, as well as the emotional labour and effort involved, in our follow up reports and papers we consider our qualitative data on these issues.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems: 4. Communication

Any organizational change requires effective and consistent communication and information exchange. In the circumstances of a global pandemic, where insecurity and uncertainty dominate, effective and consistent communication and information exchange becomes even more critical. Our participants identified miscommunication, inconsistency in communication and changing information as important issues that impacted organizational responses to COVID-19. Because information was arriving from many sources, both external and internal to organizations, it was often difficult to measure for its accuracy or to be consistent in its dissemination. HR professionals also understood that disjointed and inconsistent information, together with the fact that staff were being bombarded with information from a large number of sources, made it difficult for them to decipher and check the veracity of information they were communicating to staff. This only led to the enhancement of uncertainty and insecurity.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems: 5. Performance management

We have noted above that many aspects of the HR system were 'shocked' by the pandemic. Performance and performance management was one aspect of the HR system, however, that was most problematic in the minds of HR professionals than most others. Our participants indicated that the move to remote working highlighted considerable issues with the management of performance. Not only were there **trust** issues, wherein some line managers had difficulty trusting employees in maintaining performance, but systems of managing by objectives and goals needed to develop much greater clarity. Moreover, disciplinary issues relating to performance still had to be managed with line managers. In addition, there was very little understanding of how people actually did perform in remote working situations. Indeed, it is entirely possible that the autonomy and discretion offered to certain people through remote working actually enhances performance. This is a topic that requires further investigation.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems: 6. Technology

While the previous sections of the report have highlighted a number of the issues and problems HR professionals had to confront within the pandemic, they are all connected as the logics of necessary change. Technology is another important factor for our participants. In order for remote working to be successful appropriate technology was critical. For almost 50% of the organizations represented by our participants, remote working was completely new. Under these conditions the introduction of suitable technology was a new and difficult challenge. Access to the necessary technology and internet bandwidth became crucial. In addition, technology in itself was only one aspect of effective remote working. As we have noted, there are spatial and social aspects of working remotely that are likely to be closely connected to performance.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems: 7. Staff uncertainty

In all sorts of ways COVID-19 has created uncertainty and insecurity. Obviously, everyone became concerned with their health. From an organizational perspective, everyone became concerned with their job. HR professionals can have an input into decisions made about jobs, but this varies depending on their relative power to influence the senior leadership team, as well as their understanding of the business context. Our participants were, in large part, tactical and not strategic. They managed the uncertainty rather than reducing it. Faced with uncertainty and insecurity it is likely that people want honest communication of a situation. Our participants indicated that they were often faced with this dilemma: the importance of communication, but the need always to be careful about what information was communicated.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems: 8. Business continuity

All of the issues identified in the above sections indicate how important HR was to business continuity. In addition, participants were also very specific about the relationship between business continuity and the decisions being made about various elements of work, working practices and HR systems, practices and policies. HR professionals knew that it was critical for work to continue while changes were being made. In this sense, they were aware of the broader business context and operations and, of maintaining close connections with external stakeholders and customers.

This is important because changes to work, working practices and working hours, as well as changes to HR practices and policies all have the potential to impact business operations significantly. Understanding the relationship between changes in people management and business operations, requires connectedness of thinking and implementation. Specifically an urgent and agile mindset to respond to a crisis situation.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems: 9. Leadership capability

Our participants also indicated some concerns about the capability of leaders in their organization to deal with the implications of COVID-19. The lack of capability related especially to the range of issues related to changed working practices, HR policies and, employment law. This led, in many cases, to the increased importance of HR professionals in ensuring that senior leaders became aware of the implications of COVID-19. In addition, a large part of the poor communication related to senior leadership not fully appreciating the importance of messaging and accurate information.

With respect to remote working there was some leader-manager resistance and, a lack of understanding as to how such changes would have enormous implications for HR systems, policies and practices. Some leaders/managers were 'lost' at the thought of having no people to manage physically. It is often noted that HR executives, managers and professionals do not understand the business within which they operate. This might be true.

However, from our data it is also clear that many of the senior leadership team, in many sectors, did not understand the critical role of HR issues in business continuity.

Key COVID-19 related HR issues and problems: 10. Staff engagement

The HR issues and problems identified by participants and reported here are clearly interconnected. Number 10 of the issues and problems identified was staff engagement. The move to remote working, feelings of uncertainty and insecurity, high levels of anxiety and stress, social isolation, all contributed to disengagement. This disengagement was likely to be not only physical (spatial), but also psychological. Given that the employee experience underpins employee engagement, resetting the employee experience will be a key HR issue in the post-pandemic world.

Helpful and unhelpful behaviours in the response to COVID-19

We asked participants to identify three helpful and three unhelpful behaviours of staff in the response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We aggregated responses around 5/6 key themes for helpful and unhelpful behaviours. A fuller discussion of the process of aggregation will be contained in future academic papers, along with more detailed consideration of examples of the behaviours. In aggregation the top 5 most helpful behaviours were:

- Cooperative/Collaborative
- Supportive of each other
- Speed and agility
- Pragmatism
- Willingness

The top 6 most unhelpful behaviours:

- Lack of cooperation and engagement
- Lack of productivity/effort
- Stress/anxiety/panic
- Spreading rumours
- Poor leadership
- Communication gaps and issues

Helpful behaviour 1: Cooperative/collaborative

In response to the pandemic, our participants identified enhanced cooperation and collaboration as a major positive in employee behaviours (although a lack of cooperation was also a major unhelpful behaviour). In particular, it was highlighted that there was heightened cooperation in the *move to remote working and to learn new tech skills*. It was also highlighted that in many instances collaboration was enhanced by the need to *connect virtually*.

Helpful behaviour 2: Support

Participants highlighted how employees were mutually supportive as the COVID-19 situation developed. This was particularly the case with respect to work that needed to be done and also in relation to health concerns, both mental and physical. To some extent this was peer to peer support with HR assistance in some cases. It was noted, however, that managerial support within the business was often lacking.

Helpful behaviour 3: Speed and agility

A critical factor required of many organizations in response to COVID-19 was speed, coupled with agility in implementing change. Indeed, for all organizations, failure to react speedily and with agility would seriously impact their capability for business continuity. Speed and agility were required for the move to remote working, use of technology, maintaining customer connection and service. Indeed, our participants noted that in the full range of activities required for business continuity in most organizations, changes were generally made with speed and agility. The role of HR in most of these changes was crucial and enhanced the position and positive perception of HR in many organizations. There was a general understanding among most employees that there was little alternative to the fast and agile response to the pandemic.

Helpful behaviour 4: Pragmatism

Connected to point 3 above, participants identified an overall sense of pragmatism among employees as an important and helpful behaviour in responding to COVID-19. They noted that employees just *got on with it, showed a willingness to use leave, were available, engaged with the change and, put in the hard work*. While, as we will see below, this was not the view of all participants, in the main employees understood that without being pragmatic the future of their organizations and their jobs were in the balance.

Helpful behaviour 5: Willingness

Willingness accompanies pragmatism. Participants highlighted how the overall willingness of staff to make changes and move with speed and collaboration helped their organization with business continuity. This willingness pervaded most aspects of the work that employees performed, in particular, the move to remote working, learning tech skills and engaging with the virtual situation.

Unhelpful behaviour 1: Lack of cooperation and engagement

While cooperation and collaboration were identified as helpful behaviours, it was clear that participants had also to deal with a lack of cooperation and engagement. Very specifically, there were problems with staff adhering to guidelines on social distancing. Organizations also met with a lack of cooperation with respect to changes in working patterns and practices. Participants also reported concerns with negativity and policy exploitation. The latter was often an issue when organizations needed to make policy changes to facilitate remote working and policies related to leave and other entitlements.

Unhelpful behaviour 2: Productivity and performance

The issue of productivity and performance was a pervasive topic as the impact of COVID-19 developed. Organizations had no experience of the kind of impact a global pandemic would have on productivity. Participants certainly identified more supportive, pragmatic and willing behaviours but, this is not an indication that productivity increased. Overall, participants identified lower productivity and effort among staff, at least initially, as might be expected. There could be many reasons for this, not least of which is the anxiety and stress caused by the pandemic itself. Additionally, the reorganization of work, on a grand scale, was not something that would likely maintain pre-COVID levels of performance and productivity. Continuity of business is one thing, maintaining levels of productivity is another.

Unhelpful behaviour 3: Stress, anxiety, panic

Stress, anxiety and panic are feelings, not behaviours. However, these feelings will lead to behaviours that are likely to be challenging to manage. COVID-19 has led to much stress, anxiety and panic. Our participants highlighted how behaviours related to stress, anxiety and panic were unhelpful in negotiating through the early impact of the pandemic. They noted that to maintain levels of performance and productivity, through enormous change and high levels of anxiety, was very difficult.

Unhelpful behaviour 4: Rumours

Where there is an information vacuum, particularly if the information that is available is contradictory and readily available, people are likely to fill it with their own ideas. Given the perceived danger of COVID-19 and its increasingly significant impact on work and life, it is likely that rumours will develop and circulate. The spreading of rumours, and misinformation or, unfiltered incomplete information, was identified by our participants as an important and unhelpful behaviour. Rumours concerning how COVID-19 was spread were specifically problematic in relation to the work of essential face to face employees and, in relation to productivity and performance.

Unhelpful behaviour 5: Poor leadership

Our participants, most of whom were in senior positions or, were in contact with senior teams on a frequent basis, were in a good position to view how the response to COVID-19 was managed and led. Many of the participants noted that leaders were unsure of how to lead through the pandemic, were sometimes resistant to remote working, adopted an authoritarian style and, communicated too infrequently and often without clear focus or direction. There are clear lessons here for organizations in leading through crisis. In this and other topics important in our findings, more detail will be explained in forthcoming papers.

As we have noted above, leadership was not identified as a helpful 'behaviour' by our HR participants. This is not to suggest that there were not good examples of such leadership, however, it was clear that leaders placed a great deal of reliance on their HR execs, managers and professionals to negotiate business continuity issues effectively.

Unhelpful behaviour 6: Communication gaps and issues

Communication is critical in any change process. The nature of COVID-19 meant that communication was fluid and dynamic, there were many sources and, it was very difficult to distinguish between them. Organizations were communicating to staff through a fog of uncertainty. When there is a void, it will be filled. Staff communicated to each other what they gathered from the internet and behaved accordingly. When gaps and issues exist in what is communicated and, when it cannot be verified (or controlled), there will be varied behavioural responses which our participants noted, which lead to problematic organizational consequences.

HR in the post COVID-19 world

We asked participants to envision HRM in the post COVID-19 world. Obviously, their perspective would be contextual, based on how their particular organization and sector had experienced COVID. We report here some detail, although the interview data which will be reported in future publications, will offer a more granular view of what this might mean in terms of thinking about HR in the future. Our participants took both a short and long-term perspective on how HRM would develop beyond the pandemic. These perspectives point to some post - COVID-19 continuity in HRM practice and policy, but also point to the need for re-imagining and re-inventing HRM in some key areas.

HR in the post COVID-19 world: 1. Remote working

The move to remote working has been, and is, a key feature of change resulting from COVID-19. Our participants envisaged that this would continue after the pandemic. Not all work would be remote, but much more than before COVID. There were a number of reasons driving this view. First, organizational leadership had been convinced that productivity could be maintained and enhanced. Second, costs overall to organizations could be reduced. Third, it created the opportunity for other efficiencies in HR and business practices, and innovative approaches to workforce shaping. Fourth, it enabled more objective and outcomes driven approaches to performance management. While remote working was important in and of itself, it was stimulating the development of new and innovative ways of thinking about HRM in the future, as we outline in the sections below.

- Remote and other flexible ways of working should be a key HRM agenda. It has the potential to highlight productivity and enhance the balance between work and life.
- Flexible working arrangements, as a strategic option, present an opportunity to reimagine HR and business policies and operations.
- Remote working promotes an opportunity to reset an understanding of activities and, differentiate between value-adding and value-creating activities and those that do not.

HR in the post COVID-19 world: 2. Greater use of technology

For effective remote working, state of the art technology is important. Our participants indicated that COVID-19 would lead to greater investment in technology in workplaces which would require training and development in the use of technology. It was also noted that the increase in virtual meetings and, the increase in virtual teams would require HR to be involved in relevant types of training and development in the future to ensure that employees and leaders had the skills to operate in this way.

Participants also noted that there would be a need for HR to become much more aware of the technology that would enable more of the HR service to be delivered this way - AI, machine learning as well as on-line recruitment and onboarding. Much of this is driven by efficiencies in staffing and enhancing the employee experience. There was also, however, a view that it could enhance the quality of decisions with respect to identifying future leaders, talent mobility and leadership development.

- HR needs to strategize the adoption of HR Tech. It needs to review the efficiencies and value that might be added and created through the use of HR Tech in an organization's specific context.
- HR Tech is an enabler. It must be driven by organization needs, not those of the service provider.
- At the level of remote and flexible working, technology needs to be in place to facilitate productive work.
- HR Tech will be increasingly used in recruitment, onboarding and to enhance the overall employee experience.
- HR Tech and AI will be use to personalize leader and manager development and to support decisions about leader selection and staff mobility.
- HR and workforce analytics will become more widely used and understood in value-creation.

HR in the post COVID-19 world: 3. Change in work design and practice

Participants noted that during and beyond COVID-19 a critical HR challenge will be the redesign of work and work practices. This will obviously be partly driven by increased remote working and use of technology, but in the views of our participants it will be much more than simply moving to remote working. They identified that there are, overall, three key issues that will be important in the post-COVID-19 environment related to work. First, changes to work design and practice. Second, changes to workforce skills and the shape of the workforce (workforce shaping). Third, changes to HR policies, practices and systems.

Specifically related to the design of work and working practices, participants highlighted that beyond COVID-19 work would be undertaken with *more flexibility* and, would be designed *more efficiently and with more fluidity*. They also considered that there would be a greater awareness of *work design* within organizations at senior levels. In addition, they suggested that this would have implications for the *psychological contract* and overall *organizational culture*. Our participants, in general, suggested that these aspects of the future of work would become a more important part of the human resource management role post COVID-19. The details of these perspectives will be explored in future publications, but the overall view of participants in this study is that critical features of work and working practice would be subject to considerable change in the future.

- Audit the design behind the way work is currently done.
- Understand how work has changed as a result of COVID-19.
- Think more about what work outcomes are required from staff and teams.
- Develop and co-create greater flexibility in working practices
- Do a culture audit
- Evaluate continually the psychological contract, staff expectations and the employee experience.

HR in the post COVID-19 world:

4. Change in workforce skills and workforce shaping

The perspective that work design and working practices will need to be re-thought for the post COVID-19 environment, implies that there will be a need for new skills and new ways of thinking about how the workforce in organizations is shaped. Our participants highlighted the need for a better understanding of *workforce shaping* and that HRM would be crucial in this activity. More specifically, this requires not only workforce planning, where the future is based on what has occurred in the past, but an anticipation and vision of what will likely happen in the 'new' future. This will involve a better understanding of the shape of the labour market and, the changing nature, forms and types of employment that exist in the wider environment.

HR executives, managers and professionals will need also to think more about the *workforce skills* required in a new, more fluid and flexible work environment. This will have implications for the casualization of work, future proofing skills, building workforce agility and innovation and, developing a workforce that has dynamism and fluidity at its core. Skills, such as collaboration, communication and innovation would need to be redefined in the context of redesigning work and working practices.

- Audit workforce skills and strengths often.
- Connect skills and required outcomes from work and work design.
- Assess the shape of the organizational workforce by types of employment, hours of work, status as well as diversity characteristics, in relation to skills.
- Embed an innovation mindset.
- Build agile thinking and operating attitudes and structures.

HR in the post COVID-19 world: 5. Re-imagining and re-thinking HR systems, processes and policies

The third major post-pandemic issue identified by participants in this study related to the future of HRM in a post COVID-19 environment. The significant changes that participants predicted would occur in work design, work practices, work skills and, workforce shaping, would require new thinking about HR systems, practices and policies.

An important aspect of this will be the need for a more agile and innovative HR. Some participants reflected on the need to 're-imagine' HRM and to 'challenge the status quo'; for HRM to become more agile, more efficient and act with greater speed.

At the strategic level, the importance of having a *business continuity plan* for the people side of organizations was identified as now critical. In order for this to happen, it would be necessary for HR executives, together with other members of senior leadership teams, to envisage future scenarios which might require rapid change in work and people management practices and processes. It was also considered the case that HR would need to integrate its practices much more to focus more broadly on *organizational health* and the *employee experience*. In effect, becoming more lean and seamless in its approach and systems, with more use of HR Tech.

Re-thinking and re-imagining HR for the future requires consideration of the *HR service delivery model* organizations use. It was recognized that this will need to change in order to facilitate agility, innovation and speed in how HR services its clients and, enhances the employee experience. This will inevitably involve the use of technology. However, it is clear from our research that the use of technology in HR is not as widespread as may be thought. Quite rightly HR executives and professionals remain sceptical of aspects of tech in HR. They are sometimes not clear on its benefits for **their** organization. They see that the use of HR tech in the future would need to be driven by the specific HR concerns and strategies of their particular organization and, be very clear about how it contributes to those, rather than operating merely as an 'efficiency tool' or an 'enabler'. The primary concern for many of the participants is how, first, to envisage what the future of HR systems, processes and practices might be in a re-designed, post-COVID-19 context. Following from this, tech might then be a meaningful contributor to the achievement of new forms of HRM.

HR in the post COVID-19 world: 5. Re-imagining and re-thinking HR systems, processes and policies (continued)

As a consequence of COVID-19, HR systems, practices and processes (SPPs) are already changing. Given the perception that there will be significant changes in the nature of work beyond COVID-19, changes in HR SSPs are inevitable. In many of the organizations from which our participants came, some of this post-pandemic work has begun. Recruitment and on-boarding will be re-imagined. There is likely to be a continuing move away from the traditional job description/job specification approach and more innovative processes introduced. This may involve appropriate and relevant technology for long-listing, new job and work requirements and, a revision of personal specifications in light of new skills and work design. The focus here, as in other changes predicted, will be a greater concern for the employee experience. There is recognition that in many organizations the process of recruitment and on-boarding is both time-consuming for HR but also and, more importantly, a slow and often negative experience for the candidate. Finding ways of making this process more agile, innovative, fast and lean will be important in enhancing the employee experience and engaging employees more successfully in their organizational future.

- Develop a HR continuity plan for various scenarios.
- Re-think HR service delivery model.
- Audit HR policies and practices for value-creation.
- Create efficient recruitment processes. Innovate.
- Know the issues in the employee experience: moments of truth, pain points.
- Kill the job description as we know it.
- Think of new ways to do HRD. Build staff strengths rather than overcome weaknesses.
- Focus on speed of service delivery and support.

HR in the post COVID-19 world: 6. New ways of thinking about performance management

Participants noted that changes in the workforce, work design and skills required would inevitably require changes in how productivity is viewed and, specifically, the way performance is managed. Overall, the view was that more remote working would lead to a more *outcomes driven performance management*. In addition, a more holistic approach would be taken to performance management that would deliver a fairer, less subjective approach that would be linked to enhancing the employee experience. An outcomes driven performance management approach or a 'productivity policy' was also seen as a way of enabling more balance between work and other parts of life. What needs to be done, rather than do I need to be seen to be doing something?

Moreover, participants indicated that there might be a focus on developing *employee engagement through enhancing the employee experience*. An important aspect of this was to *be more aware of employee health and well-being*. In general, there was a recognition that into the future, beyond COVID-19, performance would be more connected to the factors that stimulate and motivate good performance as inputs that lead to achieving outcomes.

- Flexible work design can lead to outcomes driven 'productivity policies', which enhances work-life balance.
- Undertake efficiency audits.
- Be clear about what work creates and adds value, rather than work for its own sake.
- Focus on the whole employee experience.
- Preventive rather than curative performance liberation.
- Build a performance edifice.
- Change the language around performance.

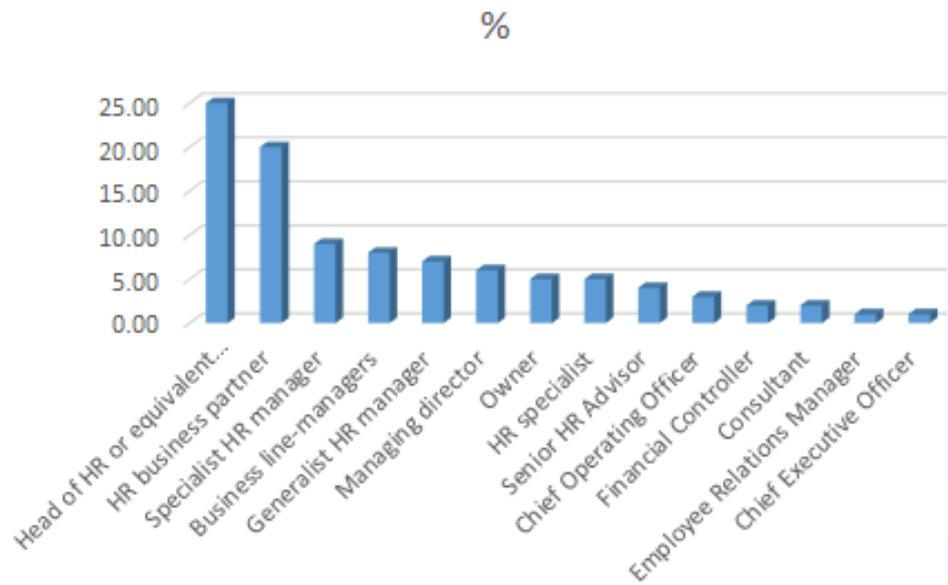
HR in the post COVID-19 world: 7. Leadership development, HRD and careers

A changed post-COVID-19 environment will require new types of leadership, new ways of learning and new ways of thinking about careers. Our participants identified that the future of work will require a full review of what their organizations offer to staff in terms of development, upskilling and career opportunities. In the context of changing work design, skills and, how a workforce is shaped, leader and staff development and careers will need to be thought about in a much more focused way than before COVID-19. It was recognized that developing a more innovative and agile staffing model as well as hiring/developing more innovative and agile staff would be an important objective in the future.

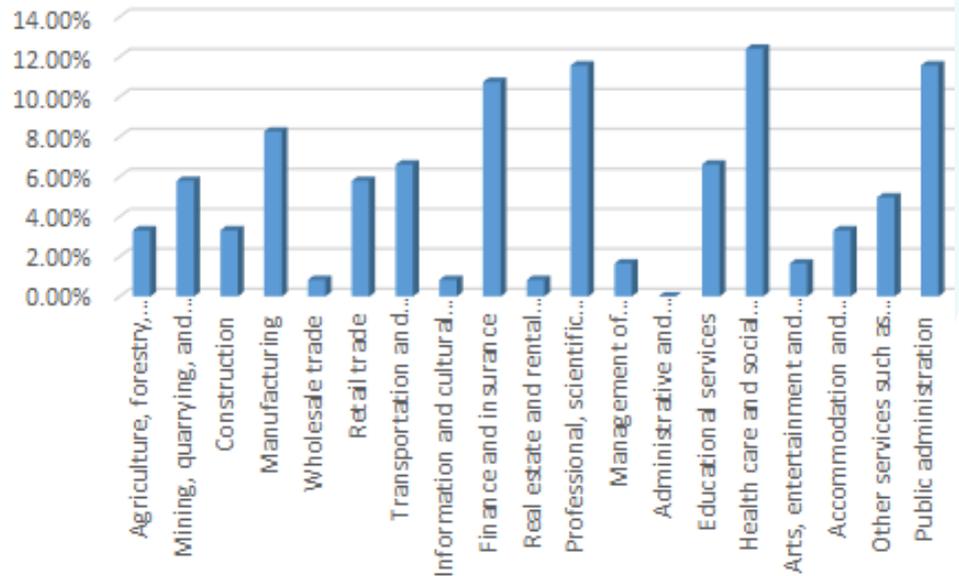
In relation the leaders and leadership development, a post-COVID-19 environment will need a thorough review of how best to implement such development.

- Review current HRD and career development activities.
- Project future workforce skills needs
- Understand current workforce strengths in relation to future, anticipated needs.
- Develop an understanding of workforce shaping.
- Undertake a leadership audit.
- Introduce career conversations.

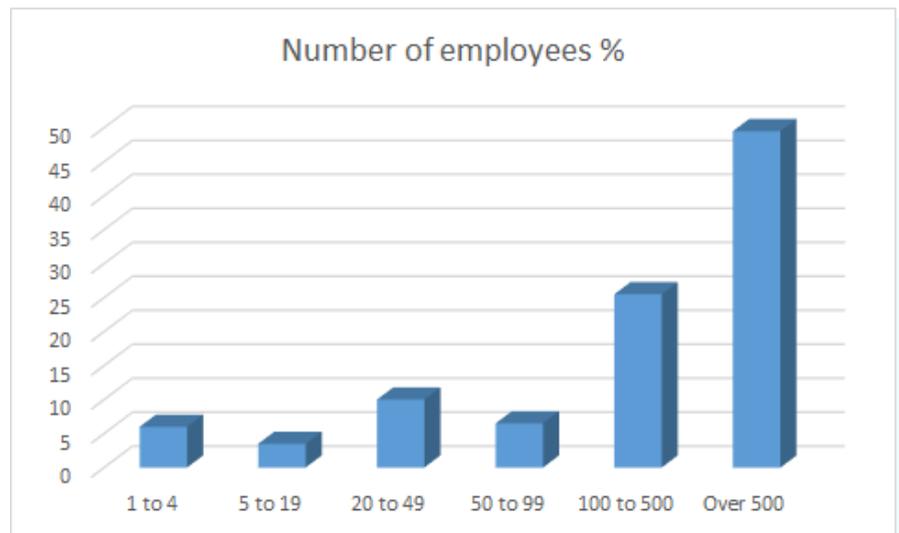
HR in the post COVID-19 world: Participant profile - position/role



HR in the post COVID-19 world: Participant profile - industry/sector



**HR in the post
COVID-19 world:
Participant profile -
size of organization
(employees)**



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