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Managing in the pandemic-induced era: *HR competency is the key*

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The COVID-19 pandemic has proved to be an unprecedented crisis with severe economic and social consequences. There is still a spell of uncertainty; it is not known how long the coronavirus crisis will last and what the ‘new normal’ will look like (Sthapit, 2020 May; Sthapit, 2021 June). The pandemic has already caused to the world several adverse consequences such as a crisis of mutual trust (Sthapit, 2020 May; Sthapit, 2020 December), economic shock, global health crisis, change in social behaviours, and challenges at the organisation level to continue business operations (Azizi et al, 2021).

In such times of turbulence, organisations are investigating whether the ways of operating and managing that have served them well and better in the past, will be fit for the future. It can, however, be maintained that the team of human resources— if made competent— is uniquely positioned to lead enterprises to recover and thrive in the new world of work, playing a vital leadership role in shaping the way enterprises recruit and develop talent, and take care of experiences, and break away from traditional operating models, to achieve work outcomes. There is no denying that the role of HR is recognised as what constitutes essential pillars in the adjustment of the organisations to this pandemic situation (Gonçalves et al, 2021 July).

A recent paper published in the HR Magazine of the Society of HRM (SHRM) asserts that the pandemic not only has expanded HR’s corporate influence, but also led to a renewed focus on employees (Harbert, 2021 Sept). The pandemic has thrown employers and employees into chaos and uncertainty, with no clear end in sight. The article observed that HR operated in a crisis mode for much of 2020 and the first half of 2021, figuring out how employees could work from home (WFH), trying to provide extra mental and physical health support, and working more than ever on C-level (the top chief executive) strategies for keeping their organisations functioning (Harbert, 2021 September). Consequently, the role of HR has fundamentally changed. But, as the pandemic has persisted with no clear

end in sight again, organisations have continued to struggle hard amid the most testing times of human history to keep themselves afloat and rolling. It has created room for substantiating the role of HRD (human resource development) amid the organisations more emphatically than ever.

Therefore, in the aftermath of the protracted COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in several crises, the one most effectual way for the organisations to survive and grow is to develop their human resources who can offer and execute ingenious solutions to ensure the continuity and growth of their businesses and to help other employees and stakeholders to cope with this extraordinary crisis. The need for training and developing the human resources has been felt more profoundly, in face of the prolonged pandemic of the coronavirus. Hence, the human resource development (HRD) should be strategized (Garavan, & Carbery, 2012; Sthapit, 2013a; Sthapit, 2013b; Sthapit, 2020 July; Sthapit, 2021 Aug) for managing organisations effectively and sustainably in the changing external environments.

Strategically managing HRD requires organisations to promote the ‘enabling’ and ‘implementing’ roles of HRD by analysing the changing environments and proactively planning its HRD activities (Sthapit, 2013a; Sthapit, 2020 July). The design of the HRD contents and instructional designs and their execution should be aimed at developing the key competencies of human resources; namely, *knowledge, attitude, skills, and ability* —put in an acronym of KASA (Sthapit, 2018). It emphasises on the development of not only attitude, emotional intelligence, and innovative skills, but also meta-cognitive competency of human resources. Meta cognitive skills empower and equip HRs with higher-order thinking that enables understanding, analysis, and control of one’s cognitive processes, especially when engaged in learning. The higher-order thinking lies in analytical, diagnostic skills, critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, and systems analysis skills.

That apart, in a recent World Economic Forum write-up, special accent has been placed on digital upskilling, as it contributes to organisation sustainability because it ensures continuity of workforce for society (WEF, 2021 December) at a time when the prolonged pandemic threatens to increase the gap of digital skills or competencies of people in organisations.

In the pandemic-induced era, management leaders should be able to lead through complexity and volatility; and successfully convert the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (or, VUCA-1), into Vision, Understanding, Clarity and Agility, or VUCA-2 (Sthapit, 2020 June) for which the leaders should possess and develop the essential competency to ‘lead through influence’ and manage on a remote basis, and manage a workforce with a combination of humans and machines including artificial intelligence or AI (Sthapit, 2020 December). It requires developing and honing the key competencies of human resources in the organisation.

In such turbulent times, organisations have increasingly emphasised on such strategies as promoting flexibility, strengthening internal efficiency, talent acquisition, and making innovative changes based on organisational assessment and needs for smooth business activities (Azizi et al, 2021). It can be accomplished only through an effective team of human talents that possess developed human competencies. It is only through such human talents that the organisations can gain required resilience and growth.

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