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What is HR professionals' quest for change management? A bird's eye view in the UAE's post-pandemic strategies

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Abstract: Changing economic fundamentals, such as Covid-19, have been catalysts for organizational change that is unprecedented, and is expected to continue in the future as well. The role of human resource professionals within businesses has changed dramatically. Rather than being involved in decision-making, human resource strategists HR professionals perform a massive role in organizational success and competitiveness. To be viable, firms employ only individuals who can add value to their workplace with a changing and learning mindset. In today's world, job security and fringe benefits are a thing of the past, and a fluid, flexible, and ever-changing environment is the norm. Organizations and people management professionals have responded with innovative ideas and practices such as change management, leadership, talent management, and E-HR, globally. This study discusses the contribution of HR professionals towards company performance. Thus, it selects some UAE firms randomly and provides a snapshot of strategies in the post-pandemic era to have a competitive edge. Further, the study penetrates the importance of having different mindsets in gaining and maintaining a stable work environment.

Keywords: change management, leadership, talent management, E-HR practices.

1 Introduction

Government policies are not for generating profits, but for creating an environment in which organizations and employees can cooperate mutually for their endurance, also, for a better quality of life. At the same time, firms must take constant measures to achieve their goals in an organized way (Lei & Slocum, 2005; Lewis, 2020) [1-2]. The global pandemic of COVID-19 and subsequent economic downturn have caused the change in the way individuals live and work, but it will open new business models. Managing change and prioritizing business agility are the top



agenda in this twenty-first century. Due to current recessionary pressures and job insecurity, there is a pressing need for a strategic move in firms by employee branding and benchmarking (Parameswaran, 2020) [3].

While reflecting the demographics of the UAE population, the nationals make up a mere 11 percent, while expatriates are 89 percent. It is noteworthy that the current net migration rate is 1.93 per 1000 population [4]. A particular emphasis is placed on Dubai in the present study because it is the second-largest emirate in the country with an area of 4,114 square kilometers. It is in the southwest corner of the Arabian Gulf and is recognized as a global business hub and the commercial capital of the UAE. Moreover, this cosmopolitan metropolis has more expatriates than Emiratis (GMI, 2021) [5]. In terms of employment in the UAE in 2018, there were 7.384 million people, and the unemployment rate decreased from 2.5 percent in 2017 to 2.2 percent in 2018 (Annual Economic Report, 2019) [6]. The entry of the women's workforce also impacted the workforce distribution in the UAE. The table below depicts the percentage of male, female employees in public, private, and other sectors in the UAE in 2019. Moreover, employment in the UAE has increased by 2 percent continuously in the first quarter of 2020. For these reasons, there are a lot of opportunities for employment in the UAE. Hence, firms should take appropriate measures to tap the skills of all talents to utilize them to their maximum.

Table 1 Statistics on the distribution of labor force in the UAE

Sector	Emiratis			Non-Emiratis			Total		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Federal Government	44.7%	31.0%	40.5%	2.0%	1.6%	1.9%	3.9%	3.4%	3.8%
Local government	36.7%	40.0%	37.7%	5.2%	3.7%	4.9%	6.6%	6.0%	6.5%
Private Sector	6.5%	11.4%	8.0%	82.4%	46.4%	73.9%	79.1%	44.3%	70.7%
Shared	10.0%	16.0%	11.9%	4.4%	3.7%	4.2%	4.6%	4.5%	4.6%
Foreign	0.2%	0.6%	0.3%	1.1%	1.4%	1.1%	1.0%	1.3%	1.1%
Diplomatic Authority	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Non-profit Organisations	0.9%	0.5%	0.8%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Without Establishment	0.3%	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Private Household	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	4.3%	42.8%	13.4%	4.1%	40.1%	12.7%
Other	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Not Stated	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Labor Force Survey 2019- Federal Competitiveness and Statistical Centre

In these backgrounds, it is quintessential to delve into sources of competitive advantage in firms. Hence, it is decided to conduct the study based on the following factors:

- Determine the factors that enhance the change management process at businesses.
- Examine the role of people managers as leaders.



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- Consider strategies to address the 'war of talent'.
- Develop an understanding of how technology can support effective talent management
- management strategy.

2 Background to the study

2.1 Change management as a tool for agile businesses

Change is inevitable to any organization for its vitality, survival, and growth; therefore, HR professionals' engagement and quality are paramount in the coming decades. Unfortunately, the success rate for change management processes in the firms seems to be very less. Approximately five percent of companies undergoing significant organizational changes avoided significant disruptions and completed on schedule. (Gilley & Gilley, 2007) [7]. According to Dawson (2004), various triggers to organizational changes are technology, customer demand, skill updation, administrative structures, along with political, social, economic, and technological aspects [8]. These aspects create virtual teams, self-managed work teams, High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS), alternative workplace programs, and talent management. Additionally, employee knowledge and skills can enhance by the following concepts:

- implement and track new technology programs
- enable online learning
- maintain work-life balance and keep responsibilities while homeworking
- perform tasks for psychological wellbeing and productivity
- socialization and networking.

The fact that half or more of employers say at least fifty percent of their workforce has been home-working continuously throughout the crisis indicates that expectations about homeworking and work flexibility have changed dramatically (CIPD, 2020) [9]. Further, 'evidence-based decision-making' by behavioral science and research, people analytics, stakeholder concerns, practitioner expertise are the foundations of skills required to draw useful conclusions from diverse insights. A survey by People Profession (2020) found that nine out of ten organizations plan to use people data and analytics in the future [10]. As far as paradigms go, the resource-oriented, best practices, and process-oriented paradigms can help enterprises to develop competencies that are tailored to the specific requirements of their businesses. Performance implication and employee motivation assist in



achieving the 'level of interest alignment.' This level of alignment leads to achieving both organizational and personal goals. During each of the three levels of motivational alignment outlined by Gottschalg and Zollo (2007), a high level of interest alignment can be achieved. A person's intrinsic motivation level dictates what rewards he or she receives for a particular action. Secondly, the hedonic intrinsic motivation level refers to the degree of pleasure individuals receive while completing their task tasks at work. Therefore, organizations can alter task and task contents in the changing economic conditions. Lastly, the normative intrinsic motivation level creates a socialization process, through which companies can clarify their values and norms and help employees to develop behaviors that are consistent with them [11].

2.2 Leadership as a change agent

Today's flexible, inventive, and vibrant business environment calls for more than just being a good manager (Nathanson, 1993) [12]. As the landscape changes, leaders need to reconfigure their approaches to their organizations' portfolios. Additionally, it recommended that they develop practical knowledge of a company's structure and internal dynamics (Parameswaran, 2021) [13]. Leaders in the post-pandemic period inspire a shared vision and ensure its implementation, articulating, maintaining it, and involving followers to further its implementation. Even though Mintzberg's ten managerial roles of leaders were published decades ago they are still relevant in this unprecedented economic downturn (Lussier & Achua, 2004) [14]. Additionally, Figure 1 depicts the view of institutionalized leadership can create a strategic move in organizations and equip them to have a competitive edge (Nadler et al 1995).

	Incremental	Discontinuous
Anticipatory	Tuning Adjustment Improvement Internal alignment Components or sub-systems	Reorientation Major change Positioning entire organization Frame bending
Reactive	Adaptation Internal alignment External event	Recreation Reevaluate whole organization Rapid system-wide change Frame breaking

Fig 1: Institutional Leadership

Source: Nadler, D.A., Shaw, R.B. & Walton, A.S. (1995). Discontinuous change: Leading organizational transformation. San Francisco, Jossey Bass:225.



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On an organizational level, flexibility involves the use of employment practices and organizational structures in a coordinated way to create a capacity for change and innovation. Numerous forms of overlapping flexibility such as functional (Kossek et al., 1999), numerical (Rimmer & Zappala, 1988), financial (Atkinson, 1984), procedural (Bamber, 1990), regulatory (Bamber, 1990), mobility (Bamber, 1990), cognitive (Morrison, 1994), and organizational (Hassard & Parker, 1993), flexibility exists, and people management professionals need to distinguish between these forms of flexibility to grab opportunities for system flexibility [15-20]. Related to this, the big concern in this post-pandemic period is to consider whether the firms are ready to implement any of these techniques. Hence, the factors that assist in this scenario are policy, employee commitment, management commitment, training and orientation, technology, teamwork, performance management, teamwork, decision making, communication, and information dissemination.

2.3 Talent management as an administrative facet

The impact of pandemic indicates that there is a great influence on employment relations that leads to restoration of policies and procedures as the 'war of talent' becomes intense. Further, the procedures of managing talents need to be more diversified, strategic, varied, and well-rounded than earlier. Various activities can be included such as HR forecasting, gap analysis, staffing methods, retention management, learning, and development, assessments, and so on. According to Michaels et al (2001), organizations can consider the following aspects to have a competitive edge; talent approach to be developed, employee value proposition to be generated, recruiting plans to be reconstructed, integrate growth into the business culture, and segregate and validate individuals. [21].

Additionally, moral standards are considered in business ethics as they are interpreted by organizations and the behavior of their members. HR professionals must follow an ethical approach to decision-making, take a moral standpoint, make financially sound decisions, and adhere to all relevant laws and regulations. Ethical decision-making requires three qualities and needs three dimensions, the capacity to analyze moral issues in a context; the capability to utilize issues utilizing lock-in principled based thinking; obligation to perform morally. The IBE surveys for 1998, 2001, and 2004 found that in 44-46% of the UK companies the Company Secretary or legal department was responsible for administering a company's code of ethics. This contrasts with the reported 16 percent in 2004, 20 percent in 2001, and 12 percent in 1998 for responsibility resting with the HR department (Vickers, 2005) [22].



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2.4 Human resource professionals in the electronic era

The organizations that understand the implications of the internet economy will be the most successful in their e-transformation project. Electronic business (e-business) in the HR area is when an organization operates in a web-based environment that provides users, managers, and employees with direct access to relevant HR data to help them achieve their objectives within the organization. Therefore, people management professionals must upgrade their skills when they approach their customers, and how they market, order, track, and deliver their products or services.

HR matrices

For HR to contribute, how HR systems enable it to contribute, and how people management professionals ultimately deliver, an understanding of the rules of the game and a new perspective is necessary. Due to various economic changes, several measures are available in organizations to explore: the workforce, HR function, and leadership to have a strategic success. The three popular measures: are the Balanced Scorecard, the HR Scorecard, and the Workforce Scorecard. For example, the balanced scorecard approach was used by companies like Sears and American Express in the 1990s was developed by Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton. In this approach, they emphasized the need for four important perspectives in the businesses namely, customer, internal, innovation and learning, and financial perspective (Kaplan & Norton, 2005) [23].

3 Methodology

In this study, which is pure or basic, or fundamental research, the goal is to advance knowledge or to improve understanding of a natural phenomenon. It facilitates the development of new ideas, principles, and theories. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, basic research developed to strive to address the gaps in the utility of science to society. This study emphasizes theoretical aspects and allows psychologists, educationalists, academicians, to comprehend certain variables for this cutthroat knowledgeable economy rather than finding solutions [24]. Hence, this research collected literature from various sources and prepared recommendations based on the same.



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4 Recommendations

From the above-mentioned strategic move firms in the post-pandemic should ensure the following factors. A strategic change management process can include three important factors:

The assessment of the current position of the company through external environmental scanning and identifying what is working well and what is not. Secondly, the changes needed to solve the existing problems, thirdly, steps to how to implement the changes and build dynamism. The factors to be considered in these aspects are encouraging commitment and utilizing the resources, working with politics of change, supporting emotional transitioning, planning the implementation details, fostering creativity and spontaneity, and inspiring continuous learning and evolution.

The development of a flexible-firm model or core-periphery model in firms can create a competitive edge by the restructuring of the employment relationship. The core is made up of a permanent highly skilled group of employees with internal career paths. Hence, they can enjoy job security to a great extent, also updating the skills and competencies by training and development. On the other hand, the peripheral workers represent a qualitative or numerical flexible workforce, and they are engaged in important day-to-day activities but are not vital to organizations.

Firms in the post-pandemic era can rebuild recruitment strategies to understand the workforce, retrain them and retain them. Moreover, it is evident from the literature that employees are looking for exciting work, personnel and professional development, the culture of the company, wealth, and rewards (Michaels et al., 2001). When it comes to ethical approaches, HR practitioners who are well versed in ethical theory are more likely to be able to respond appropriately to ethical challenges. They may also make a meaningful contribution to an enterprise's ethical infrastructure, thus reducing the probability of costly ethical breaches and strengthening its relationships with employees and external stakeholders.

Some of the concerns while implementing the workforce scorecard are; the ability of the managers to distribute skills to drive strategy, to find out the right measures of workforce success and mindset, and accessibility of using the data to give feedback and evaluate the developments. While implementing and maintaining an e-business strategy, the firms can consider the following factors: gain ongoing support from the top management in decision-making, establish job rotation in a self-managed team, launch change management and communication plans, acquire their own budget, and assess the progression.



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5 Future Scope of the study

As this, further study can be extended into applied research. This can develop corporate policies for a competitive advantage in firms. Each variable can be analyzed through sub-variables and conduct Confirmatory factor analysis and Structural Equation Model. This can be achieved by preparing a primary data collection (questionnaire/survey and interview). Finally, an outcome can be created based on theories.

Conclusion

The pandemic has truly shaken the complete world. To strengthen the financial status and economic conditions, the UAE government has introduced numerous financial approaches, plans, and strategies. The initiatives are mainly concentrated on the reinforcement of business growth by various approaches. A few are; a holistic economic support plan from the Central Bank, assisting the federal government to lessen the burden in the existing situation, and supporting local government package to ensure the solidity of the national economy; incomparable creativities to build a unified civic in times of catastrophe; the nationwide fumigation program and safe distancing rules; excellent rules and regulations for suppleness in auxiliary specific sectors; reinforcement of food security strategy, and the UAE's philanthropical initiatives. Indeed, these new initiatives and decisions created a sense of reassurance, safety, and comfort for the locals, expatriates, and tourists. Hence, by safeguarding wellbeing and security, these programs guarantee the government functions in all sectors. [25]. Certainly, the parameters for the study shed light on the UAE's initiatives and strategies for the future.

Nowadays, strategic planning and action plans play a significant role in people management professionals' responsibilities. It is clear from the mentioned aspects that to understand the learning needs and to underpin the delivery of learning, organizations need evidence-based decision-making. In this post-pandemic period, finding the future skills is a high priority for organizations, and deploying those selected skills in a strategic manner is very challenging. Therefore, firms can sustain themselves if HR professionals restructure the traditional HRM function into tactical, operating, and rational levels. In a nutshell, HR professionals must ensure that they have attributes in global, innovative, virtual, and collaborative aspects.



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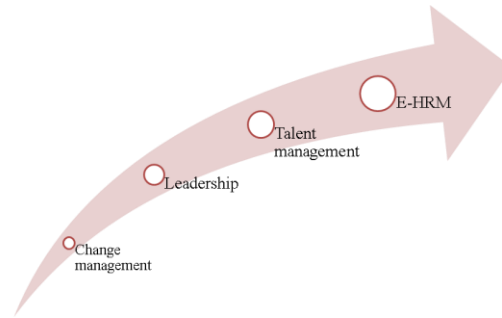


Fig 2: HR professionals' quest for change management: core strategies in the post pandemic era

Source: Present Study

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