



## Present Challenges And Future Opportunities of Strategic Human Resource Management In COVID 19 Times: a Commentary

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**PRESENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OPPURTUNITIES OF STRATEGIC HUMAN  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN COVID 19 TIMES: A COMMENTARY**

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## **Abstract**

Strategic Human Resource Management is playing an important responsibility in driving operational and strategic management during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors through this commentary highlight the three important implications for strategic HRM research in COVID 19 times. Firstly, the paper outlines the need for expanded realization regarding how new working experience influences employee attitude and their actions in post COVID era. Secondly, it showcases the stress among stakeholders because of the pandemic, thereby emphasizing the need to reconsider the interrelationship between employees, customers, and communities along with shareholders in the post-pandemic world (Srivastava and Chaturvedi, 2014). Thirdly, the pandemic situation highlights the importance of reframing the debate over tactical versus strategic position in strategic HRM research. At last, the authors consider the implications of COVID-19 on strategic HRM research and they propose few key research questions giving some directions for future researchers.

## **Introduction**

Over a while, we can see that COVID-19 is one of the human crises that the world is facing (Chaturvedi and Pasipanodya, 2021). Therefore, front runners of the human resource (HR) team are held responsible for the response in the organizations worldwide. This is similar to the crisis like the recession that the world faced in 2008-09 or the Y2K crisis, which made the positions of finance and information technology executives more noticeable. Likewise, COVID-19 has been an inflection point for HR around the world

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thereby highlighting the importance of HR leaders in changing business scenarios. In this commentary, we discuss the implications of COVID-19 for HR research, as well as some primary research questions for strategic human resource management (SHRM).

### **Literature Review**

Wright and McMahan defined Strategic HRM during the early evolution of the field as 'the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable the firm to achieve its goals' (1992, p. 298). They claimed that the domain of strategic HRM consists of 'the determinants of decisions about HR activities, the composition of human capital resource pools, the specification of the required human resource behaviors, and the efficiency of these decisions given various business strategies and competitive situations' (Wright and McMahon, 1992, p. 298). Since then, strategic HRM research is concentrating on the relationship between HR activities and the performance of the firm (Huselid, 1995). The global pandemic, on the other hand, shows how myopic such research has been addressing how the organizations strategically treat people.

Overall, this might constrain our understanding of few important questions raised during the global pandemic. For instance, the situation needs a shift in knowing about the working context, such as working from home (WFH) or from the office which influences the worker's behaviors and attitude. And it also created stress among stakeholders, calling into question the primacy of the shareholder perspective, which has dominated strategic HRM thought (Crane and Matten, 2020; Hitt et al., 2020). In the end, while HR has taken a turn towards strategic HRM, stress around its responsibility has been increased during a pandemic, uplifting the necessity for both strategic and tactical contributions. We consider the importance of each in turn in our commentary.

## THE IMPACT ON WORKFORCE

For most staff, COVID-19 has changed their work experience. It made sure that firms around the world adapt how systematic work can be performed and how jobs are designed. Ruptures between employee groups have also increased. For example, those who can work from home versus those who cannot, those who stayed on the payroll versus those who were paid overtime, and even those in various business divisions were all affected differently by the pandemic.

Strategic HRM is being criticized to involve novel, contemporary HR activities (Harney and Collings, 2021) owing to conceptual inability. Hence, traditional methods of HR activities or changes in the high-performance working style are needed during the period of a pandemic. Therefore, strategic HRM research has to shift towards advanced methods such as flexibility and job structure in HR activities instead of categorizing them as "other," which has been done in a previous study (Boon et al., 2019).

Indeed, scholarly research in strategic HRM is always based on a monolithic view of the employment relationship and an expectation that HR activities used within companies are relatively homogenous (c.f. Huselid, 1995). However, workers' experience varies, and interpretation of HR activities is based on their responsibilities (Kehoe and Wright, 2013). The difference in strategic HRM practices for various workgroups differs (Lepak and Snell, 1999). This pandemic highlights the need for considering the impact of strategic HRM across various workgroups on how and where they perform the task. These are the problems that we experience from traditional strategic HRM research. For example, this study is based on employees located in a physical workplace or with less interference from the virtual workforce. Now we can see that HR activities are more flexible with culture and

values. Knowing how working in physical culture impacts the results like employee performance is the highlighting question in the research.

### **FROM STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE**

The ramifications of such a limited focus have been highlighted by the pandemic. Strategic HRM analysis is completely concentrated on shareholder value as a key outcome (Crane and Matten, 2020). They also considered a wide range of results like economic value, social benefits, and individual wellbeing. Due to pandemic organizations now concentrate on the threat to the health and safety of workers by evaluating employee risk. For instance, earlier firms focused on short-term profits while ignoring to satisfy employee needs (Collings et al., 2021). However, COVID-19 highlighted the benefits of customers as stakeholders because firms often take them for granted in management studies (Ulrich et al., 2012). Therefore, firms need to systematically manage a balance between workers, customers, and shareholders. During COVID-19 employees need to perform, because customers need products and services, in turn, firms need to manage customer and employee safety which is an expense for shareholders' returns. HR behaviors that impact how employees treat customers often influence how customers treat employees, affecting employee satisfaction and turnover, according to some studies (Shepherd et al., 2020). The research needs to consider how HR activities need to make changes for a shift in service delivery by increasing digitalization of service or reduction in physical interaction during pandemics while providing service which in turn shows the results on key customers. This also impacts trust in the product and services of the firms in the minds of customers.

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Communities should be recognized as significant players in strategic HRM study. COVID19 has impacted negatively on several cultures across the globe. Organizations that contribute to the local community rather than just relying on financial stakeholders may create an impact, long-term positive contributions in ways that governments cannot (Chaturvedi et al, 2020). This will help in bringing a connection between strategic HRM and corporate social responsibility (see Crane and Matten, 2020). For instance, how have corporate volunteerism campaigns helped to alleviate the effect of COVID-19 on local communities? Similarly, organizations are at the forefront of shaping employee (and thus society) vaccination campaigns and research can investigate how strategic HRM activities impact employee and community behavior, as well as how the cumulative decision affects the organizational outcomes.

Problems relating to COVID-19 highlight for HR practitioners and strategic HRM scholars need to manage different stakeholder's needs (Collings et al., 2021). We can see that strengthening in strategic HRM calls for strategy research to increase the perspective of stakeholders (Hitt et al., 2020).

### **COLLABORATING STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL APPROACHES**

As HR research and practices shift to a more strategic focus, the friction between HR's conventional employee-centered or welfare capital positions and its new form as a strategic business partner has grown (Prichard, 2010). Even though the strategic business partner model has been critical to the HR practices strategic formulation (Ulrich, 1996), its simplified application has been criticized as differentiation of "thinking from doing," resulting in an arbitrary divide between strategic and transactional work (Reilly et al., 2007). Strategic HR activities are being highly promoted and transactional or tactical HR

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is being devalued, which is frequently assigned to line managers (Prichard, 2010). This is being portrayed as a shift from measuring HR effectiveness against technological aspects established by this field to evaluate other stakeholders (Beer et al., 2015).

The pandemic situation highlights the importance of reframing the debate over tactical versus strategic position in strategic HRM research. A further study tells that the positive impact of HR's understood the different operational traits, like short-term retrenchment measures to be opposed which helps the firms to direct towards the great recession (Roche and Teague, 2012). However, a purely operational objective will not produce long-term results, implying that the most successful leaders will strike a balance between tactical and strategic power (Chaturvedi, Rizvi and Pasipanodya, 2019).

Strategic HRM studies have also identified the drawbacks for indicating 'narrow and conventional definitions of strategy implying HR strategy is formulated as a one-time systemic intervention, with a predetermined consensus and a linear sequential progress from formulation through implication' (Harney and Collings, 2021, p. 3). The rapid speed of change during the pandemic compelled a flexible and complex strategy. As a result, COVID-19 provides an ideal setting for research into the strategizing process in executive leadership teams, as well as how HR strategy originated and developed in that context.

### **Implications**

The authors enhance the important responsibility that HR is playing in driving operational and strategic management during the COVID-19 pandemic. The commentary highlight three important implications for strategic HRM research. First, it highlights the need for expanded realization regarding how working experience influences employee attitude and their actions. Second, it shows the stress among stakeholders, highlighting



the need to consider the interrelationship between employees, customers, and communities along with shareholders (Chaturvedi, 2020). Third, the contradictions between HR's strategic and organizational positions are brought to light. In this commentary, we consider the implications of COVID-19 for strategic HRM research and propose key research questions for further study.

**Keywords: COVID 19, SHRM, crisis, challenges, opportunities, changing business scenarios**

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