

HRM PRACTICES TO MANAGE JOB STRESS POST COVID

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Abstract

In order to sustain competition we have to create a firm which is intelligent and flexible than its competitors. Human resource management (HRM) function is an important factor that acts as a differentiator among various firms. And human resource practices are the principal means by which firms invest in their employees. Along with other functions of HRM like the practice of recruiting, hiring, deploying and managing an organization's employees an important function is giving importance to the personal welfare of the employees also. In this study the researcher has attempted to study the causes of stress among the employees and the HR practices adopted by banks to manage stress in employees pre- COVID-19 and post COVID-19 period. The type of study is descriptive study based on survey method. The bank employees were approached directly to find out their ideas on the steps to be implemented in tackling stress post COVID-19 .

Key words :HRM, COVID-19, stress, stressor, pre-COVID-19, post-COVID-19

Introduction

Our world is changing incessantly and tremendously. With rapid changes in our social ,economic , political and legal environment, the people in it has to also change constantly so as to adapt to the change. Few people adapt to these changes effortlessly, while some struggle to adapt. This struggle to adapt brings about stress to the individuals. Stress is a normal reaction the body has when changes occur, resulting in physical, emotional and intellectual responses.¹

However, when stress build up again and again it can cause negative effects. It can leave us in a permanent stage of fight or flight, leaving us overwhelmed or unable to cope. Long term,

¹Cleveland clinic .(2021,Jan 23).*Stress*. Available on <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/11874-stress>

this can affect our physical and emotional health.² Human resource management practices not just aim at recruiting employees but also focus at retaining them in the organization. The employees has to evolve continuously so as to be more productive. When employees get stressed ,their productivity narrows down. Adding to the already existing stress levels ,the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought with it sincere concerns as to the normal functioning of the organisations. Remote working conditions were introduced. Organisations which did not have remote working practices struggled to introduce it among the employees and employees struggled adapting to them. Researches have shown that stressed employees are not productive enough, therefore stress management training can help us deal with changes in a healthier way.

The main stressors can be grouped into four groups

1. Individual Stressors
2. Group Stressors
3. Organizational Stressors
4. Extra organizational Stressors

Individual Stressors

Job concerns, Career changes due to promotion or transfer, Economic problems due to low earnings, Changes in life structure ,Increase in responsibility and Personality problems are a few of the individual stressors.

Group Stressors

Due to poor interpersonal relationships or conflicts job stress may arise. The main group stressors are Lack of group cohesiveness, Lack of social support, Inter personal and inter group conflicts and Unfriendly organizational climate.

Organizational Stressors

The main organizational stressors are Job related factors like routine, morally conflicting individuals, difficult duties and responsibilities, disturbed working conditions, role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload , poor communication, unpleasant relationship and lack of proper

²Mental Health Foudation.(2021, sep17). *Stress*. Available on <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stress>

recognition , excessive rules and regulations, unrealistic standard to perform, layoffs, retrenchment, etc.

Extra Organizational Stressors

Job stress is not only the stress that we face inside the organization during our working hours. Extra organizational factors which are outside the organization also contributes to job stress. They are listed as follows political uncertainties, Instability of government, Economic uncertainties like depression and Technological uncertainties and change.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the causes of stress among male and female employees pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 period in the banking sector
2. To analyse the HR practices adopted by banks to manage stress in employees pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19

Hypotheses

H₀=There is no difference in mean level of respondents' perception on pre-COVID-19 Job stress factors based on years of experience.

H₀= There is no difference in mean level of respondents' perception on post-COVID-19 Job stress factors based on years of experience.

H₀= There is no difference in mean level of respondents' perception on tackling stress post-COVID-19 based on years of experience .

Methodology

The required primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was tested for its reliability and content validity. After obtaining the responses, reliability for the questionnaire was measured by Cronbach alpha, which yielded value of 0.88. This value is greater than the recommended value of 0.7 which denotes high reliability. The

adopted sampling design is convenient sampling. The collected data was tabulated and analysed using statistical tools like **Percentage, Garrett ranking and one-way anova** and the data was interpreted and conclusions were drawn.

Review of Literature

Azizi.M.R et al (2021) did a study on organizations' human resource management strategies to combat the COVID-19 impacts. The strategies suggested included flexibility, strengthening internal efficiency, talent acquisition, and making innovative changes based on organizational assessment and needs for smooth business activities. The implications of the study were that the appropriate human resource management strategies implementations would increase employees' mental well-being, satisfaction, productivity, motivation, and health safety at the workplace.³

Widodo et al (2021) did a study on the effect of Job stress and the stress due to **COVID-19** pandemic to the productivity of aviation engineering employees. 65 persons were approached and the results were analysed using multivariate regression analysis. It was suggested that for further research, it was required to formulate stress alleviation activities to minimize any risk of job and **COVID-19** stress that significantly affected the employee productivity.⁴ Therefore in the present study the researcher was motivated to find out about the Job stress and stress due to **COVID-19** in the banking sector in the study area of Tirunelveli.

Analysis and Intrepretations

³ Azizi.M.R et al (2021) .Innovative human resource management strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic: A systematic narrative review approach.Heliyon .Volume 7. Issue 6,2021.e-07233,ISSN 2405-8440,<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07233>.

⁴ Widodo.A.W., et al 2021 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Earth Environ. Sci.* **794** 012084

Table-1

Perception on factors causing Job Stress among Bank Employees pre- COVID-19 period

Stressors pre-COVID-19 period		Mean score of respondents			Total	F-test	P-Value
		Work experience					
		0-10 Years	10-20 years	20 and above			
1	Recognition for hard work is not present	3.75	3.66	3.32	3.56	1.26	0.288
2	Sitting continuously due to my work nature creates back pain	3.43	3.96	3.90	3.73	2.58	0.080
3	Working in banks has lead to unnecessary tension, frustration and irritation	3.36	3.39	3.42	3.39	0.04	0.963
4	My job involves very tough targets which cannot be attained	3.00	2.61	3.35	2.97	4.58	0.012
5	The lighting and ventilation facilities provided by the bank is inadequate	2.79	2.98	2.72	2.84	0.72	0.491
6	Overtime payment is inadequate and Promotion policy is unfair	3.00	3.25	2.58	2.95	3.76	0.026
7	Co-workers are not helpful	2.64	2.30	2.95	2.62	3.91	0.023
8	There is no scope for free interaction	3.11	3.55	2.82	3.18	3.98	0.021
9	There is prevalence of constant discrimination	3.29	3.09	3.30	3.21	0.45	0.638

10	There is no job security	2.82	2.23	2.72	2.55	3.21	0.044
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Source: Primary Data

The above table reveals that “Recognition for hard work is not present (3.75)” is the highly accepted stress factor among respondents having 0-10 years of experience and “Sitting continuously due to my work nature creates back pain” is the highly accepted stress factor among respondents having 10-20 years of experience and more than 20 years of experience. Also the least stress causing factor among respondents having 10-20 years of experience and more than 20 years of experience is Job security since they have much confidence on their skills gained due to experience and expertise. Also with regard to hypothesis testing the difference between means of the variables 4,6,7,8 and 10 were found to be statistically significant at 5% level. .

Steps taken to tackle routine stress in banking sector

Steps that the respondents feel are necessary to be taken to tackle Routine job related stress are given below. The results were arrived by using Garrett Ranking Technique.

Table 2

Tackling routine stress in job in banking sector

Stress tackling factors	Weighted Score	Garrett Mean Score	Rank
Improve work environment	2903	58.06	I
Employees participation in decision making	2881	57.62	II
Organization workshop	2656	53.12	III
More break time during work	2611	52.22	IV
Regular exercise or yoga	2543	50.86	V

Taking a diet rich in vitamins, minerals ect.	2511	50.22	VI
Indulging in an open conversation with co-workers	2478	49.56	VII
Organizing employee appreciation program	2151	43.02	VIII
Arrange training to achieve higher target	2144	42.88	IX
Visiting counselor	1872	37.44	X

Source: Primary data

The above table shows that, the first and foremost step to handle stress related issues the organization has to improve work environment. Next the organization has to include employees while taking any important decisions relating to employees. While doing so the management can understand the employees better and avoid stress issues and the last rank was given to visiting counselor to tackle and prevent stress.

Table-3

Perception on factors causing Job Stress among Bank Employees post- COVID-19 period

Stress factors post covid-19 period		Work experience				F- test	P-value
		Mean score of employees					
		0-10 years	10-20 years	20 and above	Total		
1	Isolation practices at home	3.39	3.00	3.63	3.32	4.00	0.021
2	Fear of catching the virus	2.39	2.64	2.90	2.67	1.89	0.156
3	Fear of spreading the	2.36	2.45	3.00	2.63	2.90	0.059

	virus to Kin and Kith						
4	Lack of experience in Remote working situation	3.46	2.73	2.73	2.91	4.06	0.020
5	Job insecurity due to poor market conditions	3.32	3.45	3.05	3.28	1.34	0.267
6	Doubts on self-productivity due to remote working	2.93	3.77	3.45	3.45	4.70	0.011
7	Communication errors due to isolation policy	3.25	2.68	3.38	3.07	4.38	0.015
8	Wage cuts	3.43	2.80	2.97	3.02	2.82	0.064

Source:Primary Data

The above table reveals that ‘Lack of experience in Remote working situation’ is the highly accepted stress factor among respondents having 0-10 years of experience and among those with 10-20 years of experience ‘Doubts on self-productivity due to remote working’ was the main stress factor and ‘Isolation practices at home’ was the main stress factor among those with experience more than 20 years. Also with regard to hypothesis testing the difference between means of the variables Isolation practices at home, Lack of experience in Remote working situation, Doubts on self-productivity due to remote working and Communication errors due to isolation policy were found to be statistically significant at 5% level.

HR practices to manage stress post COVID-19

Since the COVID-19 battle is not completely over, several companies have started functioning in offline regular mode while quiet few are following remote working practices. There is still fear among the people that a new variant of COVID-19 may resurface anytime. Therefore to reduce the stress due to COVID-19 in the post COVID-19 era the following strategies may be followed. In order to find out the preferences of the respondents regarding the suitability of the HRM practices post-covid to tackle stress, a series of statements were framed

and data was collected. Further to test the third hypotheses one-way anova was used and the results are exhibited as follows

Table-4

Tackling post COVID-19 job stress in banking sector

S.No	Stress tackling factors	Work experience				F- test	P-value
		Mean score of respondents					
		0-10 years	10-20 years	20 and above	Total		
1	Communicating support for flexibility	3.18	3.05	3.28	3.16	0.37	0.694
2	Using a test and learn approach	2.57	3.14	3.02	2.96	2.20	0.116
3	Observance of safety protocols by fellow employee	3.64	3.57	3.40	3.53	0.36	0.700
4	Caring for the health and safety of employees	3.18	3.32	2.80	3.10	1.95	0.147
5	Improving physical environment by making it covid-19 immune eg: improved air filtration, closed-office layout	3.79	3.25	3.47	3.46	2.25	0.110
6	offering the opportunity for education or career development	3.71	3.68	3.60	3.66	0.13	0.882
7	Supporting flexible and hybrid/remote work options	3.75	3.07	3.45	3.38	3.65	0.029
8	Periodic feedback from employees	3.32	3.14	3.25	3.22	0.28	0.760

9	Strategies to cover any testing and treatment costs associated with COVID-19 for employees and their families.	3.96	3.89	3.67	3.83	1.41	0.249
10	Provide meetings to strengthen skills, share knowledge and distance learning	3.50	3.32	3.12	3.29	1.14	0.324
11	Providing protective equipment	3.50	3.02	3.22	3.21	1.60	0.206
12	Investing in approaches for employees' health care	3.25	3.68	3.32	3.45	1.60	0.206

Source: Primary Data

It was found that with a mean score of 3.96, 3.89, and 3.67 the employees in the three categories irrespective of experience felt that in order to tackle stress strategies to cover any testing and treatment costs associated with COVID-19 for employees and the families must be ensured by the organisations. Also with a mean of 3.79 the factor ‘Improving physical environment by making it covid-19 immune eg: improved air filtration, closed-office layout’ was highly preferred by employees having 0-10 years of experience and ‘Investing in approaches for employees' health care’ and ‘offering the opportunity for education or career development’ is also seen as a good step to tackle stress post-COVID-19 period among employees with 10-20 years and above 20 years of experience. Also with regard to hypothesis testing the difference between means of the variable for the factor ‘Supporting flexible and hybrid/remote work options’ was statistically significant at 5 % level.

Discussions and Implications

In the study 57 percent were Male and 40 percent were female. 70 percent of the sample are married. 20 employees have 0-10 years of experience, 44 employees have 10-20 years of

experience and 40 employees have more than 20 years of experience. A majority of 35 percent of the respondents belong to the age group of 40-50 years. 44 percent are using public transport for their mode of conveyance. The study revealed that each employee have felt stressful at some point of the job. And post-COVID -19 the stress was felt even more. Along with the routine job stress now they have to stress about being infected and also their family being infected by COVID-19 . This called for a timely work policy to tackle stress. Caring for the health and safety of employees and Supporting flexible and hybrid/remote work options were important strategies to be implemented .The findings further suggests that the government has a predominant role in provision of protective measures such as face masks and strict social distancing measures to combat the COVID-19 virus effectively. The implications of the study will be useful for policy makers, stakeholders and management of banks in adopting successful HRM practices post covid period while welcoming their employees back to normal.

References

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