HR MANAGEMENT IN THE COVID-19 ENVIRONMENT

📅 WEBINAR – JULY 2020

INTRODUCTION TO IQBAL INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES (IIPS)

Iqbal Institute of Policy Studies (IIPS) is an independent research institute with the mission to generate, track, and advocate public policies towards the achievement of sustainable development in Pakistan. In addition to taking on research projects for policy advocacy, IIPS has embarked upon the concept of swift research wherein it undertakes time bound research and compile repots for the attention of policy and decision makers.

Undertake quality research and policy analyses for sustainable national development

Conduct research on emerging technologies for industrial application

Serve as a collaborative platform for dissemination of research, exchange and dialogue

Support endeavours for socio -economic development through research and analyses

Build capacity and competence to respond to research and policy needs at national level

Undertake critical impact studies of policies and recommend solutions

Develop viable connectivity between academia and industry for applied R&D

COVID-19 pandemic has created a challenging environment for human resource management (HRM). Companies across the world are downsizing as a strategy to counter revenue losses incurred due to global lockdown. Global unemployment stands at 20%, which means that one-fifth of the total global workforce is currently unemployed. It is, therefore, vital to understand the implications of Covid-19 for working practices and find new solutions to the challenges arising across many areas of human resource management.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the major issues in human resource management emerging from COVID-19
2. To shed light on the impact of remote working on business productivity.
3. To have a dialogue on the leadership challenges in COVID-19 environment.
4. To highlight effective practices and strategies for creating productive work environment during the pandemic and for a post-pandemic world.
5. To get an understanding of the legal implica-tions of COVID-19 on employees and employers. To deliberate on viable policy options for
6. sustainable human resource management in Pakistan.

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OUR DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS

Human resource managers around the globe are challenged with a new set of issues amidst the COVID-19 environment. IIPS organized a webinar with eminent HR and management professionals to discuss the challenges that organizations are facing amidst the ongoing pandemic and how human resources management can play its part in addressing these problems.

MR. AAMIR NIAZI
CHAIRMAN, PMEA GOVERNING BOARD

MR. ØYSTEIN BAKKEN
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, TELENOR, PAKISTAN

MR. AMIR YOUNUS
MANAGING DIRECTOR, BUSINESS DYNAMICS

MR. IJAZ NISAR
CEO CLUB PAKISTAN & CEO TODAY MAGAZINE

MR. SHAFAAT R. HASHMI
CEO, BRANDBEAT ADVERTISING & TECKROSS.

MS. IQRA MUSADDAQ
HEAD OF LEGAL AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS, IMARAT GROUP OF COMPANIES

MS. SAIMA LATIF
DEPUTY GM HR, IMARAT GROUP OF COMPANIES.
MODERATOR

The details of speakers and video of webinar may be found on:
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"Resilience, resolve, return, reform, and re-imagination are some of the traits that top leadership must possess in order to steer the organization through any crisis."

MR. AAMIR NIAZI, CHAIRMAN, PMEA GOVERNING BOARD

Amir Niazi identified three key areas that are posing significant challenges to human resource management amid the current pandemic. The first is related to flexibility and managing a workforce in response to supply and demand situations. The second revolves around the rapid shift to remote working and the third is linked to the future expectation of people from employees in the post-COVID-19 world. These challenges exist worldwide, and companies must find ways to manage their human resource in ways that do not necessarily involve layoffs. There is a need for companies to come up with creative ways to reduce HR costs, such as rescaling businesses and human resources. Organizations around the globe are beginning to see traditional governance models as obsolete and are shifting to remote working. In terms of expectations of employees from their organizations, it is extremely important how companies manage human capital at this time to ensure that their employees are looked after, given emotional support, and kept motivated. Resilience, resolve, return, reform, and re-imagination are some of the traits that top leadership must possess to steer the organization through any crisis. The leadership must focus on the following four areas to cope with the impacts of the ongoing pandemic:

- Rapidly recovering revenues
- Rebuilding operations
- Rethinking the organization
- Accelerating digital adoption to enable re-imagination
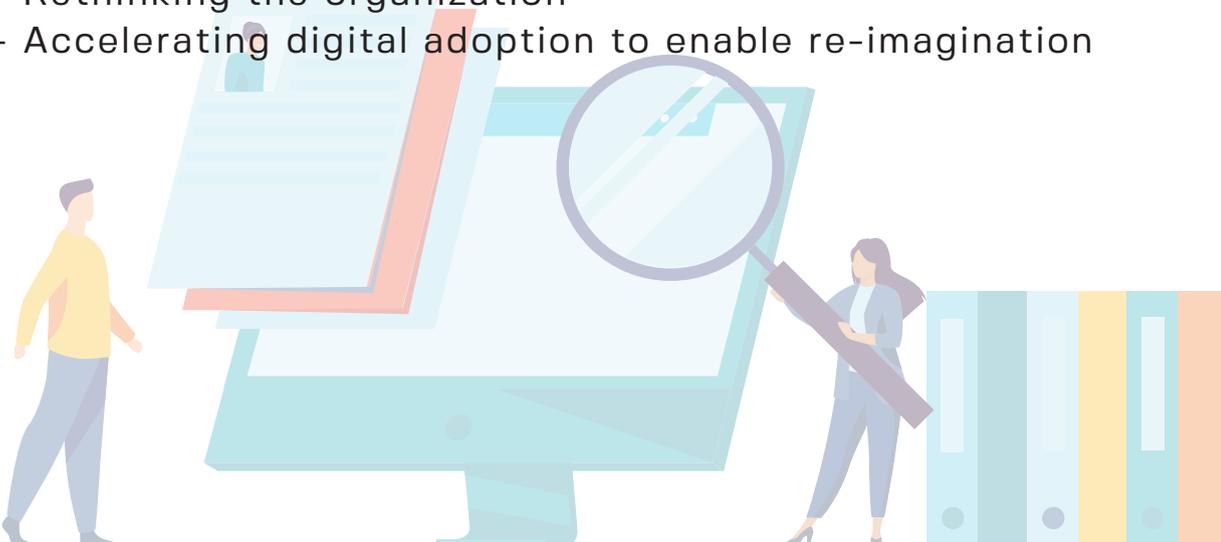
vvIn terms of remote working, employees are very happy working from home as it allows them to maintain good work-life balance and cuts down travelling cost.

MR. ØYSTEIN BAKKEN,
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER, TELENOR, PAKISTAN

Øystein Bakken highlighted the challenges in human resource management amidst lockdown. He stated that at Telenor, employees were asked about their expectation from HR and the company's leadership in the time of COVID-19. Based on that information, Telenor formulated an engagement plan which focused on five main areas. The first area is related to engagement and how people can be made more consistent while working from home. The second deals with wellness and takes care of employees' physical and mental health. The third area is enablement, and the fourth area deals with online learning and rescaling. The last area focuses on how to enhance leadership capacities in a remote working environment. He further underlined Telenor's consistent efforts to ensure the wellbeing of its employees. Telenor sent out safety packages, allowance for field staff and set up a 24/7 hotline for employees dealing with any mental stress or problem. In terms of remote working, employees are pleased in working from home as it allows them to maintain good work-life balance and cuts down travelling cost. At Telenor, engagement rate has gone up since shifting to remote work arrangement. However, a significant challenge for leadership is whether or not it can trust people to work from home.

Companies must accept the new normal and reimagine their workforce and workplace.

MR. AMIR YOUNUS,
MANAGING DIRECTOR, BUSINESS DYNAMICS

Mr Amir Younus elaborated that for the survival of businesses, the optimization of human resources is essential. Covid-19 is not going to end suddenly; therefore, organizations must plan and be fully prepared for any scenario. There are essentially two phases to plan for any crisis. First is the crisis response. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, businesses started shutting down due to global lockdown restrictions, resulting in loss of revenues and massive layoffs. Rightsizing must be prioritized over downsizing. The optimal utilization of existing human resources is essential at this time. The second phase is the recovery phase. Companies must accept the new normal and reimagine their workforce and workplace. During these uncertain times, the workforce is under tremendous pressure. Hence, the role of leadership is critical for motivating and training employees to cope with changing circumstances under Covid-19 efficiently. Remote working is new for many companies in Pakistan, and it is proving a good strategy in some places. However, some companies require a hybrid form of arrangement and need workers on the field to perform daily tasks.

There is a need to manage our response in a positive way. We need to stay mentally strong and start re-training our human resource to adapt to the new normal.

MR. IJAZ NISAR,
CEO CLUB PAKISTAN & CEO TODAY MAGAZINE

Mr Ijaz Nisar talked about leadership challenges in COVID-19 environment. While stressing the importance of life and wellbeing, he said that we must focus on health and mental wellbeing before worrying about livelihoods and jobs. Secondly, how we respond in the current pandemic will impact both life and livelihoods for years to come. There are three things to consider with regards to planning our response. The first is understanding the situation. The second is preparing the response, and the last is obtaining results. The situation and results are beyond our control so we must focus on our response. There is a need to manage our response positively. We need to stay mentally strong and start re-training our human resource to adapt to the new normal.

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Topic: Minimizing fire hazards through proper town planning

MS. IQRA MUSADDAQ, HEAD OF LEGAL AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS, IMARAT GROUP OF COMPANIES

Ms Iqra Musaddaq explained the legal implications of COVID-19 on employees and employers. Since 2010 the subject of labour and employment has been devolved to provinces. Each province has had to enact its laws to deal with labour and workforce. The workforce is generally divided into white-collar workers and blue-collar workers. Laws are dealing with the blue-collar workers in Pakistan; however, no laws cater to the white-collar workers, which make up a large chunk of the country's human resource. The white-collar workers are governed entirely by the provisions of their contract. It is, therefore, essential to understand employees' rights and obligations from a legal point of view. An employer has the right to direct its employees to work from home provided that they are equipped with the right resources to perform tasks from home. In the case an employer wants an employee to come to the office, but the employee prefers to work from home, then the bottom line is that employee has to go to work. A more policy-oriented solution would be to talk to the HR department and come up with an arrangement that is workable for all parties involved. However, if that cannot be arranged, then the employer has the right to take action against the employee refusing to come to the office, including terminating the job contract. With regards to the confidentiality of company data, it is the responsibility of the employers to ensure that necessary safeguards are put in place to protect company data. Moreover, in the case of unfair termination, courts mostly rule in favour of employees so companies must consider this aspect when planning for risk mitigation. There are specific laws in Pakistan for protecting the rights of blue-collar workers. In the case an organization faces shut down for a consecutive period of 14 days due to any pandemic or unforeseen circumstances, the workers are entitled to full paid leave for 14 days. However, if the shutdown goes beyond 14 days, then the employer must issue a one-month notice before terminating the service of the employees.

Contact mapping has become crucial now. We need to install more cameras in offices to monitor employee's movement and to gather contact information to prevent the spread of Covid-19

MR. SHAFAAT R. HASHMI,
CEO BRANDBEAT ADVERTISING & TECKROSS.

Mr Shafaat R. Hashmi elaborated on innovative approaches to human resource management amid COVID-19. He explained that this pandemic was more like the titanic hitting the iceberg and leaving countries searching for lifeboats. The first response to this pandemic came in the form of a global lockdown pushing people to shift to remote working. The service industry can go into work from home mode, but the manufacturing and agriculture sector cannot have its workers working remotely. So they need the right SOPs and social distancing guidelines to protect their workers. Furthermore, contact mapping has become crucial now. More cameras must be installed in offices to monitor employee's movement and to gather contact information to prevent the spread of Covid-19.Global unemployment stands at 20%, which means that one-fifth of the total global workforce is currently unemployed. In the developing world, the issue of unemployment multiples manifolds because there is one hand that feeds ten mouths. So what we are looking at is perhaps 50% of the world population practically at the risk of starvation. We have come up with the 5E model, which encompasses five essential traits needed to respond to the current pandemic. These traits include empathy, efficiency, energy, empowerment and ease. Empowerment in terms of delegating more tasks and authority to employees and trusting them to work efficiently from home is pertinent to running a smooth business amidst the pandemic. Micro-managing people will have negative fallouts including but not limited to job dissatisfaction, increase in turnover rate and mental stress. In regards to an easement, companies need to make it easy for employees to work from home. This includes taking appropriate measures, such as providing internet access and investing in UPS systems to cater to electricity shortages

During the course of discussion, the panelists made additional observations and comments which are appended below.

- **Oystein Bakken on trusting employees to work from home**

  I believe that employees can most certainly be trusted to work remotely. At Telenor, our productivity and engagement level has gone up since we shifted to remote working. With the delegation of trust, employees feel much more motivated and empowered. This element of trust must come from the top, and leaders must exhibit confidence in their employees to carry out their tasks efficiently, even when working from home.

- **Shafaat R. Hashmi on going back to the pre-Covid world**

  We will never go back to the pre-Covid state. We need to adapt to the changing environment and prepare for the post-Covid world, which will be highly digitized. Covid-19 has increased our reliance on digital connectivity and raised the demand for high-skilled workforce. People are now acquiring multiple skills and enhancing their technical knowledge. In the future, self-employment will most likely boom with people offering their skills to multiple companies.

- **Ijaz Nisar on leadership in crisis**

  There are certain qualities that a leader must have to lead a company through any crisis. These are called the 5Cs namely; character, composure, competence, courage and compassion. Courage is of the utmost importance when it comes to leadership, as leaders must make difficult decisions in a crisis.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is a need for companies to come up with creative ways to reduce HR cost through rescaling businesses and human resources.

- Organizations around the globe are beginning to see traditional governance models as obsolete and are shifting towards remote working.

- Resilience, resolve, return, reform, and re-imagination are the traits that top leadership must possess to steer the organization through any crisis

- Working from home allows employees to maintain the right work-life balance and cuts down travelling cost. However, a significant challenge for leadership is whether or not it can trust people to work from home.

- Rightsizing must be prioritized over downsizing. The optimal utilization of existing human resources is crucial at this time.

- Companies must accept the new normal and reimagine their workforce and workplace.

- There are laws related to blue-collar workers but no rules cater to the white-collar workers who make up a large chunk of

- Pakistan's human resource. White-collar workers are governed entirely by the provisions of their contract.

- With regards to the confidentiality of company data, it is the responsibility of the employers to ensure necessary safeguards are put in place to protect data.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Although there is a shortage of legal provisions for protecting employees' rights, in the case of unfair termination, courts mostly rule in favour of employees.

- If an organization is shut down for a consecutive period of 14 days due to any unforeseen circumstances, the blue-collar workers are legally entitled to full paid leave for 14 days.

- However, if the shutdown goes beyond this period, then the employer must issue a one-month notice before terminating the service of the workers.

- The manufacturing and agriculture sector cannot have its workers working remotely. They need proper SOPs and social distancing guidelines.

- Contact mapping is vital to curb the spread of Covid-19. More cameras can be installed in offices to monitor employee's movement and to gather contact information.

- Empowering employees by delegating more authority and trusting them to work from home is pertinent to running a smooth business amidst the pandemic.

- Micro-managing people is demeaning and will have negative fallouts including job dissatisfaction, increase in turnover rate and mental stress.

- Companies need to ensure that their workforce can work from home; this includes providing them with internet access and investing in UPS systems to cater to electricity shortages.