

**Impact of Covid-19 on Employees through the lens of
Digitalization -Work-Life Balance and the Role of HRM**



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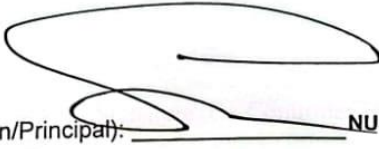
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Abstract

COVID-19's restrictions have compelled businesses all around the world to speed their business transformation to digital operations. Human resource management (HRM) is at the core of these shifts, assisting firms in navigating the uncertain present and future. HRM must manage people in firms during a crisis to maintain company continuity and have a balance between work and life. Changes in rules, procedures, workspaces, association systems, health and safety of workers are becoming increasingly important as the future brings more flexible, remote-friendly, digital working standards. Besides, the ever-changing technology significantly impacted the working of employees in remote areas. Hence, the need for adapting of new technology cannot be ignored. Henceforth, in-light with above mentioned problem this study makes an attempt to understand the impact of COVID-19 on employees through the lens of digitalization - work-life balance and the Role of HRM.

The study employed qualitative research design. By employing purposive sampling method, semi-structured interviews were conducted, where participants were chosen from IT-industry of Pakistan. The research work covers the issues that HRM experienced because of Covid-19 crisis in terms of managing employees when they worked remotely and their work-life balance. According to the expert interviews performed in IT-industry in Pakistan, human resource management must consider developing new regulations for hybrid working methods in response to the present pandemic problem. For instance, maintaining working hours for employees. Employees should be asked not to work after 6 or 7 pm. In addition, psychology workshops must be conducted to ensure the well-being of the employees.

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Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

The pandemic (Covid-19) has driven enterprises to hasten their transition to digital operations. This transition has constrained the (HRM) human resource management to steer employees in an unexpected situation. The human resource management has a significant role to play by assisting the staffs in using digital platforms to admission to their jobs, and on the other side to assist organizations in their exertions to continue business processes as smoothly as possible (Gigauri, 2020).

This pandemic has disrupted the companies processes and caused organizational development managers to think in a different manner. They had to adjust their roles for required practices such as social distancing and working remotely at all levels. To avoid the spreading of the Covid-19, companies have switched to these practices and replaced face-to-face appointments with email and video conferencing, where HR managers have to do a challenging task of managing all these operations as well as the employees. The employees' health and well-being during these tough times is of utmost importance for HR managers. Therefore, they must be motivating, even after millions of workers being laid off or furloughed. HRM needs to keep employees engaged and connected regarding all the factors in the new normal (Lewis, 2020).

The great deal of discussions happening all around the world on the impacts of Covid-19 and on how it has impacted the working practices and human resource management, much of the comment on the topics tends to be of offering observations or on having general content and on how this is going to be the practices in the long haul. This new practice of remote working will become the norm, or that the working environment will have flexible practices. While this may be what is required of the situation currently, as this is a global pandemic, we need to realize its implications on working practices and wellbeing of employees as well as on HRM in specific frameworks. It is likely that every country will have its own changes, but to consider that given constitutional differences of each country, there will be

localized nuances. For example, in Australia, through a survey and interviews with managers, the research stated that not all industries were negatively impacted, some of them such as healthcare, public administration, insurance and finance and others like mining have reported to have a positive impact (Aitken-Fox et al 2020). Consequently, the IT industry of Pakistan has not gained significant attention in context with well-being being of employees. Henceforth, this study attempts to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on employees, through the lens of digitalization specifically the role of HRMin maintaining the well-being of the employees in IT-industry of Pakistan.

1.2. Research Questions

For this study, the theoretical background in the literature aided in directing the questions of the study. Research questions for this study are the following:

1. What is impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the Human Resource Management practices the public/private IT Companies of Pakistan?
2. How HRM can assist businesses/IT industry in their transition to digitalization to cope with Covid-19 pandemic?
- 3: How did HRM in the IT industry respond to the crisis for their workers' adaption to the new norm?

1.3. Motivation of the study

Remote work hasn't been addressed well in the existing literature and especially in the context of developing countries, there is scanty work conducted in the area of HRM practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. Trend of remote work has gained significant importance and the idea has flourished well due to various reasons including the Covid-19 pandemic. The workforce in "Remote Work" is out of sight, and HRM practiced before were related on rules inside an organizational building. Thus, workforce management is a huge challenge in this regard. Over the past year, the HR practices in IT industry have considerably improved in the wake of Covid-19 but still the HR processes are not well

structured and lack proper implementation.

1.4. Objective of the study

The study deals to have important influence on Pakistani IT based tech organizations and managers in context with the management of on-going crisis through the lens of Human Resource Management and in the light of various strategies and associated challenges, issues and then put forth some recommendations based on the findings, which could be helpful for managers and executives to efficiently manage their workforce. Overall, this investigation contributes to academia by underlining and emphasizing that digitization is a business opportunity, however, remote working has an impact on maintaining balance between life and work, as sharing space for working as well as living can significantly result in causing stress.

1.5. Structure of the Study

The section of the study is organized in the following manner. The first chapter offers introduction, highlighting the background, objective, and questions of the study. the second chapter is literature review. A review of the literature from previous investigations is offered, as well as a discussion of digitalization theory. Additionally, the chapter shed light on the notion of balance between work and life of employees in IT-industry of Pakistan. Along with the ramifications of Covid-19, as well as the country's crisis effects. The third chapter sheds light on the methodology section, where the method of data collection and design of the research work is discussed. The Fourth chapter highlights the findings of the study, which is later followed by discussion. The last chapter is conclusion, where contribution, implications and future research is offered.

Figure 1

Research Structure



Literature Review

In this chapter a review of the literature from previous investigations is offered, as well as a discussion of digitalization theory. Additionally, the chapter shed light on the notion of balance between work and life of employees in IT-industry of Pakistan, along with the ramifications of Covid-19, as well as the country's crisis effects.

2.1. Covid-19 Crisis

Several international organizations agree that the present COVID-19 situation will have far-reaching consequences for society in the short and long term (WHO, 2020). In 2020, during March and April, hospitals in various nations were running at full capacity, resulting in thousands of deaths. Countries all over the globe had gone under lockdown to varied degrees, hence the citizens had to live in isolation from one another (Lippens, et al., 2020). On the basis of unemployment systems, contracts of employment had been suspended in enterprises which were not able to obey with requirements of social-distancing or had seen an instant drop in demand of their goods and services (Lippens, et al., 2020). Longer term, there is concern that what began as a health crisis may morph into a major economic catastrophe, with long-term growth slowing and unemployment rising (Mogaji, 2020). In terms of the specific circumstances in Pakistan as of April 2020, confirmed thousands of cases of COVID-19. There were several restrictions. Citizens were only permitted to leave their homes to acquire necessities. Working was permitted; however, all businesses were expected to allow the majority of their workers to work from home. Despite Pakistan's goal of allowing individuals to continue working, COVID-19 was generating a massive surge in unemployment (Lippens, et al., 2020).

2.2. Digital HRM practices

Technology is a significant enabler for quicker, inexpensive, and better delivery of HR service, and it may have both transformative and unintended negative consequences in some circumstances (Thite, 2019). However, it has been witnessed that communication through mobile or online has several advantages as well as disadvantage. When a new notification arrives, employees are compelled to shift their concentration from one APP, online-platform, or venture to the next, jeopardizing productivity and cooperation. According to the report (Igloosoftware, 2020), 55% of employees use at least two company-approved applications on a daily basis solely to accomplish their duties. Simultaneously, 57% of workers use one app which is not sanctioned from the company. This collaboration tool weariness also threatens knowledge sharing. It has been witnessed that almost half of the employees feel lazy as they cannot find a particular document and thus lesser work enthusiasm (Igloosoftware, 2020). Besides, the ongoing pandemic has increased the dependence on technology due to WFH (Hai et al., 2021). However, the increase in dependence on technology has caused several problems particularly to employees with higher age. In addition, the COVID 19 restriction has resulted in conducting the business online. Henceforth all the HR practises are also monitored through using new technology. For instance, digital data and web dashboards are being utilized to analyse employee workload and performance which record the number of sales made, the number of tickets sold, number of hours spent online and the number of phone calls made and/or clients served within that period (Narayandas, Hebbar, & Liangliang, 2020).

2.3. HRM's Role and Remote Working

In the new digital ecosystem, it is essential for employees to enhance their information, or acquire new abilities. The given research is motivated by the current unforeseen crisis's influence on organizations and continuity in business. The purpose of this investigation is to recognise the vicissitudes befallen over the corporations in Pakistan as a reaction to the crisis. The current position of the new coronavirus outbreak has caused severe vicissitudes all across the world. Both businesses and customers shifted to digital modes and models as soon as this framework was implemented. The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened the importance of digital transformation for businesses and more than that, for the workers around the world, it became a necessity to develop essential abilities to use technology in order to work remotely (Sheppard, 2020). Digital technologies enable virtual effort as well as the automation of critical duties and decision-making (Parry & Battista, 2019). This infection has highlighted the fact that the most in-demand talents for employees are digital, but also collaborative (Sheppard, 2020).

All the difficulties occurring around the globe are interrelated and they inspire the establishments of different sizes and magnitude to adapt and respond to the particular transformation along with managing the personnel properly (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). In the recent past, Pandemic Covid-19 has restructured and reshaped the extraordinary conditions which demand human resource management and therefore the managers of the field have to handle the employees given the contemporary adaptable society's and the workplace's quick changes (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Furthermore, Covid-19 will have a significant influence on work, perhaps causing career shock for a large number of people (Akkermans et al., 2020). HRM must now cope with the rising pressure and stress on their personnel generated by working remotely when the lines between work and family have become vague (Giurge & Bohns, 2020).

Previous projections predicted a rise in the number of online employees and platform staff. This necessitates reskilling requirements from the organization's personnel and its managers (World Economic Forum, 2018). In an investigation, it was discovered that corporations must be ready and organized to turbulences in the future by the bringing in technologies based on platforms, and adapting them along with development of models for business consequently (Sheppard, 2020). Previous research concluded that developing technologies – such as “digital platforms, robots, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and blockchain” – will eventually bring about changes in HR performance roles (Parry & Battista, 2019). Employees must unlearn and gain new skills in order to adapt to the new and improved digital work environment (Sheppard, 2020). According to the literature work in past, it was found that human resource management should aid employees in using sophisticated technology in businesses (Parry & Battista, 2019). Employees who are unassisted and alone are unable to meet all of the problems posed by the pandemic catastrophe. As a result, HR experts should focus on improving the digital abilities and arranging for health and safety of employees (Parry & Battista, 2019). In this regard, authorities acknowledge the relevance and prominence of lifelong learning and developing abilities; hence, using online training sessions (Narayandas et al., 2020). According to a recent poll, Chinese enterprises spend in resources rather than preserving them, in order to consolidate their decent ability (Narayandas et al., 2020). the key issues in today's world are corporate survival and continuity, employee well-being, and customer-oriented models (Singer-Velush et al., 2020).

When new technologies emerge, they bring working flexibility and allow employees to work from home. HR management is responsible for implementing proper policies and performance frameworks to guarantee that employees satisfy expectations, at the same time as

checking to reduce the bad effects of digital working on social relationships (Parry & Battista, 2019).

In an extensive study conducted in 9 European countries involving 869 teams and around 11,011 employees confirm that working remotely is not advantageous to all employees; When co-workers work from home, team performance decreases and information exchange suffers (Van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2019). The performance of the employees is greatly affected by three main factors namely, job feature, job happiness and the devotion to the work. However, when the working hours are being extended (more than 8 hours), the functioning of team is affected significantly (Van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2019). The sprightliest teams, which have previously proven to be efficient while working remotely, might become unproductive while operating fully remotely (Comella-Dorda et al., 2020). All the above findings imply that the HR position should address these issues and, as a result, arrange work flexibility.

Although job pressures penetrate into home life, affecting employees' mental health, the opposite tendency is also observed. Several studies have discovered that working remotely has resulted in fewer distinctions between personal and professional life. This has led personal stress to spill over into the workplace, resulting in exhaustion (Peasley et al., 2020). The research conducted by Peasley et al., (2020) indicates that while working from home has tons of advantages, it can have troubles for both the employees and the managers in terms of their well-being as this gets the “mix of business and home life” (Peasley et al., 2020). Therefore, it is note-worthy that health and safety has significant influence on workers enthusiasm and hence has effects on performance of personnel. The pandemic has prioritized the physiological and emotional wellness of personnel in the company (Spence, 2020). Since many staff members are looking forward for this phase to be over and they may return to workplaces, others prefer to continue with this way of

work and life. As a result, firms who are redesigning their workplaces should consider these differences (Spence, 2020).

As it has been witnessed that many HR panels focus on resolving issues by developing new rules and processes, however, once developed and implemented, these policies are seldom revised, and eventually, they lead to supplementary difficulties — particularly now, when the situation is altering so fast (Spence, 2020). The "one-size-fits-all" approach will not allow for the type of distinct thinking and creativity that results in the most inventive solutions. They are considered to state that in order to be genuinely effective, HR executives must make changes and build new fundamental capabilities such as a complexity mind-set (Slavin et al., 2020). The Microsoft Workplace Analytics research revealed that office hours were extended because workers who worked remotely checked in earlier and logged out later because they allotted time during their day for personal affairs as well (Singer-Velush et al., 2020). Despite the fact that the meeting duration has been decreased to 30 minutes, most managers were required to assist workers in prioritizing work and reducing the negative consequences of the shared environment of home and work (Singer-Velush et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the number of night and weekend occupations has grown, indicating a disturbance in balance in work and life (Singer-Velush et al., 2020).

Furthermore, social isolation has a significant detrimental impact on employees. As a result, HR professionals are needed to maintain some form of social engagement amongst workers who work remotely. To overcome loneliness, interacting, meetings between the groups, and virtual interactions must be organized, as work relationships are a key source of inspiration (Singer-Velush et al., 2020). Many HR directors are rethinking roles in order to keep flexibility, assigning tasks, and procedures at work along with maintaining the unusual trend toward retaining meetings

on video calls and events hosting virtually on platforms (Narayandas, Hebbar, & Liangliang, 2020).

HR managers are maintaining the flexibility of work and hours along with collaboration by redesigning jobs and duties to accommodate all employees at their own conveniences. The workplace managers are also trying to keep the shift towards e-meetings and virtual events as smooth as possible. When organizations exercise collaborations in redesigning jobs and work processes, it results in happier and healthier workforce which is much more efficient (Donovan, 2019). According to the findings of the study done with Chinese enterprises, it was determined that the communications which were preciously over emails, is now more personal as the employees use audio applications more frequently for quicker response (Narayandas, Hebbar, & Liangliang, 2020). Therefore, HRM intends to aid organisations to evolve the work procedure to a more digitalised workspace by enhancing and adding in skills to the workers and creating adaptability in the work environment by working over the virtual space and keeping that balance between work-life in order to maintain the health of the employees and keeping them motivated for better efficiency and productivity.

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the research process, including the technique of data collection, the design of the research, and the procedures for data analysis

3.1. Study Design

Approaches mostly adapted by the scholars include qualitative research or quantitative research or both which is mixed method (Patten, & Newhart, 2017). The method employed in this study is qualitative method. Like existing studies (Madden et al., 2018) in similar arena, this study also used a narrative research technique since the events corresponded to organizational processes of knowledge. Additionally, data was collected using purposive sampling. Since this approach aids in reducing the rate of error in the research and to signify the accurate information of the population, as mentioned in the report (Berndt, 2020). Beside an attempt is made to gather all correct and authentic information to establish our connection study combos. The researcher employed interviews to gather the data from the potential participants for this study. However, prior to gathering the data the consents for the study was acquired, and a declaration of disclosure was also signed. Furthermore, data validation was done in conjunction with the literature study, which contributed in determining the validity of the outcomes (Almanasreh, Moles, & Chen, 2019). The approach used to carry out the study is guided by the research topic, which is through the questions of the study (Doody, & Bailey, 2016).

3.2. Data Collection

In order to gain the maximum insight, this study has conducted interviews to find out the impact of the pandemic crisis on the organizations' Human Resource Management, work-life balance, and digitization. The semi-structured open ended interviews were conducted with experts,

providing space to reveal opinions, views and reflections of the interviewee, therefore, this method was considered the most affective for the research (King, & Hugh-Jones, 2018). The processes outlined above were used to acquire primary data from relevant specialists. Following a comprehensive selection of the study subject, as well as the necessary preparations and planning, a series of interviews were performed. The data was then assessed and analysed when transcriptions of the recorded interviews were completed. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations were given of the results.

3.3. Method and procedure to gather data: Interview

The major information for the research was conducted via expert interviews which were taken during the time duration of January and February 2021. The candidates were selected by employing “purposive sampling method”. The participants for the interview for this study were chosen according to their individualities and position in the company.

Expert interviews are a viable research tool in some cases, especially in the exploratory phase, when it provides a focused and effective method for data collecting and quickly achieves ideal findings (Roulston, & Choi, 2018). By the definition of the term, expert is defined as someone who consists of technical along with interpretative knowledge of the processes in a precise aptitudes field (Roulston, & Choi, 2018). They not only have the methodical and programmed information, but they also have involvement (Mergel et al., 2019). An expert possesses area-specific information and know-how of the processes, decisions involved, and approved behaviours, as well as access to information helping the research, and they have the capacity to solve problems in their relevant field of expertise (Roulston, & Choi, 2018). Researchers have

brought to light the following criteria of assessing the capabilities of the candidates: learning and abilities, status in the corporation, knowledge in the field, recognition by public (Libakova & Sertakova, 2015).

The preceding principles have derived the ideologies which will be developed in the requested interviews from the experts. These criteria's start from the theoretical knowledge of the interviewee on HR related topics, their level of expertise in the relevant field they currently are in and the experience in working with managerial issues in solving problems created by the pandemic (Figure 2). Therefore, the interviewees were invited to participate in the study and have connections with different organizations across Pakistan in the IT industry (Table 1). They have had HR related conversations either with the HR managers or have direct relations with their supervisors or subordinates on day-to-day basis with respect to HR related problems and issues so that people may view the current pandemic circumstances and try to solve the daily problems with following the social distancing protocol.

Figure 2

The selection criteria to choose appropriate expert for the interview for the study (Gigauri, 2020)

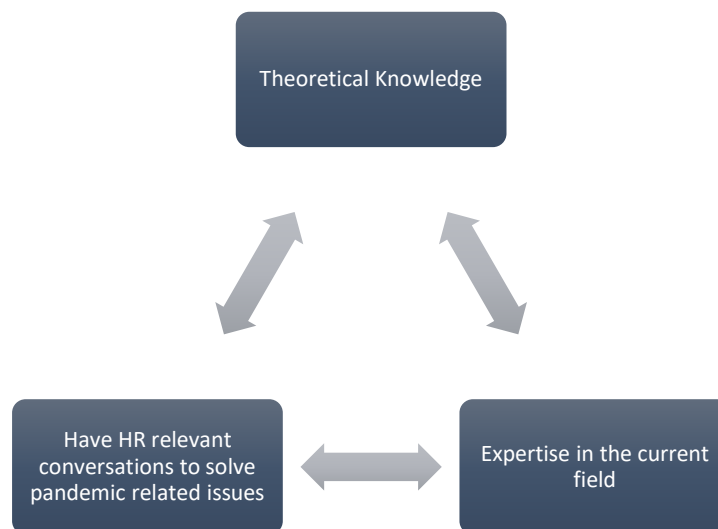


Table 1 illustrates information of participants. Several professionals of different ages were approached to get information regarding the difficulties and benefits of working at home due to pandemic in IT-firms. The following are the respondents' job titles and ages:

Table 1. Information of Participants

	Employee Designation	Company Name	Company's Purpose	Size Approx - No of employees
1	Business Analyst	NETSOL	Software Company - Automobiles Softwares	1300
2	Quality Assurance Manager	Ibex Global	Software company - Customer Support Softwares	30,000
3	Program Architect Manager	Noon UAE	Supply Chain Company - Ecommerce	10,000
4	Product Manager	Emblem Technologies	Software company - Freelance Projects	70
5	IT-manager	Telenor	Telecom service provider	20,000
6	Program Architect Manager	Quartz	Call centres Software Company	5000
7	Business Development Manager	Zong	Telecom service provider	4500
8	Software Consultant	Babble Germany:	Language learning Software Platform	750
9	Project Manager	Arbisoft	Customer Service Providers / E-learning platform	1200
10	Client Implementations Specialist	Arbisoft	Customer Service Providers / E-learning platform	1200
11	Quality Assurance Manager	i2c	Banking Softwares	3500
12	Lead Software Consultant	GagaMuler	Software for construction sites	45
13	Strategic Cloud Engineer	Google	We all know g00gle	139,995

14	Principal Machine Learning Engineer	Hazen.ai	Machine Learning softwares	30
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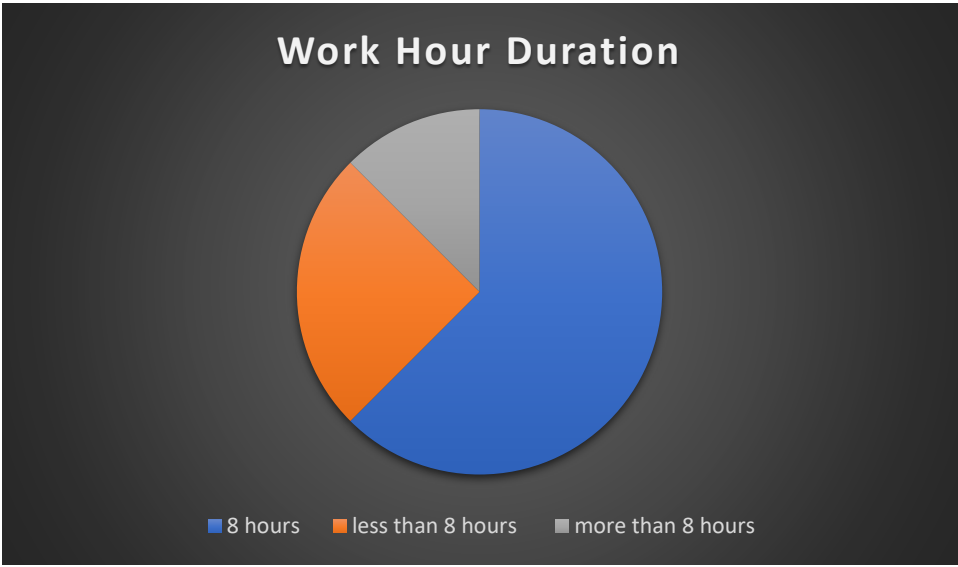
As shown in table 1, the majority of the participants in the current study were managers in various IT-house departments. Only two employees among the participants were at different position. This was appropriate for the study as managers play the key role and take the major decision. Consequently, they can provide additional information regarding the methods that were executed, as well as the challenges or benefits that they faced.

3.3.1. Work Duration and Gender

In this study, work duration refers to the number of years or months that a person has worked for the specific country in Pakistan. Moreover, the gender here refers to the proportion of males and females working in respective companies who took part in the survey.

Figure 3

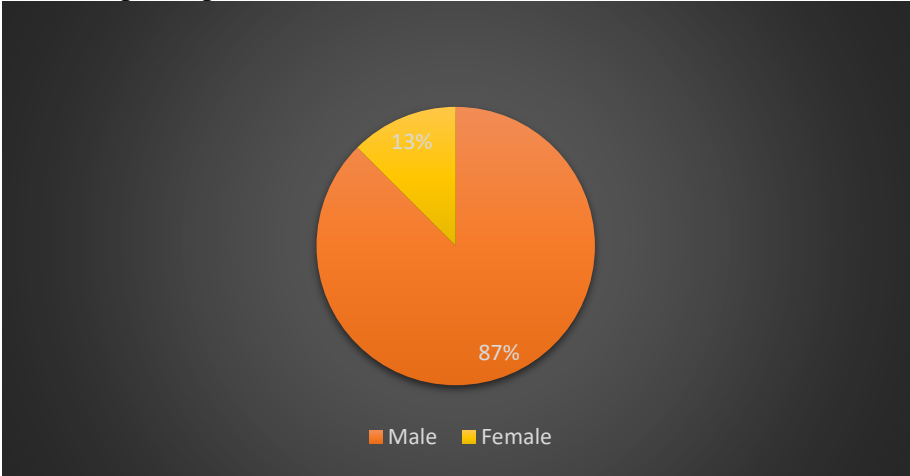
Working Hours



As seen in the Figure 3, most of the employees making 63% work almost for 8 hours in a day. Whereas the other 25% worked less than eight hours a day and the rest 13% worked more than 8 hours in a day.

Figure 4

Gender of the participants



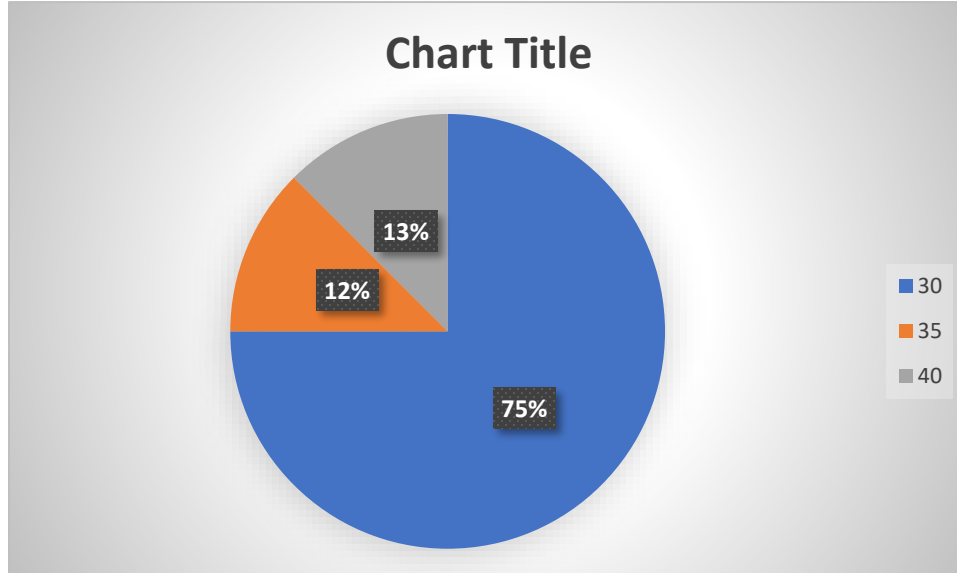
The Figure 4 depicts the gender statistics of the study. As illustrated, most of the participants in the study were male making up to 87% whereas the rest 13% were females. Despite the fact that there are female employees, however due to on-going pandemic the number of participants who anticipated in this study were just 8.

3.3.2. Age of the Participants

The figure 5 details about the age of the participants. Majority of the participation in this study are around 30 years, being 75% while the other 13 per cent of the participants were around forty years and the rest 12 per cent were around 35 years.

Figure 5

Age of the participants

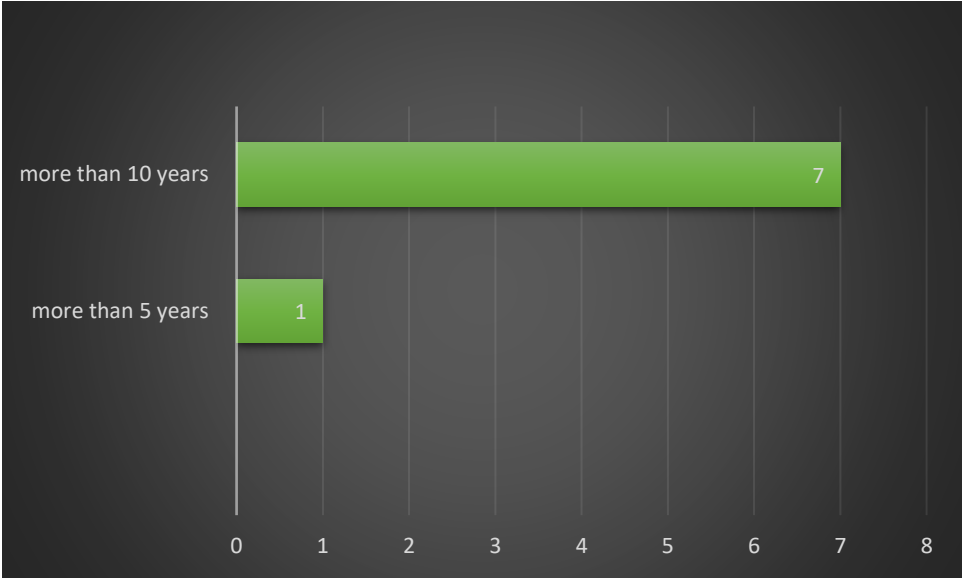


3.3.3. Work Experience

Since most of the employees had been with the company for a longer period of time and were in higher positions, the majority of the employees had the experience of over ten years, as

demonstrated in figure 6. As Illustrated, only one of the participants had experience of only five years as a consultant in the company.

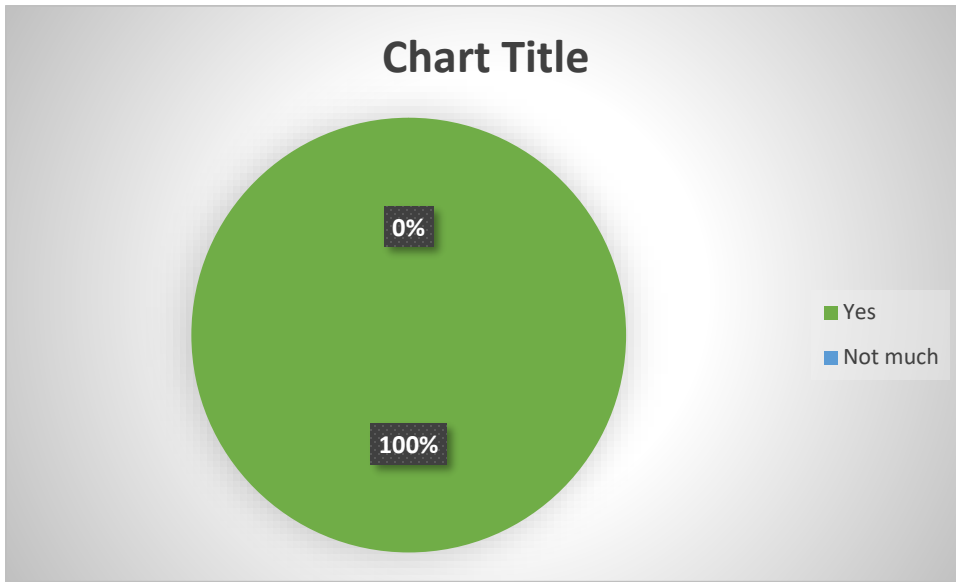
Figure 6
Work Experience



3.3.4. Lifestyles

As depicted in the figure 7, it can be concluded that majority of the participants personal life was affected due to pandemic. Although the image illustrates 100% result showing, a little diversity can be accepted since the number of participants in the study are less.

Figure 7
Change in private life because of the pandemic

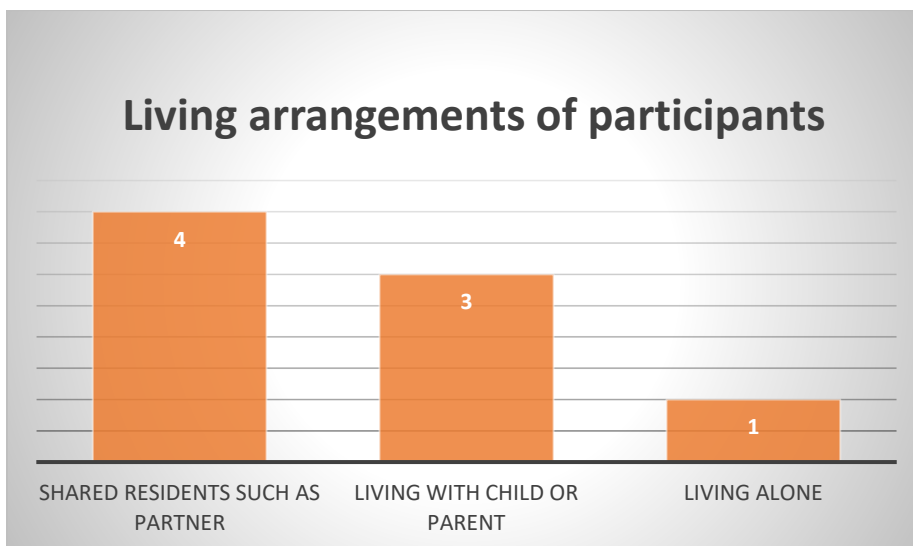


3.3.5. Living arrangements of participants

As can be seen in figure 8, almost half of the participants (46 percent, 4) shared a residence with at least one adult, such as a partner. The other 26 percent (3) of them lived with at least one adult and one person requiring special care, such as children. The rest 19% (1) of the population lived alone.

Figure 8

Living arrangements of participants



3.4. Sample and Size

The researchers have suggested that in a qualitative research method, the study will reach admirable result only if there are ten or more interviews with the experts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They have also suggested the saturation concept, which has been backed up by Shaheen, & Pradhan, (2019), that the size of the qualitative research sampling has been the nonprobability method and it depends on the concept of saturation (Shaheen, & Pradhan, 2019). When the saturation is observed, the data collection should stop as the analysis will no longer be providing any new insights (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). The number and the duration of interviews should be limited to as long as there is increment in knowledge and sampling should be closed when there are no new understandings achieved (Shaheen, & Pradhan, 2019).

For this study, the total of 23 experts were contacted via email and calls, and only 14 of the employees were interviewed for the study. The participants for the study were employed by utilising the professional networks and the purpose of the study was explained along with the research questions. The experts provided their experiences and insights to analyse the influence of the on-going crisis.

3.5 The guideline of Interview

The interviews were conducted over online video platform: and were conducted in English. After the interview session, the transcripts of the content were given a shape for analysis. Each interview took between 30-50 minutes and were prescheduled according to the convenience of the interviewee. Their personal information will be kept private, and their identities will not be revealed to any third party. Open-ended questions were asked, and it was ensured that no private information was taken from the employees. Besides, the interview ensured that only questions

related to research is asked to stay within the boundaries of the subject. Their important viewpoints or additional insights were also asked at the end of the interview for a complete understanding of the interviewees approach towards the situation of work-life balance during the pandemic times.

The study questions were based on existing literature, and the analysis was based on the interviewees' responses and capacity to submit additional questions. Since all the questions were unstructured and open-ended, extensive replies were expected. These broad and wide-spread answers made the analysis to be of much value. The research interview comprised of 8 questions in total, comprising the study's 5 primary subjects, illustrated below in table 2.

Table 2: Themes of the Main Interviews

Part	Theme
I	General inquiry regarding the experience of the experts and specialized branch of knowledge
II	Concerns regarding the Covid-19-effect on enterprises and the issues that employees encounter/ HRM
III	Questions concerning the pandemic's problems – “work-life balance and digital inclusion”
IV	HRM-related concerns concerning the organization's approach to the crisis
V	Future consequences and suggestions for managers and businesses
VI	If appropriate, additional points of view and opinions

This study's framework examines the issues in the third and fourth sections of the theme. The experts during their interviews were asked what they felt about the dramatic changes that had

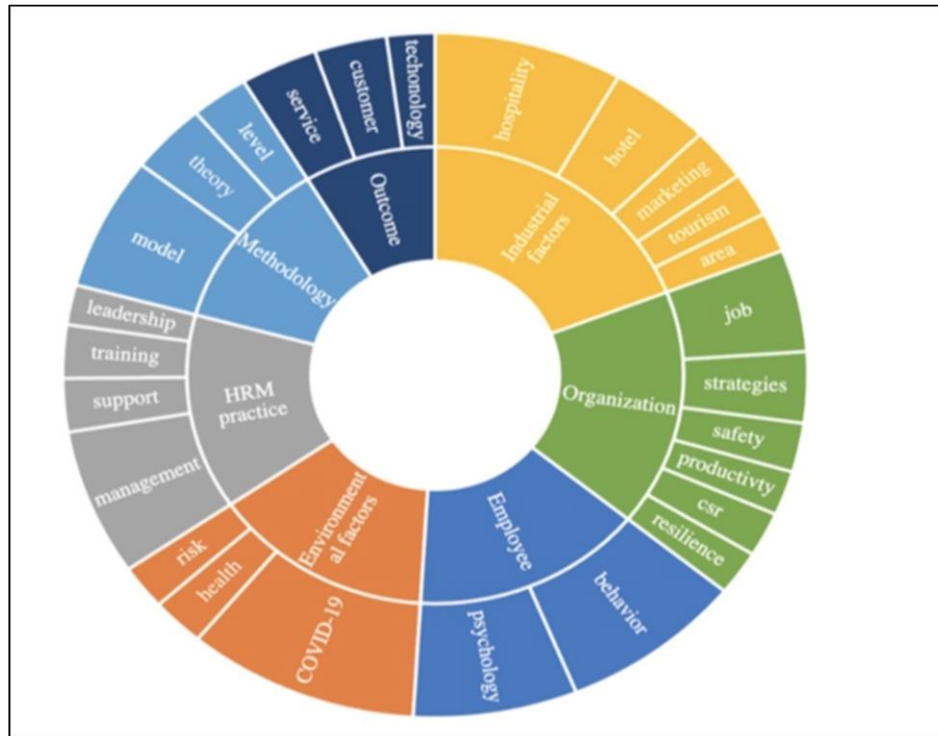
occurred in their organizations made when the pandemic hit and what types of amendments did the management make in reaction to an unexpected catastrophe, as well as whether their firms examined any other possibilities

3.6. Data Analysis Procedure

Following initial managing and analysis of the data, this study used the qualitative data analysis method commonly recommended by scholars, which is based on the NVivo method. First, after running open code, this study totally obtained 100 nodes. The nodes were further decoded in sub-nodes. Lastly, clusters were formed. The structure of the node is presented below (Figure 10). The center of the structure illustrates the purpose of the study the impact of Covid on employees and the balance in work life, along with the practices of HRM.

Figure 9

Structure of the node



3.7. Compiling the Data

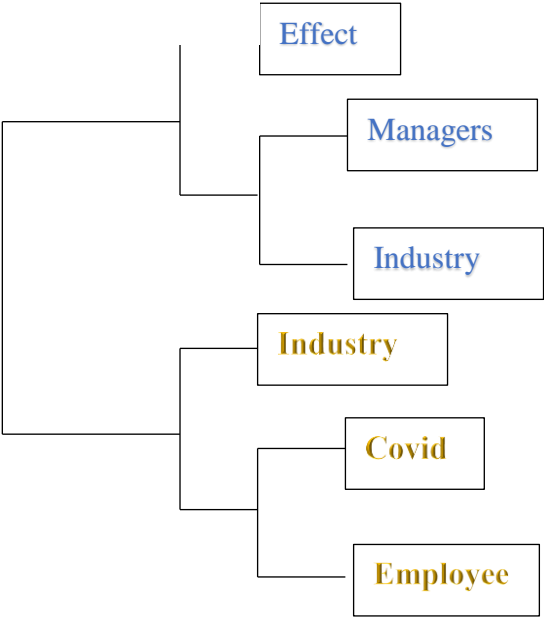
The current study employed NVivo 10 software to compile all of the interview data (Castleberry, 2014). It is critical for data collection into a centralized resource for data analysis and the comprehensive search for data commonality (Cassell, & Bishop, 2019). The research from several perspectives allowed for the organization of data through categorizing the participants for the research, interview questions, or documentation sources, allowing for analysis from various perspectives.

3.8. Disassembling the Data into Codes

The process of searching for the recurring codes and organizing them into a common theme is known as data Analysis (Mihas, 2019). The process required to analyse each question of the interview separately from every participant to attain common codes. Henceforth, this study employed the same method to code the obtained data and information. For this study, themes were assigned to each group. Later the findings were compared to existing literature to assess how the results contribute to the existing body of knowledge, as well as the similarities and differences in findings. Following the analysis phase, the data is provided in the form of text, tables, and graphs. Furthermore, this study places a strong emphasis on graphical data display. This is accomplished through the use of graphs, column and bar charts, and pie charts, which is also performed in the previous section. The codes which were generated are use of updated technology, managing time, managing work task, managing workspace, self-care practises, virtual interaction with workers, and spending time with family (Figure 11).

Figure 11:

Top 6 cluster



3.9. Concluding the Data

The data-driven conclusions are included in the final composition of the study. The relevant components of the study based on the theme which were initially generated are included in the findings. The conclusion explains how the results are aligned with the study's problem statement, objectives, and main research question.

Findings

4.1. Upfront Issues and Inabilities of the organization to contain Pandemic Covid-19

Numerous challenges were confronted by the cooperation, employees and human resource department due to the restriction imposed due to COVID-19. According to the analysis of experts it was determined that some of the primary challenges faced by the cooperation were financial crisis in the company, suspension of various operations, or business closure. Furthermore, in the context of continuity in business, in numerous cases, it was found that there were deficiencies in the system and employees were not prepared. Instead of immediately adjusting to the new reality and launching activities in the face of a pandemic, the corporations were compelled to shut down, and they began to wait for situation to ease.

For instance, one of the participants stated, *“I do not see any structured strategy by businesses to learning how to live and work with the virus”*.

Since, the management had no experiences of working under such crisis, this questioned that culture of the organization and the corporate brand. Another important factor which needed attention was flexibility and the adaption of digitalization when starting to work from remote areas. According to the experts, one of the most serious issues was the ambiguous and contradictory regulations, which were exacerbated by a lack of contact with government institutions.

Another participant stated that *“When rules change regularly and there is no direct communication with regulators, the dangers of levying penalties on corporations grow if a*

company does not fulfil every component of the legislative requirements due to ambiguity and the likelihood of different interpretations”.

Besides, most of the participants in this context had common comments, where there were huge misunderstandings as each day there were changes in the rules from the government which were not announced or updated in the timely manner. Moreover, it was reported by the experts that the stress, anxiety and fear increased in employees. They must now adjust to the new realities of digital procedures and remote working, which necessitates upgrading their abilities in online technologies. Furthermore, the workforce must deal with joblessness or cutbacks of wages as a result of the recession during pandemic. Respondents feel that HRM demonstrates an uncompromising commitment to the success of businesses and the well-being of their workers. Based on the observation of the participants, it can be concluded that, the biggest obstacles encountered by HR managers during the pandemic were a lack of understanding in new technology as well as management of the crisis. Furthermore, they wanted to manage individuals online also had to track the performance of the employee on the basis of remote working. Simultaneously, HRM has faced with dismissals, staff renewal rate, and organizational panic. Furthermore, new safety requirements must be evaluated from the standpoints of the firm and the employees. According to the experts, several enterprises in Pakistan had already hired a labour safety consultant to assist the company and its personnel in adhering to safety standards. Henceforth, it had become necessary to maintain a balance between work and home since most of the employees were working from home and it may cause anxiety within employees

When it comes to working from home, experts say that certain organizations, particularly those in the IT or consulting industries, already offer a flexible work schedule. However, a flexible

work schedule results in endless working hours, which cause disturbance in work- life. Furthermore, many employees desire to be able to keep working online after the epidemic has ended. According to specialists in the interview sessions, firms in Pakistan and HR systems were not technologically or emotionally prepared to operate remotely. Furthermore, many organizations' management has a lack of expertise with stress and change in management. Another important problem identified by experts is HR professionals' capacity to operate independently, remotely and based on results. Earlier, many procedures and operations were done on broadsheet, and management was viewed as staff supervision and monitoring. During the distant working conditions, those traditional ways were called into question, and the need for new processes evolved. However, neither human resource management, nor HR experts, nor workers are prepared to create and implement revolutionary management methods.

“We are living in the age of artificial intelligence, and it is difficult to imagine life without it. This encourages individuals to develop themselves and keep oneself updated with the new technology”.

4.2. Managing the Covid-19 Crisis from an HR Perspective: Digital Transformation

During the pandemic crisis, HRM has assumed increased leadership regarding accountability in a variety of enterprises, focusing their resources on issue resolution. Respondents shared their perspectives on how firms in Pakistan handled with the pandemic situation from an HRM standpoint. During the epidemic, digitalization was viewed as a tool for making commercial activities possible. Furthermore, the relevance of digitization has grown throughout the crisis time. As a result, organizations may now be managed remotely, and the potential of e-commerce has

grown. The epidemic has hastened the digitization of business operations in firms in Pakistan. Working from home is no longer unthinkable for managers. Nonetheless, digitization is not widespread in Pakistan since many businesses reverted to their conventional offline practices after reopening. While some Pakistani businesses consider internet platforms as only a means to return to their previous reality, others see them as a means to an end. While some Pakistani employees in IT-industry consider internet platforms as only a means to return to their previous reality, others see them as a means to an end. Others took advantage of the full potential of internet technology throughout the crisis to maintain relationships with employees through online team meetings and even to integrate new personnel more swiftly. Like many of the companies in IT-industry in Pakistan have allowed their employees to work from home even after the restrictions have been lifted. Additionally, HRM should assist organizations in determining if some positions will be relocated partially or totally remotely, while other roles that cannot be performed from home should be recognized.

According to interviewee, notwithstanding the harmful effects on “stress, unemployment, and business closures”, some departments have been significantly influenced since they have grown more productive by utilizing digitalized platforms and taking care of development. The specialists emphasize that the pandemic scenario and safety laws have accelerated the practice of working remotely in conjunction with digital channel transformation in IT- firms in Pakistan. There is significant impact on the jobs. Jobs will be drastically altered. As a result, both businesses and workers must get more technology knowledge and expertise, build digital skills, and be more agile, adaptive to changes, and prepared for future uncertainties.

4.3. Employees View on the Influence of Remote Work on Balance of work and life

The findings revealed that there are number of challenges faced by employees while working remotely during the pandemic lockdown. Employees at work are focused on their duties for around 7-8 hours, however working from home entails considerable distractions such as taking care of children, doing other household chores and other activities, and hence employees must accomplish the allotted tasks at night. It was stated by the female participant that they did not know moment they first began and when they ended the task, or where the boundary was between work and home, i.e., how to draw a line between work and home. a participant stated this as :

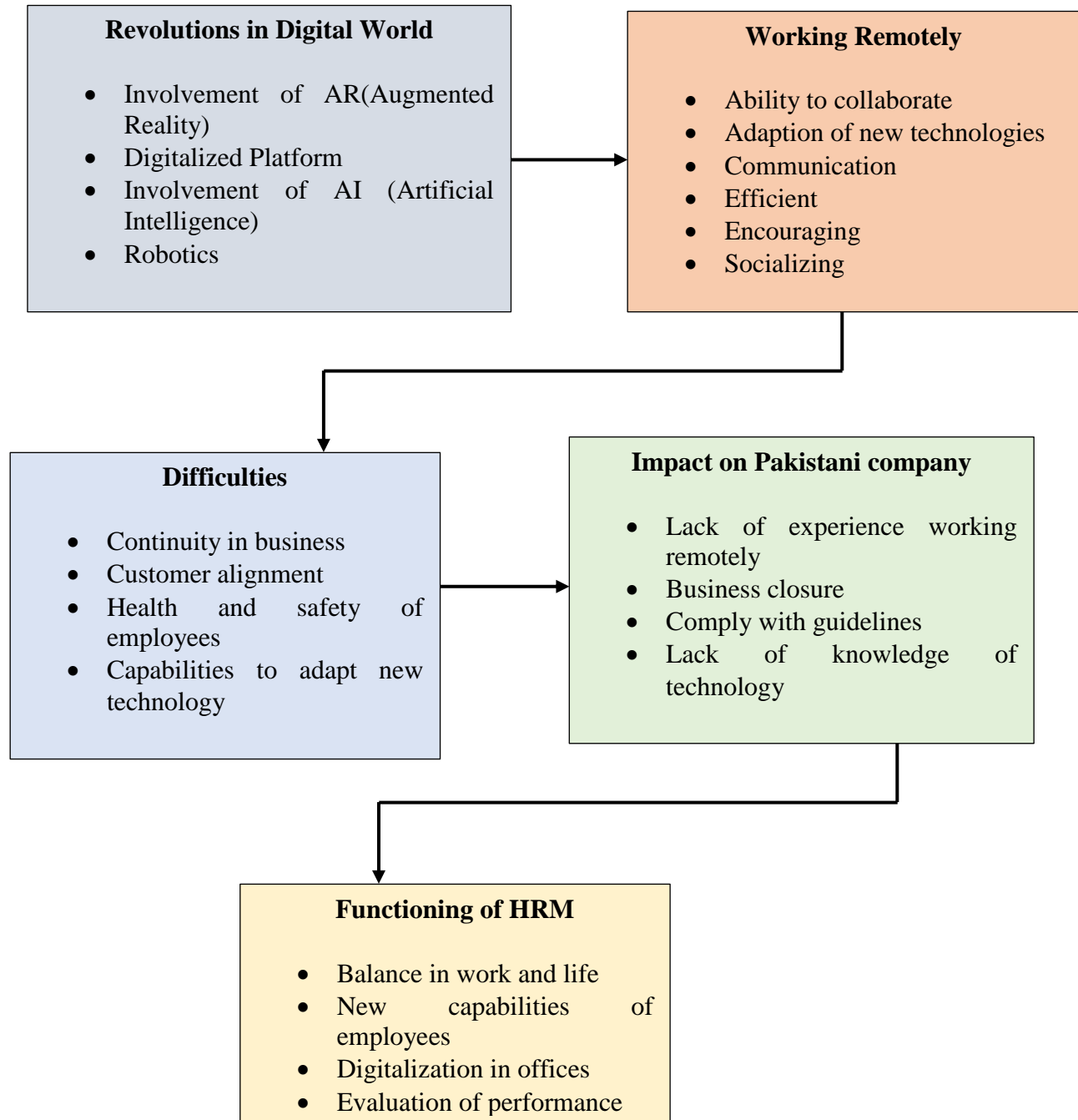
“The residence, where they slept, is intertwined with their professional contacts”

Additionally, if other members in the family were working from home the timings would clash, which also significantly influenced the stress level of employees and increased pressure and tension. As a result, HRM should assist the workforce in arranging the area and timetables for working from home while taking individual characteristics or situations into account in order to preserve balance in work and life. Though working online may be advantageous for businesses, the most significant negative is a loss of socializing. When moving to the remote mode, the respondents stated that there should be enough space, with the intention of holding meetings at offices on occasion. This will lead to a more relaxed state of mind and improved mental wellness, in addition to greater worker enthusiasm and productivity. Experts feel that, despite the fact that certain vocations are completely remote, Face-to-face meetings should be planned on a regular

basis to fight employee isolation and strengthen social relationships. Figure 14 highlights the key findings of the study and answers the research questions.

Figure14

HRM being impacted by COVID-19



Discussion

The chapter discussion and outlines the recommendations for practice and research in overcoming some of the issues that today's organizations confront as they react to COVID-19's grand challenge. Furthermore, the researcher believes that looking across disciplines can provide additional insight for how firms might modify their HR procedures in ways that can ease the challenges mentioned above and improve employees' capacity to thrive during such dynamic and unpredictable times. IT-industry, in particular, which focuses on the identification, appraisal, and exploitation of possibilities that arise in fundamentally confusing and dynamic situations, is likely to provide some useful insights.

As previously established, the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have severe socio-psychological, physical, and technological consequences for employees as they struggle to adjust to dramatically transformed work settings. Despite the fact that some of these challenges are plainly unique, necessitating the invention of new methods and theories for resolving them, some of the issues that employees are today confronted with are similar to those that employee face on a daily basis. Hence following measures can be taken by HR experts to maintain balance.

5.1 Reactions of Human Resources Professionals to the Impact of remote working

The major effects of work from home (WFH) include occupational skill needs, psychological stress, family conflict, and WFH culture. HR professionals must respond to these impacts with feedback and strategies.

5.1.1 Advancement of Skills while working remotely: Advanced Training Content and Approaches

Employees lost enticement to develop in their jobs during the epidemic because they worked too much from home. Employees required to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge in order to thrive in their current environment. As more remote workers want to improve their skills, the HR professionals should take the lead in organizing appropriate skill training to fulfill employees' desire to learn and grow. Personnel that work from remote areas will, predictably, be instructed on how to improve their performance and help the company's expansion in the post-pandemic age (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Several real-world examples show that HRM has found answers to the pandemic's challenges. These initiatives, including as improvements in training approaches and content, assist in improving employees' talents, motivating them, and reducing mental stress (Zou et al., 2020a; Gigauri, 2020). Online virtual training designs are increasingly being used to inspire human resource managers. Employees who work from home can develop a variety of skills by taking online courses (Hamouche, 2021). Henceforth, HR departments responsibility is to deliver trainings and programs which needs assessments and collaborating with other subdivisions to construct online training programs to fulfil the demands of their own uninterrupted growth in a scenario of pandemic. It is possible that in the future (Alhat, 2020), online virtual classrooms may become the new standard for training amid the reign of the brand-new pneumonia. In addition to traditional occupational “skills training, the current crisis has resulted in new training requirements, such as ICT”. ICT, to be precise, may be utilized to teach recruits in workplace and

cooperation skills. As regular job content reduces and the WFM model stays intact, many businesses perceive the need to plan for a long-term epidemic. At present, the most efficient use of time is to improve staff abilities through training (Hamouche, 2021). This is fueling an increase in training programs based on technology are in high demand all across the world. Many employees who work from home must often utilize computers and the Internet. Human resource professionals recognize the significance of information security training. Besides employees who are working remotely must be given elementary training on enhancing the cybersecurity and learn how to properly avoid information dangers and private corporate data disclosures.

5.1.2. Alleviate Psychological Stress Caused by remote working

Based on the principles of preferences in economics, it is concluded that all the employees do not prefer to work remotely (Perrigino & Raveendhran, 2020). Employees face a significant amount of stress as a result of work-family conflict when working remotely and has a negative impact on their health and safety and face emotional blackouts (Sharma et al., 2016). The imbalance in emotions may cause managers to have an unfavorable view of remote working and influence their opinions. Furthermore, professional groups' pressure might have an impact on HR practitioners' willingness to work from remote areas. Henceforth, the HR professionals can take necessary steps to reduce this stress.

However, Psychologists feel that allowing employees to work from home might help reduce stress and depressed signs (Shepherd-Banigan et al., 2016). It is believed that enhanced work-family interactions can affect goal of the organizational such as increased performance and business reputation, as determined by a cost-benefit analysis. HR professionals should play a critical role in developing such a workplace. Despite the fact that employees work from remote areas such as home, the HR experts aid in building programs which are family-friendly,

communicate with staffs and their family members, and demonstrate care for staffs throughout the pandemic. The package often includes a “supporting family-friendly program” and a “supportive family management team”, which reflect efforts of HRM to assist workers in balancing work and family duties. HR professionals may give stress management training in areas such as “stressor analysis, threat and infection risk prevention, mental health in WFH, and work-family balance”. The HR experts can deliver training through online portals to reduce the risk of a crisis while providing training in the office. Furthermore, the long-term viability of policies and exercises of HRM are critical in minimizing employee unhappiness and job stress. Employee-related HRM rules that are important include remuneration and benefits, performance assessment, promotion, and transfer. With the pandemic's effect, the long-term viability of these regulations served to ease the mental stress and job slack of work-at-home workers.

5.1.3. Must support the balance of work and family life

To prevent the possibility of an epidemic, several organizations afflicted by new crisis required to implement adaptable working practices. Working remotely, according to various research, may help individuals balance professional development with employment. It may also save commute time and help firms save money on office space by keeping it smaller (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Alternatively, working remotely has a considerable influence on the balance between work and home (Perrigino & Raveendhran, 2020). As stated previously, work at home frequently makes it difficult to distinction between work and home duties (Schieman & Young, 2010). Even persons who work at home are dissatisfied with the division of family responsibilities after functioning for a longer duration. Working long hours and using home space both raise the chance of work–family conflict (Sols, 2016). According to the findings, assisting workers in achieving work-life balance should be an important component of HR policies and initiatives,

whether it promotes maximum employee happiness as opposed to “leaving them unhappy, weary, and anxious”. According to the findings of a study the conflict “Work–family” is more connected with the flexibility of the working hours while working from home. Work from home is classified as either conventional (normal “9–5 working hours”) or “non-traditional irregular working hours by Duxbury et al., (1996). Non-traditional WFH offers a significant degree of adaptability in terms of working hours, which differs from standard work hours”. When designing rules to work remotely particularly home, the HR practitioners must take into account the specific inclinations of employees who are working from remote areas based on their various qualities (Chen, 2021). HR regulations should allow IT-industry employers to schedule their working hours flexibly in order to meet their own demands based on individual likings. Work–family conflicts can be reduced during a pandemic by allowing non-traditional WFH to work on flexible schedules.

Furthermore, longer work hours raise the likelihood of “work–family conflict”. Employees utilized their residences as offices during the pandemic. In comparison to typical office job (Dockery & Bawa, 2020), they spend more time on work without realizing it. Working long hours at work from home might raise family discontent and anxiety. This might have a detrimental influence on the family's surroundings (Song & Gao, 2018). While putting together work schedules, HR professionals must ponder on a policy of avoiding working excessive hours. An appropriate HR strategy can help to reduce the extra working hours which are unintentionally developed by the employees while they are working from remote areas. Conclusively, assigning family responsibilities is also vital for maintaining balance in work and life. Perceptions of the quality of connections and the level of equality with which family responsibilities are done within the family is a measure of how well the family functions. Family functioning indicators are used to assess the degree of work–family conflict. The members of family of employees will believe

that the allocation of obligations inside the house is reasonable and rational, and moderation will impact family member interactions. Henceforth, businesses, especially human resource professionals, must aid with curriculums or trainings for distant employees, such as family member relationship management, reconciling family and work duties, and post-conflict resolution.

5.1.4. Reinforcement of Culture in remote working

Company culture is a “complex network of corporate rules, vision of the company, and attitudes of its workforce that are characterized by distinct group traits (Kalogiannidis, 2021)”. It may be reinforced by training, punishment, and incentives, among other methods. Culture must be modified to the external environment of the firm, especially in light of the emerging crown pandemic concern. Managers' attention will be drawn to corporate culture as the pandemic problem's impact escalates and the mental strain of working from homeworkers intensifies. If HR practitioners demand to decrease disruption and enhance arrangements, they must foster a remote working culture that prioritizes execution above impediments. Hence HR professionals must concentrate on the following areas.

Human resources must analyse if applicants are a good fit for the business culture while analysing and recruiting personnel during a pandemic. Based on the P-E fit theory, it can be stated that Individuals will pick establishments if their ideas coincide with the same working culture as of the chosen association. The company must continue to give basic training to adapt the new culture to newly recruited employees. Due to the ongoing pandemic, employees who are functioning from remote areas needs a more collaborative approach. Virtual organizations help workers who are working remotely to interconnect and co-operate with one another. Regardless of their varied roots and lack of meetings in offices, a model for remote working is more probable to

encourage a collaborative environment for the establishment (Borkovich & Skovira, 2020). According to research, Leadership is a culturally distinctive trait (Singh & Kumar, 2020). In times of crisis, HR practitioners should provide some leadership to assist their firms survive. A number of investigations have indicated that a culture of leadership in crisis permits workers to successfully compact with the impacts of the pandemic (Chen, 2021). Managers with strong leadership abilities are able to satisfy employees' expectations and guide the organization through the consequences of the epidemic. It is believed that an employee culture which is overly idealized, for instance attaining higher performance and which emphasize on results, might create cultural hurdles while working remotely. Leaders want their employees to do their jobs appropriately in the office, yet when they work remotely, supervisors are unable to directly oversee them or talk with them in person regarding their performance or functioning on regular tasks. This is one of the reasons why employees dread working from home (Lott & Abendroth, 2019). Human resource professionals should urge managers to logically assess the performance of WFH personnel using an online evaluation system. Furthermore, “work-from-home support programs” for HR professionals may help reduce cultural barriers in the paradigm of working remotely.

Conclusions

The focus of this study was on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on HRM, as well as digitalization and the associated balance difficulties between work and life. For this study, a qualitative approach was adopted to improve the shape of the issues posed by the recent outbreak of pandemic. The study's purpose was to learn about choices of the company during the epidemic. The findings of the study were based on the personal experience and knowledge of the experts

from IT industry of Pakistan. While performing the analysis, assessment was done, which was “followed by data interpretations, results discussions, and conclusions”. similar leanings in “human resource management” during a crisis would exist and would have an impact on health and well-being of the workers. The specialists who were questioned also acknowledged that professional demands had encroached on the private space that had traditionally been reserved for personal life. Besides most of the participants stated that employees worked during the night as well in Pakistan. They also found the similar where they could not break from work and give time to personal life affairs. Henceforth, removing virtual meetings on some days will help to relieve this issue.

Since, During the shutdown, there has been an upsurge in working remotely. Therefore, it is vital to acclimate to the new working regimen. Cultivating communication is crucial for quickly adapting to changes. While personnel are working remotely, there is no need to routinely oversee their job activities by the human resource specialists as they are capable of carrying their tasks individually and responsibly the need to protect one's health in the workplace has grown. Additionally, health and safety of employee is also crucial for businesses to create long-lasting corporate principles and a brand. As a result, during the digitization process, it is vital to address employees' balance between work and home life. Although some employees choose to work from remotely, i.e., from home whereas there are other employees who prefer to work from offices. Therefore, employees should be able to choose their preferred way of operation under the new human resource policy. This also creates pressure for HR as managers are under intense pressure to create effective approaches. Additionally, policies that govern “travelling, taking business- trips, and corporate functions” must be reviewed. Today, the key goals that organizations set in partnership with the management of human resource to establish a “hybrid model” that allows

workers to continue to work from anywhere and rewrite corporate culture in line with, to employ workers remotely, and lastly to develop spaces in workplace digitally.

6.1. Future Research

For the scholar in future, they can further develop a survey for conducting a survey with HR managers of IT companies, in order to properly investigate the impact of the Covid- 19 pandemic problem on firms, workers, teams, and the HRM system in Pakistan. Secondly, it would be interesting to collect statistics on the impact of digitization and behaviour of employees while working remotely, employee family members, and society.

6.2. Limitation of the Study

This research, like any other, has limitations. Firstly, because of time and resource constraints, the study only addressed the IT-technology, with just 14 respondents in total, hence in future scholars can use larger sample. Given this constraint, researchers should use caution when applying the findings of this study to the field of telecommunications as a whole. More replications of research in this field with higher sample sizes are needed to overcome the problem of generalizability of this study caused by limited sample size. With proper study inputs, meta-analysis may be utilized to get a more solid result.

Second, due to the fact that this was a “cross-sectional study”, it could only reflect the situation at the time the data was collected. Therefore, the findings may no longer be applicable in the future. Despite the fact that the study's findings will be useful to IT-industry in the current circumstances.

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