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A Review of Covid-19 and Employment Implications: Evidence from Human Resource Management

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Abstract

The study complements the extant literature by using a process tracing technique to assess how theoretical and textual insights into employee adjustments and wellbeing in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic withstand analytical scrutiny within the frameworks human resource management (HRM) and more contemporary literature. The Covid-19 pandemic poses a challenge to, as well as an opportunity for organizations to find novel solutions to the concerns resulting from the management of their human resources. This study provides contemporary evidence on several suggested frameworks for future research by Carnevale and Hatak (2020, JBR). The perspectives are discussed in terms HRM opportunities and challenges in the light of erosion of fit, constraining work-family impacts and disproportionate effects on alternative structures of the family on the one hand and on the other, on insights into entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Human resource management; Wellbeing; Employment implications; Covid-19

JEL Codes: G28; D60; D80; J21; J23; J24

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to assess how the future research directions suggested by Carnevale and Hatak (2020) withstand analytical scrutiny when observed from the prism of contemporary Covid-19 oriented literature. Accordingly, while the future directions suggested by Carnevale and Hatak (2020) are based on theoretical and practical insights into human resource management (HRM), it is relevant to inform scholars and policy makers with an assessment of how the underlying insights withstand analytical consistency when scrutinized with the attendant contemporary literature specific to the Covid-19 pandemic. In motivating the positioning of this study, we argue that scholarship on research directions pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic is incomplete unless other scholars complement the corresponding literature with an engagement of the suggested future research directions. Hence, in so doing, the study is giving practical relevance to the implications of Carnevale and Hatak (2020) in the Covid-19 literature related to HRM, not least, because to the best of our knowledge, hitherto, the extant literature has not focused on the same problem statement.

In the light of the above, the focus of this study departs from contemporary HRM related studies pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic which have largely been concerned with, *inter alia*, assessing: the effect of Covid-19 on the practice of reconstructive and hand microsurgery (or HRM) in a medical institution (Hwee, Chiew & Sechachalam, 2020); prospects for non-profit HRM in the light of Covid-19 (Akingbola, 2020); the need to avoid HRM generalizations during the crisis (Aitken-Fox et al., 2020) and hospital-level responses in HRM owing to the pandemic (Eghbali, Negarandeh & Froutan, 2020). This study extends the extant literature in view of complementing Carnevale and Hatak (2020).

The above complementarity consists of substantiating the structure of Carnevale and Hatak (2020) with the attendant contemporary literature on the Covid-19 pandemic. The rest of the study is structured as follows. The context and agenda are discussed in Section 2 with some emphasis on the adopted methodology. Section 3 provides evidence to the HRM opportunities and challenges in the light erosion of fit, constraining work-family impacts and disproportionate effects on alternative structures of the family. Insights into entrepreneurship are disclosed in Section 4 before Section 5 concludes with future research directions.

2. Context and analytical agenda

The current Covid-19 pandemic has had far and wide-reaching consequences that are not exclusively socio-economic (Diop & Asongu, 2020; Farayabi & Asongu, 2020), but border on many fields such as HRM (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). According to the narrative, even before

the advent of Covid-19, companies had been increasingly confronted with unforeseen events (e.g. climate change, political instability, civil wars, financial crises and economic meltdowns) to which, they have to adapt their management styles beyond the scope of national, regional and continental borders (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015; George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016; Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016). Such major challenges, *inter alia*, represent restructuring issues for all companies affected. However, while concerns surrounding political strife, socio-economic collapse and climate change have been on the horizon, the Covid-19 pandemic represents a hitherto unprecedented concern of which, corresponding externalities are exacerbated by the degree of interconnectedness of world in the era of globalization as well as substantial reliance on information and communication technologies (ICTs) as means of fuelling the underlying globalization (Ting, Carine, Dzau, & Wong, 2020; Wang, Ng & Brook, 2020).

In the light of the above, the Covid-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented challenge to HRM because managers are currently trying to tailor their workforce so that it copes with and adapts to the corresponding new challenges such as, adjustments of work-life balance and adaptations to virtual work environments. Accordingly, alternative virtual spaces of work are now fast replacing traditional/physical workspaces such as libraries, restaurants, and offices at jobsites. The Covid-19 crisis has therefore created more private workspaces, leading to more concerns in “unplugging” associated with demands of work (Chawla, MacGowan, Gabriel, & Podsakoff, 2020).

Working from home as a result of schools’ closure, compounded by suspended services of childcare, have increased strains on parental care, blurred private life and work life as well as made the distinctions between family and work spheres less apparent (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Kramer & Kramer, 2020). It is worthwhile to also note that the externalities are not exclusively unfavorable for families with children, but also extend to childless homes, single parents and the aged who are also affected by the changing conditions of work (Brooks & Jackson, 2020; Matias, Dominski & Marks, 2020).

In spite of the above negative externalities, the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic also represents an opportunity for scholarly research in the management field to provide both scholars, and policy makers with critical perspectives upon which, management practitioners can leverage to address this unprecedented challenge in contemporary history. Hence, both the opportunities and challenges pertaining to Covid-19 in the light of the practice of HRM are critically engaged and substantiated with the attendant contemporary Covid-19 specific studies. The corresponding select topics are consistent with Carnevale and Hatak (2020),

especially as it pertains to well-being as well as employees' efforts to adjust in the light of changing working environments.

The adopted analytical approach is process tracing given that it is both consistent with the objective of the study and contemporary literature on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. In essence, process tracing is a fundamental analytical instrument in qualitative research (Beach, 2017) given that, this study traces the select topics documented in Carnevale and Hatak (2020) and substantiates the evidence with contemporary studies in the Covid-19 literature. Hence, secondary data is largely used from *inter alia*, official sites, books and articles. The adopted analytical approach of using process tracing in substantiating the future research directions of Carnevale and Hatak (2020) with contemporary literature on Covid-19, is consistent with a strand of recent Covid-19 studies (Asongu, Usman & Vo, 2020; Ngamije & Yadufashije, 2020).

3. HRM challenges and opportunities in the era of Covid-19

3.1. The erosion of person-environment fit

In line with Carnevale and Hatak (2020), the erosion of fit is when there is some disharmony in the person-environment fit (P-E fit), given that employees fundamentally choose where to work by finding some common denominator between their attributes (i.e. culture, values and work features) and those of their potential working environment (Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). It follows that this dimension of HRM is severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic which is characterized by network environments that limit human contact owing to shifts to work environments that are remote and by extension; misfit is very likely to be apparent (Follmer, Talbot, Kristof-Brown, Astrove, & Billsberry, 2018). In this section, the concern about P-E fit is discussed in two main strands, notably, how: (i) the current Covid-19 crisis is affecting employees' P-E fit experiences and (ii) other socialization practices can help rebalance potential misfit perceptions.

First, among motivational factors that attract individuals to a given working environment is a desire of association with people, values and other specificities of the targeted work environment (Edwards & Cable, 2009; Barrick, Mount, & Li, 2013; Yu, 2016). The impact of Covid-19 on misfit can be seen from various angles in the contemporary Covid-19 literature, notably: (i) Donthu and Gustafsson (2020) have raised concerns of misfit in different industrial sectors (e.g. higher education, retail and tourism); (ii) the feeling of not mattering by some employees as well as the elderly (especially in retirements homes) that

they are not valued and adequately cared for (Flett & Heisel, 2020; Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Béland & Marier, 2020; Flett & Zangeneh, 2020) and (iii) concerns about misfit when searching for jobs and understanding of new employment situations, especially in the light of virtual assessment and recruitment platforms (Vining et al., 2020; Spurk & Straub, 2020). In the second strand, the three streams of concerns related to misfit are discussed (i.e. in the same chronology) in the light of how other socialization practices are helping to address the corresponding misfit issues.

Second, owing to the dissatisfaction that employees may have as a result of misfit (Sacco & Ismail, 2014; Chawla et al., 2020), understanding how social connections and associations can be improved at the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in order to rebalance misfit perceptions by employees is worthwhile. Hence, in this strand, the three streams of the previous section are expanded in chronological order in order to understand practices of socialization and association that can be instrumental in rebalancing potential perceptions of misfit existing among employees and how best they can be implemented.

(i) With regards to the more general concern of avoiding misfit by current employees, such can be attenuated by having recourse to work arrangements that are flexible, notably: flexible working schedule; flexible work locations and flexible nexuses in employment. These three main dimensions for flexible work arrangements (Spreitzer, Cameron & Garrette, 2017) can be used, *inter alia*, to address concerns related to the attendant misfit (Spurk & Straub, 2020). For instance, according to the narrative, a Work Hub has been launched by Uber to enable drivers leverage on alternative avenues in service and production sectors.

(ii) Potential solutions on mattering (or feeling involved) of older and neglected people in order to avoid misfit have been documented in contemporary Covid-19 literature (Flett & Heisel, 2020; Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Béland & Marier, 2020; Flett & Zangeneh, 2020). According to the narrative, it is imperative for adults and those that are lonely to be treated in ways that make them feel/have a sense of belonging to the community and profession where they are, because doing so would decrease risks of suicide and by extension; enhance corresponding well being, partly owing to lower levels of loneliness and depression. Achieving this objective may require the adaptation of employee skills, more training and recruitment of professionals.

(iii) Job searches and new recruitments can also be tailored to mitigate and avoid misfit. For instance, as documented by Spurk and Straub (2020), Uber has lost more than 90% of its passengers in the USA since the beginning of the pandemic and has been responding to such a

loss by encouraging old and new drivers to switch to Uber Eats or the Uber food couriers service. Moreover, the announcement of 100 000 potential new hires by Amazon is also in view of adapting to the Covid-19 crisis and limiting associated misfits. Recruitment processes could also be aligned with the country-specific phases of lockdown and exit measures such that, new employees are more psychologically prepared for respectively, “working from home office” and “returning back to main office”. Engaging these dynamics in tandem with phases of management of the pandemic would contribute towards reducing potential misfits.

In summary, in order to better understand how present and future social interactions can be adapted to various lockdown and exit phases of the crisis, in view of avoiding the “erosion of fit”, it would be worthwhile for the following to be taken into account with respect to contracting firms and labor platforms: the experiences of workers before, during and after the pandemic should be leveraged to understand the demands of workers. In effect, the underlying platforms for HRM should be tailored to reduce misfit, promote the performance of workers, enhance workforce quality and minimize workers’ depressions and loneliness (Spurk & Straub, 2020).

3.2. Disproportionate work-family effects

Another dimension worth critically examining in HRM externalities from Covid-19 is the disproportion work-family nexuses. As substantiated by Carnevale and Hatak (2020), the current pandemic has substantially altered employees’ relations, the work environment and by extension, work-family ties. Accommodating work-family relations is fundamental to improving employee performance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Golden, Veiga, & Simsek, 2006). As the present pandemic unfolds, the attendant literature is consistent on the position that there are increasing conflicts within family and work spheres (Spurk & Straub, 2020; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Some of the associated concerns pertain to, *inter alia*: employees managing increasing issues surrounding childcare given the widespread closure of childcare services and schools. Owing to the fact that family and work roles have been further blurred, in what follows, this section provides insights into how employees are coping with disproportionate work-family impacts. These are engaged in three main strands, namely: (i) organization support in the absence of elderly care and childcare; (ii) discretion on how and when to do tasks when working from home and (iii) efficacy of self-affirmation interventions.

First, concerning organization support, in the absence of elderly and childcare services, during the Covid-19 crisis, it is important for company support to go beyond emotional support and be more instrumental in counseling employees on how to address

family-work conflicts (French, Dumani, Allen, & Shockley, 2018; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Such support could consist of helping employees to better organize their work schedule by constantly updating them on recent developments as to when child and elderly care services can resume or options for part time care for corresponding dependents. It is worthwhile to note that knowledge of such a part time option can help employees plan how and when to engage a particular sets of tasks, especially those that require maximum concentration and limited external distraction. Accordingly, while the gender effect of school closure pertaining to child and elderly care services during the Covid-19 pandemic are more skewed towards women (Gabster, van Daalen, Dhatt & Barry, 2020) partly owing to increased childcare for working mothers, the corresponding advantage however is that many fathers are also taking the primary role of childcare (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, & Tertilt, 2020; Power, 2020) which is partly relevant in promoting gender equality owing to eroding of social norms, flexibility in working arrangements and distribution of labour. So far, given the global nature of the crisis, as far as we have reviewed, the extant literature is sparse on corporate-specific measures that are being adopted to address concerns related to child and elderly care services, not least because the pandemic is global and touching almost every sector of economies in affected countries.

Second, given the increasing strain to reconcile work-family nexuses, organizations could adapt training programs to the underlying constraints as well as organize meetings and anticipated task inputs when the children and the elderly are expected to be asleep or less constraining. It follows that companies can be very instrumental during these crises moments in determining how and when tasks are performed when taking into account both the challenges faced by employees and available tools of dynamic HRM. *Inter alia*, autonomy as well as emotional and cognitive support as documented in the family-work conflict literature can be steps in this direction (Langfred, 2000; Golden et al., 2006; Stiglbauer & Kovacs, 2018; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

The Covid-19 literature is consistent with increasing work autonomy to employees by HRM which is enabling them to determine how and when the corresponding tasks are performed (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020; Langè & Gastaldi, 2020; Mani & Mishra, 2020; Baert, Lippens, Moens, Sterkens & Weytjens, 2020a, 2020b). The attendant contemporary Covid-centric literature is consistent on the position that job autonomy is helping to reduce family-oriented working pressures because such modes of working, align with the preferences, needs and constraints of employees in the light of increasing family-work load.

Third, efficacy of self-affirmation interventions is also relevant in helping employees better manage work-family constraints in this time of Covid-19, not least because it enables employees to better align the underpinning needs and values with changed working environments (McQueen & Klein, 2006; Dweck, 2008; Tasselli, Kilduff, & Landis, 2018; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Evidence of how self-affirmation interventions have improved the work-family balance in contemporary Covid-19 literature include: Li et al. (2020) concluding after an experiment that “*Self-affirmation is easy to accomplish since it does not require professional guidance or a distinct environment and occupies little time, it would be a convenient strategy for the public to cope with psychological stress during the outbreak*” (p.886). This strand is consistent with the attendant Covid-centric literature on the importance of self-affirmation in alleviating work-family issues resulting from the pandemic (Pandey, Tiwari, & Rai, 2020; Dunning & Pownall, 2020; Black, 2020).

3.3. Disproportionate effects on alternative family structures

Another concern that HRM is attempting to address during this Covid-19 crisis pertains to the disproportionate impact on alternative structures of the family, notably: single and childless employees. This is essentially because in most parts of the world, some employees are either delaying the process of having children and/or are voluntarily or involuntarily living lonely (Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Drescher-Burke, 2005; Abma & Martinez, 2006; Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive, & Heelan 2010; Kreyenfeld & Konietzka, 2017; Kellerman, Reece, & Robichaux, 2018; Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). The corresponding concerns pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic are discussed in three main strands, namely: (i) socio-psychological issues and (ii) the role of HRM during Covid-19. These strands are expanded in the same chronology as highlighted.

First, the literature has documented that there are significant socio-psychological issues as tangible externalities of the current pandemic (De Coninck, d’Haenens & Matthijs, 2020; Usak, Masalimova, Cherdymova & Shaidullina, 2020; Hua & Shaw, 2020). Such socio-psychological issues are likely to more affect the lonely and childless employees because lack of inclusion is naturally heightened by the closure of businesses that are nonessential and adoption of social distancing measures. Accordingly, from practical standpoints, such feelings of lack of inclusion are more apparent among single (Smith, 2020) and childless (Miller, 2020) employees, which can affect their productivity in the companies in which they are employed as well as their mental health. While these issues can be

addressed by the relevant health professionals, HRM can also be instrumental in addressing them.

Second, HRM can be also relevant in tackling disproportionate effects on alternative family structures owing to the Covid-19 pandemic (Collins & Clark, 2003; Casper, Weltman, & Kwesiga, 2007; Kehoe & Collins, 2017). Such roles could entail, *inter alia*: (i) as apparent in the attendant Covid-19 literature (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), HRM can consolidate relationship-linked systems of human resources in view of fighting the isolation risks relating to employees that are single and childless as well as prepare them for unforeseen crises that breed social exclusion and loneliness. (ii) Some measures that HRM can use include, feedback, training, development of networks in which employees are encouraged to connect with one another, sponsoring of online/virtual social and professional events. Moreover, consistent with the attendant literature (Corse, 1990; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004; Byrne & Carr, 2005; Ashburn-Nardo, 2017; Follmer et al., 2018; Grandey, Gabriel, & King, 2020) in order to provide the relevant HRM and physiological therapies, it would be worthwhile to first of all understand how employees feel about social exclusion before designing appropriate social inclusion measures.

4. Insights from entrepreneurship

The insights from Carnevale and Hatak (2020) pertaining to entrepreneurship can be summarized into five main perspectives, *inter alia*: (i) the Covid-19 represents an opportunity for companies and HRM practices to enhance opportunities of employees' to thrive during the uncertain times, not least, because entrepreneurship is largely concerned with discovering, evaluating and exploiting apparent opportunities in dynamic and uncertain economic environments. (ii) The adaptation of entrepreneurs to new and challenging working environments owing to the underlying pandemic (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Rauch, Fink, & Hatak, 2018). (iii) How entrepreneurs are adapting to work, life and family balance (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Jennings & McDougald, 2007). (iv) Valorizing autonomy, tolerance of uncertainty, approaching new challenges proactively and openly (Stephan, 2018). (v) Addressing concerns of social exclusion, reduced well-being and loneliness in times of unforeseen events (Fernet, Torrès, Austin, & St-Pierre, 2016; Baron, 2010; De Jong, Parker, Wennekers, & Wu, 2015; Van Gelderen, 2016; Gawke, Gorgievski, & Bakker, 2017; Tasselli et al., 2018) and social support from employees and entrepreneurs to mitigate the downsides to employee wellbeing (Stephan, 2018). The underlying perspectives are substantiated in what

follows with evidence from contemporary Covid-19 literature, in the same chronology as highlighted.

First, the ability of entrepreneurs to leverage on the current Covid-19 situation to discover, evaluate and exploit more opportunities in the light of HRM practices is consistent with contemporary evidence as to how employers and particularly entrepreneurs are adapting to Covid-19 work challenges. The attendant literature has documented the importance of entrepreneurs in adapting their HRM measures (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann, 2020; Dirani et al., 2020).

Second, *inter alia*, there is also a growing stream of literature supporting the perspective that entrepreneurs are quickly adapting to the challenging and new working environments imposed by constraints underlying the Covid-19 pandemic. For instance, there are emerging narratives of new venture creation and growth that are linked to the characteristics of entrepreneurs such as their mindsets, resilience, education as well as entrepreneurial ecosystems in stakeholders such as capital providers and business incubators (Maritz, Perenyi, Waal & Buck, 2020). Other studies supporting this stream include: the importance of sport entrepreneurship in times of Covid-19 (Ratten, 2020a) and relevance of social and business entrepreneurships in the crisis recovery efforts (Haeffele, Hobson & Storr, 2020; Nassif, Armando & La Falce, 2020).

Third, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, entrepreneurs are also adapting their work and family balance to the pandemic. For instance, Ratten (2020b) shows that owing to some initiatives that are partly traceable to entrepreneurs; the Covid-19 pandemic has led to higher social value co-creation, which is generating innovative favorable externalities to society. This is confirmed in another study by Ratten (2020c) on the nexus between Covid-19 and entrepreneurship in the light the changing work-life landscape.

Fourth, the attendant literature has also confirmed the perspective that features of tolerance, autonomy and uncertainty (especially in entrepreneurs) are crucial in the management of challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, *inter alia*: Ratten (2020c) in the discourse of improving the balance between work and life and Dolan, Raich, Garti and Landau (2020) on values that are indispensable to cope with the crisis.

Fifth, the Covid-19 pandemic is not without challenges for entrepreneurs especially owing to reduced well-being, heightened loneliness as well as limited support to alleviate the negative externalities of the pandemic. Consequently, social entrepreneurship is being boosted and reinvented in order to rapidly address the corresponding challenges (Bacq, Geoghegan, Josefy, Stevenson & Williams, 2020; Kuckertz et al., 2020). Other streams of research

focusing on how entrepreneurs can tackle attendant challenges relate to concerns in entrepreneurial universities (Kawamorita, Salamzadeh, Demiryurek & Ghajarzadeh, 2020) and resource and waste management issues (Neumayer, Ashton & Dentchev, 2020). Moreover, given limited supported to entrepreneurs compared to public corporations, in order to avoid the downsides of the crisis on entrepreneurial activities, scholarly arguments are made in the direction of short-term economic rescue packages accompanied with other complementary measures aimed at fostering entrepreneurship in the long term (Naudé, 2020; Kuckertz et al., 2020). These rescue packages are also designed to help employees adjust and cope with the changing work dynamic.

5. Conclusion and future research directions

The study has complemented the extant literature by using a process tracing technique to assess how theoretical and textual insights into employee adjustment and wellbeing in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic withstand analytical scrutiny within the frameworks human resource management (HRM) and more contemporary literature. The Covid-19 pandemic poses a challenge to, as well as an opportunity for organizations to find novel solutions to the concerns resulting from the management of their human resources. This study has provided contemporary evidence on several suggested frameworks for future research by Carnevale and Hatak (2020, JBR). The perspectives have been discussed in terms HRM opportunities and challenges in the light of erosion of fit, constraining work-family impacts and disproportionate effects on alternative structures of the family on the one hand and on the other, on insights into entrepreneurship.

In the study, some suggestions have been made on how the attendant HRM concerns pertaining to the Covid-19 pandemic can be alleviated. The insights are relevant to both practitioners and scholars as efforts continue towards the fight against the pandemic. Such insights should be taken on board for the present, the short term future as well as a distant future because the Covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing on the one hand and on the other, such pandemics are likely to be recurrent in the near and distant futures. Hence, HRM in corporations has to adapt and adjust to the evolving employees' conditions as well as newly changed environments of work.

The present study obviously leaves room for further research especially in the light of using both secondary and primary data as time unfolds, to assess how the documented insights withstand further empirical scrutiny. Moreover, engaging comparative studies in this direction across regions, countries and corporations would improve insights into lessons that more

successful corporations and countries in terms of HRM can provide to respectively, less successful corporations and countries.

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