

BCPs; A look into what they are and how they were put in place during COVID pandemic in India.

Sidharth Sreekumar¹

¹Symbiosis Centre for Management and Human Resource Development, SCMHRD, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), SIU, Hinjewadi, Pune, Maharashtra, India
E-mail: ¹sidharth_sreekumar@scmhrd.edu

ABSTRACT

Purpose: To function as a repository of measures taken in the wake of increasing crises situations that are coming up, disrupting the normal functioning and threatening the survival of the business world. The industry with the best plans to ensure the survival of their business during periods of emergency is the IT industry as of now. Their plans and practices, involving the infrastructure related components as well as the HR policy components can be adapted to form a strategy and plan for other industries to follow through during times of crises.

Proposed Methodology: The study is proposed on analysing and comparing existing measures taken by companies operating in India to tackle the COVID-19 situation and ensure the continuity of their business. The governments of the respective states/territories along with the central government of India have also tried to take steps to tackle COVID-19 situation while not crippling the business world. All these combined efforts that are supposed to keep the business world afloat will be studied in detail to arrive at meaningful conclusions.

Theoretical Implications: This study will provide insights into how organisations can alter their means of functioning during stressful times such as these, by fulfilling the legal as well as the moral obligations a firm should follow while still making sure that the organisation does not go into financial instability and face uncertainty in its future.

Keywords

Business Continuity Plan, Flexible working, WFH (Work from Home), HR Policies.

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Introduction

Every organization that wishes to continue operations well into the foreseeable future must have a plan to tackle the different types of obstructions that may arise in varied scenarios and circumstances.

The concept of Business Continuity Planning emerged in the 1970s from the disaster recovery planning processes. The main source of disruption in the conduct of business in those times were natural disasters like storms, floods or other means of physical devastation like fires. During those times, banks and other financial institutions, as part of their disaster recovery plans, invested in a variety of different industries and the major focus was on diversification of investments in order to ensure success. Organizations where the storage of data, both in physical form as well as computerized form made efforts to store it away from potential sources of harm, taking care to maintain multiple copies of it stored across their operating locations. As the years progressed, the scale of the recovery operations and efforts went up, and by the 1990s, globalization and the pervasiveness of data access across multiple locations of corporate offices scattered all across the world became a nightmare to service, with the infrastructure for storage in the servers struggling to catch up to the rising demand. The IT industry, parts of which assisted other organizations in managing their data and planning for an unfortunate event which might potentially disrupt business also witnessed a spurt in growth during these periods.

Since the turn of the millennium, many unfortunate incidents have happened, such as the 9/11 terror attacks and the earthquake in India in 2001, the 2003 SARS outbreak in China, the 2004 South Asia tsunami, the hurricanes Katrina

and Rita in 2005, the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and of late, the coronavirus pandemic in late 2019 and 2020, that forced many organizations to stop functioning and others to modify and adapt their means of functioning in order to prevent total, permanent and complete shutdown of the organization. Such plans, enacted at times of difficulty in general, are now termed business continuity plans. These plans are intended for the business to continue its operations and thus focus on ensuring the survival of the organization post any form of crisis. A successful BCP implementation will ensure the survival as well as the retainment of the competitiveness of an organization. How successfully a BCP can be implemented depends upon how the HR policy is framed. The HR strategy during the implementation of a BCP is of prime importance. The survival of the company and its business is of no use if the major talent in the company has moved on to places that they feel treat them better. This paper aims to look into the practices put in place by various organizations in India as part of their plan to ensure the various aspects of business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

The phrases Disaster Recovery (DR) and Business Continuity Planning (BCP) are often used interchangeably, but they are quite different from one another. The major difference among the two of them is the fact that DR is performed after a natural or man-made disaster, in an effort to restart the business that might have been disrupted by it whereas the BCP is the plan already put in place before the disaster, thus preventing the total disruption of the business.

DR usually applies to IT systems and is the process an organization executes in response to a crisis. It is the process of regaining access to the data, hardware and software necessary to resume critical business operations after a natural or human-induced disaster (Hoffer, 2001).

BCP, on the other hand, is the process of ensuring that an organization can survive a crisis thereby mitigating its impact. Essentially, BCP is the activity that takes place before an incident occurs, and DR is what happens during and afterwards (Menkus, 1994).

A BCP outlines a strategic response to all kinds of events that may potentially disrupt the normal running of the organization. It covers all aspects of the organization's functioning, ranging from its technical infrastructure, its people and even its buildings and workspaces. It may involve the requirement of a team of employees in the organization who are ready to respond to the needs of the business during a calamity and ensure the continuity of the business into the future.

A 2005 Disaster Preparedness Survey Report conducted by SHRM indicated that as a result of the World Trade Centre attacks on September 11 2001, 56% of organizations created or revised their disaster preparedness plans. Organizations at that point in time still continued operations with the "it will not happen here" thinking. However, with the passage of time, in a poll conducted by SHRM in 2011, organizations exhibited greater awareness and action directed towards disaster preparedness. A majority of the organizations, almost 75% of them, reported that they had disaster preparedness plans, up from the 56% in 2005.

Most of the plans put in place during the ten years from 2001, which was when SHRM started collecting data about the disaster recovery aspects of business organizations, was focused on detecting and thwarting potential terrorist attacks against the organization, as the steps taken indicated.

- Providing training to employees.
- Developing Business Continuity Plans.
- Developing communication plans for emergency situations.
- Installing and upgrading CCTV surveillance in the organization's premises.
- Monitoring employee e-mails and Internet usage.
- Developing and utilising data backup storage systems.

Following the attacks on the WTC buildings in New York City in 2001, organizations were clearly alarmed at the possibilities of a potential attack on their premises and started taking steps to prevent such happenings.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management, a successful crisis management plan involves organizational programs including emergency response, disaster recovery, risk management, communications and business continuity. It also is about developing an organization's capability to react flexibly and its ability to thus make prompt and necessary decisions in the event of an unfortunate crisis. Teamwork and rehearsal are also listed as critical success factors for any business continuity plans. This is also the reason why all professional bodies advise revision and review of BCPs every year at the very least.

Research informs us that the HR department, which should be making sure that the organization continues in its business and does not succumb to any sort of disaster, was

underprepared and underfunded for any such activity. Prior designs of the HR department in organizations did not consider the complexity of running the BCP and ensuring the organization's success. Nowadays, with the increase in leadership roles and duties that are bestowed upon the HR department leaders, they in the organization have a strategic role and responsibility to ensure that their organization is aware of all aspects of any crisis, including the human cost of such crisis. In order to make sure that they are most effective, HR leaders of today work collaboratively with the top-down commitment so that enterprise-wide solutions can be drafted. Although it is not physically possible for them to predict the future, they work together to ensure that the business does not fail in their goals. They work as change agents and bring about the necessary changes, if any, in the organization to ensure that the organization's problems are diagnosed and appropriate solutions are applied in a timely manner, which helps to set an agenda for the future and create plans for making things happen.

Businesses are often said to be the foundation of local, regional as well as national economies due to the sheer volume of products and services that they produce and offer in the market. Lack of preparation to mitigate the effects of a disaster on the businesses will thus not only cripple the business, but if ignored by major corporations, will result in loss of revenues and possible bankruptcies along with a fall in tax revenues, create a fallout in the local economy as well.

One of the major factors that decide on what kind of disasters a business shall have to take more precautions on is the location where it operates. The location is often of great significance to the businesses, as is the case in industries like retail and manufacturing industries, both of which have to have sites of operations in specific locations, due to varied reasons. This might not be the case with businesses that operate in some other industries.

Another factor that contributes to the vulnerability of an organization is the level of diversification in the geographies and the markets it operates on. An organization predominantly operating on a local scale is much more vulnerable than one that operates nation-wide or internationally. When a business is under siege due to the any such calamities, it may even lose out permanently on a large proportion of its business. This was evident in the case of revenues of Kobe port in Japan. Kobe, one of the largest container ports in the world, (which was already witnessing falling revenues due to rising competition) was struck by the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake in 1995. The disaster severely damaged the port, and it required time for it to be reconstructed and made useable again. During this time, however, major shipping companies had already moved their business elsewhere, and saw no reason to shift back to Kobe once it was ready. The port of Kobe, as a result of the earthquake which struck it, has never regained its former position of glory, even 25 years after the disaster.

A factor that decides the preparedness levels and vulnerability of businesses are the regulations and statutory requirements. It has been found that regulations in the field of business go a long way in mandating the required standards in operating procedures resulting in better performance of the organization during a crisis. This has been observed in the loss reduction requirements mandated

by the United States government in the finance, insurance and real estate sector (Dahlhamer & D'Souza, 1997). However, most of the safety / standard operating procedures followed by organizations are found to be voluntary, with the interest of preventing or reducing losses faced by businesses due to different modes of crisis.

Size of the business also indirectly determines the response it can put forward to any crisis that it would have to face. Majority of the businesses that exist in India are smaller in size, affecting and often improving the quality of life of a large number of people in the country. It is often found that the larger the size of a business, the larger its chances of outliving a crisis situation. This is because larger organizations tend to have a larger amount of money and influence that could be strategically deployed to create and implement plans ensuring business continuity during a crisis. Size could be thought of as a proxy for cash. Larger organizations typically tend to have larger cash reserves which help them tide over difficult times.

Disasters and business disruptions can have different types of impacts on organizations. Those different types of impacts are Direct, Indirect and Ripple effects. Direct impact refers to the loss occurred in the business due to the nature of the disaster/disruption in the form of loss of inventory, loss of business at a time when the business had to be shut down, loss of assets due to natural/manmade disasters and other such losses. Direct impact also includes losses and damages to infrastructure that also created a problem for the business. Indirect and Ripple effects in the economy are greater problems than loss of infrastructure for business. They are second order disturbances for the business that involve the disruptions caused in the supply chain for raw materials or that of the finished products. Such effects normally do not contain themselves to just one business, and affect the entire regional economy when they do happen. These effects also have the potential to bankrupt and destroy businesses, as often the philosophies that are adopted by businesses to go 'lean' and efficient in their operations shall result in the organization having little in the way of inventory or cash balance to count for working capital to tide over the bad times.

Other effects that may not immediately come to mind are the costs involved to make the business start running again after a disaster has been overcome. In the aftermath of the 2001 World Trade Centre attacks in New York City, it was also found that insurance providers were unwilling to provide insurance to businesses operating at similar high-profile addresses in the area in fear of another attack there and possible huge insurance pay-outs in the future. The insurance rates for businesses in all the boroughs in New York also saw their insurance premiums increase by amounts ranging up to 73%.

Often, the vulnerability of organizations shall also depend on the actions taken at community level to mitigate the ill effects of a crisis. There have been observations made about how the actions of the governments immediately after a disaster strikes will affect the performance of the businesses in the area. The studies regarding business performance after a disaster which affects quite a large area has been predominantly done in the USA. It was noted that businesses affected and disrupted heavily during hurricane Katrina in New Orleans had a much harder time surviving

due to the local firefighting authority not being able to respond well to the fires that started. It paled in comparison to the response provided by the firefighting authority in a San Francisco district to a large number of earthquake-induced fires that started a few years prior.

Some other examples to be considered could be the community level efforts taken during the time of the coronavirus pandemic, all over the world. An unprecedented crisis of magnanimous proportions, COVID-19 took the world by storm. Such a situation was happening for the first time after globalization had transformed the world into a huge interconnected village. The governments of many countries were at a loss as to how to tackle the crisis. This crisis also meant that a large number of seemingly invulnerable corporations also saw their fortunes slimming. The efforts made by the political leaderships of different countries and regions differed slightly, but were with a focus on reducing the impact of the crisis on the general population. Governments also took steps to ensure the continuity of the businesses as they did not wish the businesses to fail en-masse and cause an economic crisis. Steps were also taken by the businesses to ensure employee and customer safety while not allowing themselves to go bankrupt or lose their competitive edge.

Manufacturing plants had to be shut down and operations like those in the retail industry had to scale down business in order to comply with the local restrictions regarding the coronavirus pandemic. Restricting customer entry and shutting down manufacturing plants has certainly affected the bottom-lines of a huge number of organizations. Some other industries like personal care industry and salons also had to suffer negative earnings and losses. A lot of businesses in these industries have also had to shut up shop for good. Some organizations found alternate uses for their infrastructure and have modified them for the production of PPE kits and other emergency necessities in order to ensure that they stay in business and do not allow decay in equipment. Organizations introduced different means like shortening of shift timings to allow for sanitizing and other procedures and thus make the premises safe for the workers. Organizations, whether or not they were allowed to continue with their operations, needed to modify their existing HR policies and standard procedures due to the change that was thrust upon them; COVID-19.

Quite contrary to the popular notion, businesses which suffered from higher property/asset damage did not take longer to recover from the ill effects of the crisis. It was observed that physical damage to the organization's assets were not an indication of how long it would take the organization to regain its former performance and competitiveness. It was also noted that the organizations affected by a crisis tend to suffer more to regain past performance when the damage they suffered were of the type of business and supply chain disruptions. Infrastructure losses were observed to be less crucial to the survival and ultimate reinvigoration of the business.

The steps taken by governments and other bodies are offerings to the businesses and should not be relied upon as a backup plan. It is so because the nature of steps undertaken in that aspect are subject to a lot of conditions and as such may be following a different timeline. An organization, if it wishes to operate in a manner that proves

to be fail-safe and not susceptible to disruptions, should devise its own plans to ensure the continuity of the business by their own actions. This is one area where the organization's personnel or human resources department should focus on. It was traditionally not a topic of focus for HR departments of organizations. It is widely speculated that the reason why organizations did not invest in plans to create and maintain a disaster recovery plans was due to the 'it won't happen here' mindset that had often formed in the minds of the management. Often corporations found it easy enough to implement the most basic, rudimentary forms of protection against natural disasters and insuring their assets with an insurance firm enough to survive any disasters that might occur.

The traditional role of the personnel manager has transitioned to that of the human resources manager, evolving and absorbing the changes that has been happening in the industry. The role of HR has changed a lot, from just a person/department responsible for enforcing discipline and increasing workman productivity to a complex role with responsibilities also including leadership. The responsibility of preparing, enabling and prioritizing and making sure that the business can be continued into the foreseeable future is also part of the roles and responsibilities of an HR team.

The HR team is supposed to be able to deal with crisis situations, but as often is the case, the funding and equipment required are not made available to them. This is often attributed to the fact that organizations typically have had the 'nothing bad will happen here' mentality. Only recently have organizations accepted the fact that they need to be prepared for any form of crisis, with the potential to stop or disrupt their business. Another important factor that must not be overlooked are the concerns of the employees. Even though employees may behave grateful for having a job in the first place, during times of crisis, it should never be the case that the company is exhibiting unethical behavior, ignoring employee needs, not paying heed to the hardships that they face.

If employees are forced to work for the organization with low morale and esteem, it adversely affects the productivity levels of the organization. So, to enable and empower employees during times of crisis is of utmost importance. It has also been observed that there has been an increasing trend in the number and types of threats that an organization has to face.

At this juncture, the HR department's responsibility has increased. They have to hold hands with the employees unused to crisis situations and provide them with the required levels of equipment and motivation for them to continue work. The HR department should also proactively engage with all stakeholders of the organization, including employees and provide or arrange for necessary training to be imparted to all employees in dealing with the crisis at hand.

There have been multiple attempts to explain the processes involved in organization crisis management. Andrianopoulos explains crisis management as being made up of 3 parts – pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis. Pre-crisis period is when organizations look into the different types of crisis that could affect them and take precautionary measures, along with the creation, outlining and working trials for plan implementations to survive a crisis situation.

The crisis period refers to the period where the plans already outlined have to be put in place and managed, so as to allow for smooth functioning of the organization to the best possible level. This could also be thought of as an opportunity to test out the plans that were made in the Pre-crisis stage and test for efficiency, which could be done via data collection of the required parameters. The post-crisis period is after the crisis, when recovery operations should be carried out in order to make the transition back to normal working conditions be possible. All these stages are considered to be of great importance for a business that wishes to survive all kinds of challenges thrown at it.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted via primary as well as secondary research into what different organizations have done in order to stay afloat during this COVID-19 crisis. The primary research was conducted among employees and management interns at different industries working throughout the country by interacting with them and by asking the respondents to provide responses to a data collection exercise that would reveal what the employees themselves felt about the way in which their organization is handling this emergency. The questionnaire was found to have a cronbach alpha value of 0.84, which is a typical satisfactory value. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed to understand what the employees and management interns thought about the preparedness levels of the organization they were working with.

The secondary part of the research was conducted by studying the changes in policy and other standard operating procedure that was adopted by various organizations as part of their activities to minimize the effect the COVID-19 induced shut downs have caused, from different industries. This was obtained from published information about the companies as well as by conversing with employees. This was done to gain more insights in to the policy changes that the companies have adopted to ensure successful business continuity during these trying times.

For an organization to successfully regain its position of advantage in the market after a crisis situation, support of the employees is a crucial factor. It has been observed that employees are willing to leave an organization that they perceive to be struggling and try to join organizations that are apparently going strong. The primary research was conducted with the sole intention of discovering the reaction of employees in various industries and to find out how they rate their employer's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The responses provided were tabulated in excel and analyzed to figure out the overall trends that was exhibited by the responders. This provided varied insights as to how respondents value different steps taken by their respective organizations.

Literature on pandemic response efforts by corporations and other agencies was also studied to gain better insights to the steps taken to combat COVID-19 in different organizations and industries. A lot of industries which involve factory/assembly work as well as manufacturing work had no choice but to stop operations till the situation improved slightly to allow for workers to work in the plants. The IT industry, due to the nature of majority of the work that has

to be done, is one of the very few industries that has managed to remain in operation even during these challenging times.

Results And Analysis

The results of the study conducted in both the primary and secondary means have provided insights into the importance of an organization's decisions. Many organizations have gone to great lengths to ensure that their employees feel taken care of while they take steps to ensure business continuity.

From the respondents who were surveyed, only one percent agreed to a statement that their organization is under very real threat of bankruptcy. More than two percent of the respondents, from the Retail as well as the Energy industries respectively, were positively convinced that their organizations were badly affected by the lockdown and other measures undertaken to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that employees in organizations that are functioning in the pharmaceutical, banking, financial, e-commerce and ed-tech industries were having a very positive outlook and were convinced that their organizations were not at all negatively affected by the pandemic situation. These respondents largely felt that their organizations have recorded higher revenues during this time period.

More than 8% of the respondents were in strong agreement to the statement that their organizations did not experience an increase in revenues and profits due to the COVID-19 induced lockdown all over the nation.

Almost all the respondents were quite satisfied with the policies that their respective organizations had adopted for the pandemic affected time, with the slight exception of respondents from the energy industry. The respondents were also satisfied with the guidance they received on how to perform day to day tasks in their respective organizations in the changed working conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is also in line with the observation that can be made after studying literature on energy companies and how they manage to continue to operate during times of crisis. Being a critical sector, people cannot afford to implement shut downs and other mechanisms which disrupt the operations, leading employees to believe that they are not properly cared for. A majority of the audience surveyed also expressed confidence in their corporate leadership having plans in place for the organization to emerge successfully out of the crisis.

The respondents also felt that their organizations were able to implement the instructions and regulations enforced by the central and local government authorities that needed to be complied by the organizations, with ease.

Since one of the major concerns that organizations have now is the increased availability of funds to pay for the extra expenses and losses incurred, some organizations and employees are able to relate the current situation with periods of great disturbance from the not-so distant past; corporations have been through traumatic phases in their existence starting from natural disasters that destroyed the assets of businesses to terrorist attacks to economy crashes, the last of which occurred during 2008 when the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the United States led to a world-wide

recession. Some employers and employees do seem to have the mostly painful memories etched into their minds that they have chosen to highlight that point. These respondents also had a positive outlook on their organization's future after the crisis is over, along with higher levels of confidence in the business's leadership.

However, a significant number of respondents felt that their organizations had not experienced a bad situation prior to this and thus remained a bit skeptical on their organization's plans to endure this difficult time. They too, however, expressed confidence in their organization leadership's plan to sail through the crisis successfully.

The respondents also put forward valid suggestions aimed at improving the quality of their experience in performing their full capacity from the point of view of an employee. The respondents were from different industries with varied outlook on what has to be done to improvise the current scenario. Almost all industries are working with minimum manpower being deployed, after devising plans to ensure that the productivity levels remain optimal even and thus prevents losses. Respondents from the core manufacturing sector felt that the organization was suddenly being pushed to make changes that usually take years to be implemented. The push towards work from home for all roles that could be done so, was felt necessary. Respondents also felt that the responses their organizations took with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic could be done better had it been faster. The model of dispersed/staggered shift timings for workers should be mandated with proper Personnel Protective Equipment's being provided for each worker, thus ensuring the continuity of the business along with safe working conditions being provided to the workers. The suggestions being put forward by the employees imply that some of these procedures were not satisfactorily implemented in the organizations.

Other suggestions put forward by a significant number of respondents was the lack of equipment necessary for large scale work from home operations to be carried out. Many organizations had to face shortage of laptop computers and other equipment to function to their full capacity when the government-imposed restrictions in travel and transport delayed many such shipments full of essential goods. The urgent need for such a large number of computers and other such equipment was not foreseen by the organizations and the sudden restrictions made short work of their plans to introduce the required number of equipment into the hands of the employees. A suggestion from some employees in the banking and financial services sector was to give the employees a choice to use their own devices for work related purposes instead of the organization scrambling at the last moment to ensure devices for all employees. Modern technology has created solutions in the form virtual machines, which could be utilized to save on valuable time which may be lost in procuring different devices for everyone. Some of the respondents also suggested the requirement of better means to approve leaves for the employees, especially in the case of legally mandated leaves like maternity leave. This may be due to partial computerization of the HR department in those organizations, where flexibility was not offered due to compliance issues with policies. In view of the impact made by the current crisis, this complaint would already have been

addressed. Extreme amount of automation is also proving to be quite a burden on organizations and employees, as witnessed in Amazon, where the quarantine orders by the government led to automatic leave application, approval and subsequent pay-cuts as a result.

Respondents from the IT industry suggest a more democratized means of BCP implementation. They feel that organizations should try and include the suggestions put forward by the employees when they are planning for a disaster scenario, so that the employees can also have their concerns about the plan heard at the point of creation of the plan. This may also result in lesser number of changes and requests for changes in the plan once it is being implemented, also proving better for the organization. Most other respondents provided responses regarding engagement programs. The respondents favored a greater number of programs to engage with the employees.

ABB, one of the most prominent switch manufacturers, have implemented work from home for employees across its offices while keeping the factories shut across India, in line with the government directives. This will result in a dip in productivity, but it is unavoidable in the current situation. The organization also formed a national level task force to keep its employees, customers and other stakeholders informed of changes (if any) in the plans of operation.

Some other operations like steel plants have are by nature not meant to stop production abruptly. As it is one of the core industries, steel plants shutting down even for short periods of time makes primetime news. Tata Steel, one of the most prominent names of steel manufacture in India, introduced novel methods to curb the economic impact of the crisis and prevent unemployment. The organization reduced shift timings by 15 minutes each, with the resultant gap of half hour being used to sanitize the plant to make it safe for the workers of the next shift.

Mindtree, from the house of L&T have undertaken steps to prevent the spread of the disease among the employees. The organization has put restrictions on employee travel and large groups being assembled. Mindtree employees also have access to a special 24-hour medical hotline to provide timely assistance to employees in need. The organization has also implemented work from home for a majority of its employees.

IT companies in India have been pioneers in ways to get work done from employees even when the office is out of bounds. This prior experience has given them a head start in combating COVID-19. Wipro, one among them, had shut down its offices in the city of Pune when cases of COVID-19 were reported among its employees. They also went one step further. Apart from providing their employees with required resources to work from home, they also managed to convert their spacious offices into a center to treat and house COVID-19 patients.

National Fertilizers Limited, one of the state undertakings have also taken steps to combat COVID-19. The corporate offices have been shut down with the staff designated to work from home. As the plants produce a vital component which contributes to the nation's food security, the factories have not been shut down completely. The management has taken necessary steps such as providing facilities for and enforcing cleanliness in the personnel, by installing foot operated washbasins and soap dispensing machines.

Thermal scanning of all personnel coming to work has been made mandatory and several means of communicating the dangers of the disease and how to overcome them have been placed in their facilities. The organization has also undertaken cleaning efforts in and around their facilities. All of its staff has also been provided with masks and other safety equipment as deemed necessary.

One of the leading mineral processing companies, Imerys has also taken steps to fight COVID-19. The organization has specified the cleanliness requirements to be able to prevent employees from catching and unwittingly spreading the disease. The organization has clear cut protocols on what is allowed. Thermal scanning and maintaining proper hygiene are strictly mandated.

Being a sector of utmost importance due to the restriction in movement and travel imposed, E-commerce is one such segment that cannot afford to shut down, with companies even experiencing increases in revenues. This has prompted Flipkart Internet, one of the nation's most well-known E-commerce websites, to take steps to counter COVID-19 spreading among its employees. Flipkart employees are subject to thermal scanning at the workplace along with cleanliness guidelines, which are strictly enforced. All employees and agents are now required to wear masks as a preventive measure to check the spreading of the disease. The company, also operated for the initial days of the nation-wide lockdown by only delivering essential commodities. The same steps were also taken by Amazon across its fulfilment centres and delivery sector employees also. The companies also allowed for work from home for its corporate employees to reduce the traffic and gatherings at offices. The e-commerce giants also started manufacturing and selling of PPE's of their in-house brand during the crisis period.

Major automaker Toyota Motors have issued directives to its employees returning back to their factories after the nationwide lockdown was lifted and they were allowed to operate. The company requires its employees to self-check before starting off to go to office. Pickups and drops arranged by the organization now follow strict norms of social distancing, with only half the total number of seats being occupied and the vehicles being used for the purposes being sanitized regularly. The company has also taken measures to ensure that employees wear masks whenever they are inside the company premises, and maintain cleanliness and social distancing. The canteen timings have also been staggered to ensure that rush is not created in the canteen area. The organization has also issued these guidelines to all their registered auto dealers, so that they may also implement these in their showrooms. The organization has also implemented programs requiring change in seating arrangements in office and during travel. The company has banned carpooling temporarily to maintain social distancing while travel.

Discussions

Some organizations, despite getting the government mandated clearances to continue to operate through the lockdown period, decided to stagger the reopening of their offices after the lockdown was lifted and businesses allowed to operate.

Those organizations that already had a strong work from home policy like the ones in the IT sector were able to continue working during the lockdown period whereas other sectors had to schedule shut downs and allow only basic maintenance personnel into their facilities.

The hospitality sector was also terribly affected. Some organizations operating in the hospitality sector was able to convert their facilities to quarantine and isolation centers and thus regain some lost revenue by way of compensation provided by the state/central government.

The manufacturing sector was affected deeply as most facilities did not provide social distancing enabled residences for the members of the workforce. Also, in the initial stages of the nationwide lockdown announced, very few organizations were allowed to operate. Once the organizations were allowed to re-start operations, stringent measures to ensure social distancing and spreading of the disease were to be observed. It was not much in the way of expenses for the corporates with large scale operations, but for many small companies operating in small scale, this cost is even proving to be ultimately not profitable. These restrictions are not unfair to be imposed, as the health and safety of the citizens is of utmost importance. The organizations should have to develop strategies and policies to implement the social distancing and sanitizing of the premises, while being operational.

Other sectors that have tried to adapt to the situations by adopting stringent safety precautions are the telecom and energy sectors. As the aforementioned services are crucial to the functioning of the nation, they had the necessary government clearances to operate by taking adequate precautions to prevent infections and their spread.

All organizations, irrespective of the industry sector they operate in, have drastically reduced physical meetings, having virtual meetings and conferences instead.

The IT industry, which usually offered its employees the 'luxury/convenience' of work from home now found a reason to make it the norm. The work from home model is not applicable for a lot of other industries, like manufacturing. A factory cannot convert its model of working into work from home. As a result, the organizations have found a way to mitigate the losses that they have had to face due to the pandemic. This includes the staggered arrival and departure of workforce, staggered break timings, mandatory thermal screening and usage of Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE) and masks, restrictions on travel arrangements, timely sanitizing of the premises and others.

Other changes that have been accomplished are from the standpoint of the HR policies of organizations, with changes being made to the leave policies and work from home allocation policies. Even in organizations which cannot allow work from home for a vast majority of the workforce, the employees who can perform their work from their homes have been made to do so. Virtual meetings and conference calls, which were once almost a hallmark of IT sector

employees, are now part of corporate employees in most major companies.

There is a strong possibility that the changes in policy that are being made in this crisis times, will remain to be used by the organizations that are adopting them for the foreseeable future. This will prove to be a boon for organizations because the employees who are able to function normally during work from home may be allowed to continue doing so, which allows for reduction in costs at operational facilities and an agile team that will not be disturbed in time of crisis.

The crisis period of the COVID-19 pandemic will allow for the organizations to reflect upon their response to it and thus curate a better plan for when the organization will be expected to sail through another crisis.

Conclusions And Recommendations

Work from home is certainly no more a luxury to tempt employees in to joining an organization, but it will be expected from employees who are to join in an organization. Companies will have to find better methods to evaluate the performance of the employees working from home, as the direct connect is often only available for much shorter time periods.

Organization will have to define better means of performance appraisals so that employees can also be satisfied with the results. Some common methods that are being used now are actually proving to be unpopular and ineffective. The kind of performance appraisal methods which involve systematic tracking of the employee's computer screen is ineffective as employees often feel threatened and watched, which might lead to higher levels of anxiety and thus lower levels of performance. Employees who feel that their employer does not trust them to get the jobs done also have a higher chance of leaving the organization.

Other conclusions that can be derived from the small study is that in the not so distant future, a quality that would be much in demand in an employee would be the availability of a soundproof area in their dwelling. This might even be a professional necessity for consultants who might have the option of working from home.

Organizations will have to improve the performance management systems in place at their places to improve the operations during future crisis situations in addition to keeping the focus on improving its practices. This is to be emphasized due to the increased focus on remote working on many offices.

Limitations

The study was conducted over a short period of time, and thus due to the same shortage of it, only includes a very small portion of the topics that was intended to be covered. The paper was intended to cover all major innovations in the HR policies and operations field that have come about due to the pandemic induced restrictions. This did not materialize completely as the number of organizations studied had to be decreased in the interest of time.

Most established organizations have executed their business continuity plans in a similar fashion. Most organizations

have adopted methods that are similar to each other, within their respective industries. There have been lesser variations in the responses than that was expected, with most firms deciding to proceed in similar, known and sometimes proven ways.

Organizations are still evolving innovative methods to counter the ill effects of the pandemic induced lockdowns and shut downs. Some of these have been covered in this paper, but most have not been, due to operational limitations and time and network constraints.

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