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EFFECTS OF CORONA VIRUS PANDEMIC (COVID-19) ON SELECTED HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT
The global economy has been severely affected by Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic. Workplace has not been the same because of its connection with the domestic and global economy. Change of lifestyles of customers and employees to cope with the new normal life has caused a crisis that organisations are trying to manage. The effect of the disease on human resource management which is one of core management functions in the corporate world has not been empirically identified. This motivated the researcher to conduct this study. Specifically, the study assessed the effects of COVID-19 on employee recruitment and selection, employee training, performance management and compensation management. Survey design was employed in this study. The study used a sample of 250 human resources practitioners from which data were collected by the use of telephone interviews and an online survey. Data were collected from 6th April, 2020 to 10th May, 2020. Data was analysed using content and descriptive analysis. The study found out that number of employee recruitment and selection activities drastically decreased as a result of COVID-19. Employee training programmes that were scheduled prior to the outbreak had been cancelled to protect employees from contacting the disease. Online training which would be the best alternative could not be used by all organisations because of lack of facilities. Respondents doubted whether e-learning would be as effective as face-to-face mode of training. Performance management became more challenging. The study found that employees could not achieve previous set goals because of disruptions caused by the disease. For organisations that opted for working from home were experiencing difficulties in monitoring employee performance and the practice raised a concern of work-life balance issues. COVID-19 has made organisations to fail meeting some of their financial obligations including payment of employees' benefits. The study recommended adoption of e-HRM to minimize employee physical interactions, employee engagement in crisis management strategies and review of HR policies to suit times of crisis.

Keywords: covid-19, human resource management, practices and Tanzania

1. INTRODUCTION
The novel corona virus pandemic was firstly discovered in December, 2019 in Wuhan Providence of China (Gondauri, Mikautadze, & Batiaishvili, 2020). The disease caused by the virus is famously known as COVID-19 which stands for corona virus disease 2019. The number ‘2019’ signifies the year when the disease was firstly discovered. In the end of January, 2020 the disease was declared as a global health emergency by the World Health Organization (Yuen, Ye, Fung, Chan, & Jin, 2020). The virus spreads from one person to another when people get to close contact through respiratory droplet that can be expelled in the air by an infected person when he coughs or sneezes (Ramesh, Siddaiah & Joseph, 2018). Droplets from an infected person may also fall in different surfaces and put anyone who touches those surfaces at risk of contracting the virus when that person touches his or her face (ILO, 2020). As per data of 6th May, 2020 there were 2, 236, 835 active cases of the disease and 259, 355 deaths all over the world.

Various policies and measures are being taken by national governments, including border closures, mandatory quarantines, restrictions of movement, prohibitions on large gatherings, and lockdowns of cities or entire countries, resulting in widespread changes to ordinary life and business activity (ILO, 2020). COVID-19 has affected almost all
sectors on different scales. It is evident that COVID-19 has affected workplaces and activities that are performed by organizations.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only the most serious global health crisis since the 1918 Great Influenza (Spanish flu), but is set to become one of the most economically costly pandemics in recent history. Experience with past epidemics provides some insights into the various channels through which economic costs could arise, in the short as well as longer term. At the same time, COVID-19 differs from previous episodes in several important ways. Notably, the globally synchronised lockdowns and trauma of financial markets reinforce one another into an unprecedented economic sudden stop (Boissay & Rungcharoenkitkul, 2020). Globally, the effects of COVID-19 to the economy are alarming. Importation and exportation of goods and products have decreased and make international trade to slow down significantly as the result sales volumes in various firms have gone down. In Africa, key sectors of the economy are already experiencing a slowdown as a result of the pandemic. Tourism, air transport, and the oil sector are visibly impacted. However, more invisible impacts of COVID-19 are expected in 2020 regardless of the duration of the pandemic (AU, 2020). Due to practices such as lockdown of cities and countries, quarantines, self-isolation and discouragement of people’s movement hence, many businesses and firms suffer since people who are the customers and employees are experiencing new ways of life. Organisations are now experiencing new normal practices that many were not prepared for and never saw it coming. Some organisations have adopted working from home which cannot be as effective as a traditional way of working.

Since human resource management directly deals with people in workplaces so many impacts of COVID-19 are expected in human resource management practices. For instance, employee recruitment and selection is always done when there is shortage of manpower in firms but during crisis like this, operations of many organizations tend to slow down and therefore instead of hiring, organisations normally opt for strategies like layoff. It should be noted that to avoid spread of the disease social or physical distancing is encouraged and gatherings are discouraged. Traditionally, employee recruitment and selection requires employers or recruiters to meet with their prospective employees for assessment. This may result to spread of the disease from one person to another. Employees within organizations are also more likely to meet with customers and in some cases meetings among employees themselves are unavoidable. All these are potential sources of spread of COVID-19 something which leaves workplaces more vulnerable to the disease. As previously noted working from home may be used by firms as one of effective ways of helping employees to avoid unnecessary movements and physical interactions to reduce chances of contacting the virus. Working from home may also pose challenges in managing the human resources specifically on the issue of performance management. Work-life balance is another issue that can arise from this practice and make achievement of individual and organisational goals difficult.

The reviewed literature shows lack of empirical evidences on how COVID-19 have affected human resources management practices. This motivated the researcher to undertake this study by using experience from Tanzania. The researcher selected employee recruitment and selection, employee training, performance management and compensation management as four HR practices to be studied. Generally, the study sought to identify the effects of COVID-19 on human resource management practices. Specifically, the study aimed at assessing the effects of COVID-19 on employee recruitment and selection, employee training, performance management and compensation management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Resource is considered to be the most important asset in the corporate world. Performance of any organization depends on how this resource is managed through human resource management practices (Mwaniki & Gathenya, 2015). Armstrong (2006) defined Human resource management as a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization’s most valued assets – the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives. For this reason human resource management is considered to be a driver of any business (Bose, 2015). Human resource management deals with acquisition, development and maintenance of competent employees at work place. Corporations are made up of people and under any circumstances employees are normally significantly affected when an organisation is faced by a crisis.

(Athamneh, 2018). Organisations tend to adapt various strategies to ensure employees are not negatively affected and at the same time they contribute positively towards organisational performance. It is important that the HR department knows how to adapt itself to a turbulent environment and the HR practices that result from a crisis environment do not harm the employees so they are able to keep producing and carry out their work in the best way possible (Simões, 2013).

In times of crisis an organization may find itself losing key staff by either dismissing them or they decide to leave the company due to the panic they are in (Vardarlier, 2016). This may affect performance of an organization in terms of quality and quantity of its productivity due to loss of talent it had. The study of Vasa (2010) shows that employee recruitment during crisis poses a significant challenge due to inability of companies to recruit new staff. On the other hand, organisations may enjoy an advantage of having a larger pool of experienced job candidates due to presence of laid-off employees in the labour market. Employers also find themselves in a better position for bargaining salaries due to higher labour supply.

COVID-19 being a unique kind of crisis, strategies to deal with it should also be different from other types of crisis. For instances, organisations tend to regularly train their employees for enhancing their capabilities to successfully perform their jobs (Rodriguez & Walters, 2018). However, traditional face-to-face mode of training is discouraged in this outbreak as a way of protecting employees from contracting the virus. Organisations are currently forced to shift to online training which can be unaffordable to some organisations. There is also an argument that online training programmes cannot be as effective as traditional face-to-face training programmes (Rana, Rajiv, & Lal, 2014). It is evident that organisations that cannot opt for online training programmes are more likely to reduce number of training programmes or decide not to train their employees at all.

Individual and organisational performance is one of top priorities of any organisation. Firms design and put in place mechanisms to ensure employees put their efforts towards achievement of individual and organisational goals through performance management. When a successful performance management system is implemented, it helps in evaluating and improving both individual and company performance against pre-defined business strategies and objectives (Kumar, 2019). Armstrong (2009) defined performance management as a systematic process for improving organisational performance by developing the performance of individuals and teams. It is a means of getting better results by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework of planned goals, standards and competency requirements.

Avoiding performance evaluations during crisis may seem to be beneficial to individuals because generally people do not prefer being evaluated. However, Wilken (2020) suggests that abandoning evaluations during COVID-19 could result in managers losing critical business performance data in a moment in which leaders are expected to make tough decisions on where to focus resources. Ultimately, this could lead to poor business decisions and an increase in regrettable turnover when high performing employees fail to receive the recognition and opportunities they deserve. It should be noted that, crisis can negatively affect employees’ performance due to stress it is capable of causing (Halkos & Bousinakis, 2016). This implies that performance management during this time should be more strategic and humane for the purpose of maintaining and improving individual and organizational performance.

In most of the time managing crisis is very expensive especially when it happens by surprise. Crisis may disrupt organisation’s financial obligations including benefits that employees are entitled to receive. Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 in one of the recent crisis similar to COVID-19 that affected firms’ cash flows and led to voluntary and involuntary pay-cuts and in some cases employees were forced go for leave without pay (Warner & Lee, 2005). Although it is a practice for organizations to reduce benefits during times of crisis still rewards may be used to motivate employees to perform their jobs better. The study of Wu, Lee, & Lin (2012) highlights that during the SARS epidemic of 2003, management of many hospitals in Taiwan implemented policies that introduced financial and non-financial rewards to those staff who accepted to take care of SARS patients. This means incentives can be used as a motivating tool to employees in crisis management.
3. METHODOLOGY

This study collected both qualitative and quantitative data from the respondents. Qualitative data was collected by the use of semi-structured interview and quantitative data by a standard questionnaire. Due to the fact that, this study was done during COVID-19 outbreak the researcher used telephone interview and administered an online survey as a way of protecting himself and the respondents from contacting the virus. Moreover, an online survey is recommended for being time efficient, easy to reach large samples, and the fact that respondents can respond to questionnaires at their own convenient time (Evans & Mathur, 2005). A sample size of 250 human resource practitioners working in Tanzania was used for data collection. Human resource practitioners were purposively used because of their engagement in day-to-day human resource management activities in organisations and therefore they are presumably knowledgeable on human resource management practices in their respective organisations. All 250 respondents were asked to complete an online survey and 8 respondents among them were also interviewed. Data were collected from 6th April, 2020 to 10th May, 2020. Content analysis was used to analyse data that was collected by using interviews. Content analysis is done through identification of main themes that emerge from descriptions given by respondents during answering the set of questions (Kumar, 2011). Descriptive analysis was used to analyse data that were collected by using an online survey through questionnaires. Descriptive analysis intends to make description and summary of data through the use of frequencies, measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion (Fallon, 2016).

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Out of 250 respondents, 146 (58.4%) were male and 104 (41.6%) were female. In terms of nature of organisations that respondents were working for, 140 (56%) respondents were working for private organisations and 110 (44%) for state owned organisations. Other characteristics of the respondents are presented in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>146 (58.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>104 (41.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Experience</td>
<td>1-4 Years</td>
<td>80 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-8 Years</td>
<td>98 (39.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9-12 Years</td>
<td>21 (8.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Above 12 Years</td>
<td>47 (18.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Organization</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>140 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>110 (44%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Effects of COVID-19 on Employee Recruitment and selection

The study sought for an understanding of the extent to which COVID-19 had affected employee recruitment and selection practices in organisations. Through the interviews conducted it was found that organizations were no longer interested in hiring new staff to avoid unnecessary spending. The main reason for this was the fact that organisations’ operations were slowing down and therefore usual activities were used to be performed by these organisations before were decreasing. Responses from the questionnaire were consistent with what the study found in the interviews. Respondents were asked to tell if their organisations had cancelled any of employee recruitment and selection activities due to COVID-19. Out of 242 respondents, 89 (36.8%) respondents said no, 136 (56.2%) respondents said yes and 17 (7%) were not sure. Further, 169 respondents (69.8%) confirmed that employee recruitment and selection activities were being discouraged to avoid physical interactions and movements that could result to spread of COVID-19 while 59 (24.4%) informed that their organisations were not discouraging the activities. Other 14 respondents (5.8%) were not sure if their organisations were discouraging employee recruitment and selection activities because of corona virus or not.
Respondents who were working for public organisations were optimistic that recruitment of new staff would probably continue to take place in some of public organisations because most of state owned organisations were still operating. It is evident that employee recruitment and selection in private organisations were more affected than in public organisations. Practices such as working from home, work-shift, encouraging leaves and others that intended to have as less employees as possible in the working stations were more prevalent in private than public organisations.

During the interviews respondents were asked whether there were digital platforms in their organisations which could enable employee recruitment and selection to be done without unnecessary physical contact with job candidates during the COVID outbreak. It was found that job opportunities could be advertised and job candidates were able to send their applications electronically; however, in the interviews there was divided opinion on job candidates’ assessment by the use of online platform. To the large extent this was seem to be impossible due to employee recruitment and selection policies of some organisations which required face to face assessment of job candidates and other formalities that required physical verifications of forms, certificates, etc. One respondent interviewed explained that employee assessment through various technologies could possibly be done in his organisation because it had been done even before the outbreak. In the questionnaire, respondents were also asked to tell whether organisations had online or digital platform that could be used for employee recruitment and selection. Out of 242 respondents 142 (58.7%) responded no they did not have such facilities, 89(36.8%) responded they had and 11(4.5%) were not sure.

### 4.3 Effects of COVID-19 on Employee Training

The interviews revealed that employee training had been severely affected by COVID-19. All eight interviewed respondents admitted that their respective organisations had cancelled training programmes that were scheduled to take place. This was done as a means of protecting employees from contacting the virus. This was also confirmed by the responses from the questionnaire. Out of 242 respondents 212 (88.4%) confirmed that their organisations cancelled training programmes that were scheduled to take place due to COVID-19. On the other hand, 25 (10.3%) responded that there were no any cancellations while 3(1.2%) were not sure.

One respondent interviewed explained that some organizations had already started using online platforms for training their employees. In the questionnaire the respondents were also asked to tell whether they had shifted their training sessions to an online mode. Out of 241 respondents who answered the question 97 (40.2%) said yes, 137 (56.8%) said no and 7 (2.9%) were not sure. In the interviews, it was noted that the introduction of the use of e-learning in many organisations would not be smooth because of the fact that a significant number of employees were not trained on how to use it and many had not used them before. Effectiveness of online training was also found to be questionable since out of 239 who answered the question concerning effectiveness of online training 151(63.2%) had an opinion that online training could not be as effective as face-to-face mode of training, 56 (23.4%) thought it could be effective and 32 (13.4%) were not sure. This was also reflected in the interviews since respondents showed a doubt if online training would suit all demands of their respective organizations. The interviews revealed that financial benefits were attached to face-to-face training programmes because employees were offered per diems for each training programme attended something which seemed to be impossible with online training sessions. For that reason the use of online training were less preferred by many employees and the interviews indicated that lack of financial incentives in online training sessions would affect employee motivation to take part in this mode of training.

### 4.4 Effects of COVID-19 on Performance Management

Managing employee performance was also found to be more challenging. In the questionnaire respondents were asked to say whether COVID-19 made it difficult to set realistic goals (short term and long term) for employees. It was found that, 202 (83.5%) said yes, 31 (12.8%) said no and 9 (3.7%) were not sure. Some of targets that employees were supposed to achieve seemed to be difficult and in some cases impossible because of disruptions caused by the disease. One of the respondents gave an example of primary and secondary school teachers who were expected to achieve certain targets in teaching students and it was not possible because schools were forced closed as a result of COVID-19. The findings from the interviews were consistent with those from the questionnaire since 213
respondents (88%) confirmed that COVID-19 made it difficult for employees to achieve previously set goals. On the other hand, 20 (8.3%) had a different opinion that the disease did not make it difficult to achieve previously set goals while 9 (3.7%) were not sure. One respondent who was interviewed had an opinion that majority of employees’ performance was negatively affected by the pandemic and satisfactory achievement of individual set goals was impossible. Responses from questionnaire show that majority of the respondents (77.6%) had an opinion that employee performance dropped due to the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. Another challenge identified is a new normal of working from home that some of organisations had opted for. Monitoring performance in this practice was seemed to be problematic and coordination of activities performed by different employees working in their respective homes seemed to be tedious.

4.5 Effects of COVID-19 on Compensation Management

The interviews revealed that managing financial rewards had become more problematic than non-financial because organizations were more concerned with their ability to offer these rewards to their employees both in short and long run. Incentives were reduced and in some organisations were suspended to help organisations meet other financial obligations. In the questionnaire the study was interested to find out whether indirect compensation packages such as bonuses, overtime payment and other allowances were no longer paid sufficiently due to the effects of COVID-19. Out of 241 who responded to the question 124 (51.5%) responded yes, 103 (42.7%) responded no and 14 (5.8%) were not sure.

It was revealed that other organisations had gone far by asking their employees to take leave without pay and some were thinking of opting for pay-cuts. Additionally, other organisations were unable to pay salaries to their employees. One of the interviewee said that she was familiar with two organisations that had not paid salaries their employees for more than 2 consecutive months. Although many organisations were found to be severely affected in compensation management, respondents had an opinion that employees working in government organisations would not be affected as much as those working in the private sector specifically in salary payment. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to answer the question “If COVID-19 pandemic lasts for 12 months now from the time of data collection will your organization be able to pay salaries?”, Out of 242 respondents 113 (46.7%) responded no, 80 (33.1%) responded yes and 49 (20.2%) were not sure.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study showed how COVID-19 affected four selected human resource management practices in Tanzania. Most of these effects are beyond control of organisations but in a crisis like this it is the right time for HR department to demonstrate how strategic it can be. Organisations are normally affected differently in any crisis based on type of products or services they offer, the industry they operate in, capabilities of management to handle crises and crisis management preparedness of the organisations. Some of HR practices such as employee recruitment and selection, training and performance management would have been not affected as much as they were, if organisations had put in place some mechanisms to deal with situations like this particularly the adoption of electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM). This implies that crisis preparedness and management in Tanzania is not well done as far as human resource management is concerned.

The issue of employee motivation is of importance to highlight in this study. Employee motivation is more likely to be affected when organisations stop providing rewards to their employees. Management specifically HR department in organisations should think of various ways to motivate their employees. Inability to sufficiently offer financial rewards to employees should make leaders start thinking of other strategies including provision of non-financial rewards to their employees. For instance, during a time like this when everyone is at risk of being infected with the disease it is important for the organisations to start reviewing their health insurance policies to help employees and their families to be properly insured.

Lockwood (2005) insists that during a crisis, employees and other internal stakeholders need a convenient and easy-to-find place to access communications from the company. This calls for organisations to ensure sufficient information is supplied to help them protect themselves and stay calm during the crisis. The recent study of Elsafty and Ragheb (2020) which was done in Egypt revealed that access to information including updates on the
pandemic is one of important factors that contribute towards employee retention in organizations. It is also important to understand that whatever decisions that organisations think of making employees are consulted or participate fully. This always helps to improve quality of decisions and avoid unnecessary resistance from the employees.

This study has confirmed that jobs in public organisations are more secured than in private organisations since majority of respondents from public organisations were optimistic that their jobs were secured and they would still receive their wages for a longer time during COVID-19 unlike those working in the private sector. The issue of working from home which emerged in this study reminds the importance of hiring employees who are self-motivated. This is because monitoring employee performance was found to be a problem when employees are working from home. Training employees to enable them working independently with less supervision is also important whether there is a crisis or not. Supportive organisational culture should also be in place to make this possible. Popa, Furdui and Edelhauser (2019) opine that organisational culture is the social energy that causes people to act, and is considered the invisible "force" behind the easily observable and tangible things in an organisation. In this sense if organisational culture does not facilitate employees to work independently with minimum supervision employees are more likely to perform less than expected.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Human resource management practices are not immune to COVID-19. The outbreak made employee recruitment and selection more difficult for organisations in the time when employees voluntarily and involuntarily leave the organisations. Employee training programmes were decreasing in a time when trainings were necessary to make sure operations were effectively going on and the employees stay safe in their organisations. Performance management had been challenged since previously set goals seemed not possible to be achieved in the standards expected while monitoring employees working from home become challenging as well. Due to the effects of COVID-19 many organisations were increasingly failing to meet their financial obligations including paying salaries to their employees and other financial benefits. The effects of COVID-19 on human resources management were more severe to private organisations than public organisations something which made employees in public organisations to feel that their jobs are more secured than those in private organisations. Effective crisis management is crucial during time like this to help employees and their organisations to be less affected by COVID-19 and this role should be excellently played by the HR department.

This study recommends the following;

(i) Organizations should consider adopting for electronic human resource management (e-HRM) to facilitate HR functions such as employee recruitment and selection, employee training, performance management and others to be done electronically. This will help to avoid unnecessary interactions that can result to spread of COVID-19.

(ii) Decisions made by the HR departments and the organisations at large such as pay-cuts, forced or encouraged leave without pay, etc should be made through consultation with the employees to give them room for opinions and suggestions for a better decision making process.

(iii) Organisations should review HR policies to enable them accommodate current demands that force organisations to abandon their normal ways of operating.

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