La Gestion des Ressources Humaines : Quels nouveaux enjeux en temps de crise sanitaire COVID19

Human Resources Management: What new challenges in times of the COVID19 health crisis?

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Abstract: *The health crisis due to the coronavirus and its various variants (Delta, omicron, etc.) has had related effects on human resources management. Whether it concerns recruitment, dismissal, compensation, health and safety at work, work organization, the current context has invited human resources managers to innovate and adopt new practices.*
It is therefore interesting to analyze the new challenges of HRM at the time of the pandemic, and to question the ability of HRDs to lead the organizational changes that the complexity and uncertainty of the economic context wants.

Key Words: **Human Resources Management (HRM), health crisis, teleworking, change management, digitization.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The health crisis that the world is experiencing will forever mark not only the history of medicine, but also the history of economic, legal and social thought. As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has stated, COVID 19 is "*the worst global crisis since 1945*". By transcending all borders, it has imposed a brutal change by challenging all standards and values upstream, including globalization of economies. The pandemic reveals that we must adhere to Edgar Morin's philosophy that "*We must live with uncertainty*".

With this episode of the coronavirus, companies have finally understood that managerial logics centered on profitability are questionable, and that their upstream organization system was failing. The current crisis is a reminder to organizational theory and human resources management to make a fresh start. It invites them to integrate new practices; whose key words are: telework, well-being, digitalization, e-management. Some authors, such as Kim (2020) find that the pandemic is a management crisis, in the sense that it has amplified organizational changes. Others, on the other hand, believe that the current crisis questions the efficiency and social responsibility of the company (Pesqueux, 2020).

However, the pandemic is an opportunity for a number of companies to experiment with telework and e-management, in opposition to physical and formal work spaces. It has accelerated digitalization in opposition to archaic bureaucratic. In addition, it has encouraged HR departments to opt for more flexible organizational modes, as opposed to the rigid practices of the pre-crisis era.

The competitive and successful company in the era of COVID 19, wants to be flexible, able to change, adaptable to uncertainties, digital, human and especially ethical and responsible.

In the framework of this contribution, we will try to answer the following question: **To what extent is human resources management capable of responding to the challenges of the cornavirus pandemic?**

2. XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION AT WORK LINKED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Discrimination in the field of employment has long been a key issue in human resources management. Discrimination refers to "a negative attitude or predisposition to behave negatively toward a group, or toward members of that group, which is based on a false and rigid generalization" (Allport, 1954). It underlies the illegitimate and unfounded difference, distinction, and treatment of individuals who are members of an exogroup about which individuals have stereotypes and prejudices. As Lochak (2004) points out, even positive discrimination is questionable given the ambiguity of the term.

In business, we speak of a discriminatory situation as soon as two employees with an identical profile and differing in non-productive characteristics (such as gender, race, age, religion, union or political affiliation, place of residence, etc.), do not benefit from the same attributes (access to hiring, training, salary, promotion, treatment, dismissal, etc.).

Indeed, the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic has fueled discrimination in the workplace. We should bear in mind that COVID-19 originated in Wuhan in late 2019, subsequently circulating in China, and other Asian countries, before spreading around the world.

It should be noted that the epidemic has led to an increase in incidents of racism, discrimination and violence against people of Asian descent, particularly in the United States, Europe and Canada. According to Croucher et al. (2020), in the United States alone, hate reports against Asian Americans have reached over 100 daily, with victims reporting abusive and unjustified dismissals, insults, physical violence, spitting, and extreme social distancing in the workplace. Wang (2020) believes that in the French context a certain amount of anti-Asian xenophobia has been mediated both on the work premises, as well as in the streets and public spaces including schools and universities. This can be supported by the "#JeNeSuisPasUnVirus" movement launched on social networks (Tisserand, Wang, 2020).

In Morocco, no scientific research has examined anti-Asian discrimination in times of health crises in the workspace. On the other hand, it should be noted that several testimonies have been publicized in the media, as some tourists of Asian origin have been called "coronavirus" in the street.

Beyond anti-Asian discrimination, discrimination in the workplace has taken a new turn with the spread of the virus, as other forms of xenophobia have emerged. For example, xenophobia against employees who have been infected or who have been close to a person infected with the virus, and this when they return to work. In addition, there is xenophobia against employees with relatives who work in hospitals, as well as against those who use public transport or go on missions abroad.

3. COVID 19: AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIMENT WITH TELEWORK

Etymologically, telework refers to "working from a distance" (Metzger and Cléach, 2004). It is characterized by the use of information and communication technologies (ICT), as well as by spatial and/or temporal distancing. (Aguilera et al., 2016; Taskin, 2006; Morel-a-Lhuissier, 2006). Telecommuting is far from a new practice. It dates back to 1950 in the United States, and finds its genesis in the work of Norbert WIENER on cybernetics. The author cites the case of an architect living in Europe, who supervised the construction of a building in the United States, using data transmission means, and thus without having to travel.

Since March 2020, teleworking has been one of the suggestions proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO), on the one hand to reduce the spread of the virus,

and on the other hand to reduce the negative impact of the confinement on the economy.

Thus, a plurality of companies have been led to massively relocate the workplace to the employees' homes, or even to opt for compulsory telecommuting. According to Bouziri et al., 2020, more than 3.5 billion people have confined themselves to their homes, which means that several million employees have been teleworking since March 2020. This finding leads Adzhamoglian and colleagues to say that "companies have caught the telecommuting bug". (Frimousse and Peretti, 2020)

On the other hand, it is important to specify that if telework was already a common practice, before the COVID-19, and well framed legally in developed countries, it is not the same for developing countries like Morocco. In France, for example, Dumas and Ruillier (2014) estimate that telework became official in France with the entry into force of the law of February 29, 2012. It should be added that the beginnings of telework already existed in the European framework agreement on telework of July 16, 2002, as well as in French legislation since 2008 thanks to the proposed law to promote telework.

As far as Morocco is concerned, there is a heavy conceptual and legal fragility in the field of telework, and therefore a delay in the introduction and development of telework. Indeed, before the coronavirus, telework was practiced unofficially but never officially. This is the case of executives who worked from their homes, in the evening, on weekends and during vacations, to advance on subjects or projects that were behind schedule, or simply to check their e-mails.

In addition, there are self-employed freelancers who already work remotely for their clients. Finally, the micro-worker who earns money on the Internet in return for some small tasks like correcting spelling mistakes or translating texts.

The use of telework in the Moroccan context is therefore a first for the Moroccan company. It should be noted that, as with any innovation in work organization, telework has advantages and opportunities but also risks and disadvantages. (Vendramin, 2005).

Telecommuting has several advantages such as autonomy (Pavlova, 2019; Gajendran and Harrison, 2007; Kłopotek, 2017 (Kłopotek, 2017); Wojcak et al., 2016), reduced tensions between private/work life (Metzger and Cléach, 2004). Telecommuting is also a guarantee of better productivity and time saving, thanks to the reduction of fatigue related to long commutes and traffic jams during rush hours. It also reduces costs and time spent on transportation. (Helminen and Ristimäki, 2007; Mokhtarian et al., 2004; Peters et al., 2004; Sandow, 2014). In addition, telecommuting contributes to the reduction of absenteeism due to a better organization of private life allowing to work even in case of difficulty to reach the office (Kitou and Horvath, 2008; Nakrošienė et al., 2019). The spatial distancing, which telecommuting is intended to provide, also reduces stress due to the absence of the formal and stressful atmosphere of the face-to-face mode. (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Aguiléra et al., 2016). Telecommuting is also a Social Responsibility practice. On the one hand,

telecommuting is an ecological solution to improve air quality especially in metropolises, thanks to the reduction of pollution related to the use of transportation to get to the office. (Aguiléra et al., 2016; Giovanis, 2018). This finding can be supported by the significant decrease in CO_2 emissions during containment. On the other hand, telecommuting increases employment opportunities for women and people with limited mobility (Morgan, 2004). Finally, telework constitutes a kind of trust towards the employee, which provides a certain well-being that can have a positive impact on the productivity of some employees, and thus positively impact the financial performance.

On the other hand, telework also has several disadvantages. The first of these is the question of autonomy, which remains debatable for some employees. Indeed, teleworking is a hindrance for some employees, especially for those who need to be assisted and supervised by their manager at all times. In addition to this, there is the complexity of personal organization in the sense that working from home requires a great deal of organization, considerable logistical resources, as well as the ability to separate professional and personal lives. Telecommuting can lead to isolation and even the loss of team spirit. (Pyoria, 2011). This distancing and isolation from the usual work space can lead to decreased productivity and even demotivation among teleworkers (Wojcak et al., 2016; Fedakova and Ištoňová, 2017). This is also the opinion of Bailey and Kurlet (2002) who find that employees' motivations for telecommuting are ambiguous and far from clear. Telework in the age of COVID19 can also be criticised for its negative effect on the health of teleworkers. On the one hand, the shift to telework for 100% of total working time can create musculoskeletal problems (back, neck or shoulder pain for example) as employees often work in an unsuitable environment (inadequate furniture, computer placed too low, etc.). In addition, the excessive use of the screen can have an impact on the quality of sleep and even on the well-being of the teleworker.

From the employers' side, telework has several disadvantages related to the cost of investing in remote platforms, the control and monitoring of performance, and the difficulty of measuring productivity and actual work in some cases.

In addition, it is worth noting that the current global health crisis has been an opportunity to experiment with enforced telework. If we refer to article 46 of the French law of simplification of the law of March 22, 2012, "telework is a form of work organization in which work that could also have been carried out on the employer's premises is carried out by an employee outside these premises on a regular and voluntary basis using ICTs within the framework of an employment contract or an amendment to it".

This definition, which emphasizes the "voluntary nature of telework", has given rise to much debate, and leads us to wonder whether the telework imposed by companies at the time of the COVID-19 really constitutes telework.

4. PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AT THE TIME OF THE COVID19: A STRESSFUL WORK ENVIRONMENT IN SEARCH OF WELL-BEING

Since the media coverage of the suicides of employees of the Renault and France Telecom groups, the issue of psychosocial risks has become a major topic in the discourse of HRDs as well as in CSR and sustainable development reports.

Psychosocial risk refers to the probability of the appearance of a psychosocial disorder emanating from the professional environment. The latter can affect the employee's mental health, or even their physical integrity, such as stress and anxiety, fear, depression, burnout, etc. (Combalbert, 2010). (Combalbert, 2010)

The pandemic of COVID 19, which we are currently experiencing, has alarming implications for collective health and social and emotional well-being. It is necessary to distinguish the effects related to the pandemic itself from those related to containment and work during the health crisis.

On the one hand, the stress factors linked to the pandemic have to do with the loss of loved ones or their contamination, physical distancing, vaccination, etc. On the other hand, there are the effects of confinement, such as insomnia, domestic violence against women and children, depression, isolation.

In addition, there are psychosocial risks related to the change in organizational culture, and even to the disruption and questioning of the company's values. It should be remembered that organizational culture refers to the deep structure of organizations, which originates in the values, beliefs and assumptions shared by the members (Carmeli, 2005).

In order to support these remarks, several examples can be borrowed such as the respect of social distancing, the obligation to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) in the workplace, the prohibition of gatherings during "coffee" and "lunch" breaks; the stress linked to telecommuting, technical unemployment, stress linked to the change in work rhythm, anxiety linked to the high rate of redundancy and short-time working, stress linked to the date of return to work or even non-return, the affective deficit linked to the lack of colleagues and professional warmth for those confined (Frimousse and Peretti, 2020), the lack of change management, the limitation of employee groupings, the switch to online meetings and e-conferences, the excess of signage in the workspace, the switch from the physical workspace to the virtual workspace, etc.

5. OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AT THE TIME OF COVID19: TOWARDS A REVISITING OF STANDARDS

Occupational health and safety has been a topical managerial issue for at least a decade. This thesis can be supported by the best practices in this area, as found in the CSR reports of top performers. Similarly, by listing the principles and standards as well as the directives, in particular those of the UN, the ILO and the AFNOR concerning health and safety at work (GRI, ISO 14001, SA 8000, ISO 45001, OHSAS 18001).

The stakes of safety at work are multiple. First of all, the issues related to safety linked to the use of production machines and chemical products, especially for industrial companies. Then, there are issues related to the safety of the premises, which refer to the safety of the building, fire safety and signage. In addition, there are hygiene and occupational pathologies, in particular stress and burnout.

The health crisis that we are experiencing has had an impact on the predefined standards of health and safety at work. This can be supported by COVID19 related signage, enforcement of strict sanitary rules, social distancing, limiting the number of employees, vaccination, screening, body temperature control, use of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks and hydroalcoholic solutions. Remember that PPE can be defined as a means or device intended to be held or worn by a person to protect him or her against one or more risks likely to threaten his or her safety or health, mainly at work.

The current health crisis is an opportunity for companies to revisit their CSR charters, and even to set up health and safety charters at work. This is also the opinion of Benabou (2020) who believes that "companies must invent health charters or even a label reserved for a branch of activity such as the restaurant or hotel industry. The backbone of these charters is the wearing of masks, gloves and social distancing." The author adds that technology is being called upon to help, such as tactile holograms in office doors and elevators.

6. COMPENSATION, RECRUITMENT, JOB SAVING PLANS AND DIGITIZATION: ISSUES ON THE AGENDA

Compensation is a means of motivation, involvement, attraction and retention. It refers to a form of reward received by an employee for his or her contribution to the company's financial performance. There are two components of compensation: financial compensation and intangible compensation.

Financial or material compensation refers to base salary, bonuses, savings and employee profit sharing. In addition, there are social benefits such as health insurance, training assistance and retirement insurance. Non-financial compensation refers to intangible recognition, which is manifested in trust, dialogue, well-being, esteem, status and personal development, among others.

Table -1: The impact of the main compensation tools

Source: Guerrero (2019)

Remuneration Financial	Salary	Attract, motivate
	Performance-related bonuses and incentives	Motivate
	Collective variable remuneration	Attach, retain
	Employee savings	Attach, retain
	Social benefits	Retain
Non-financial compensation	work climate	Attach, motivate
	Trust	Attach, retain
	Well being	Motivate, retain
	Personal development	Attach, retain, motivate
	Status	Attach, retain, motivate

Indeed, the health crisis has had a negative impact on the profitability of businesses. This impact can be seen in the drop in activity, and even in the technical unemployment and bankruptcy, especially for companies operating in the restaurant and hotel sector.

These financial conditions have had a real impact on pay scales, insofar as countless companies have lowered the pay of their employees. Similarly, some company executives have announced that their compensation will be reduced in Covid context. Note that in France, for example, according to Collin et al. (2020), CEOs' annual compensation in 2019 was 24 times to 243 times the median compensation of employees. The authors add that the pandemic raises in its wake a fundamental question related to the hierarchy of jobs and the salary grid, such as the compensation of healthcare workers, cashiers and other shadow jobs such as workers in the food and pharmaceutical industries.

Thus, the decline in financial remuneration has had an impact on motivation, loyalty, and the sense of attachment and belonging. On the other hand, it should be noted that managing payroll and measuring fair material compensation in the context of telework is difficult, if not impossible in some cases. For example, it is difficult to measure the actual level of involvement of employees, or to assess their level of achievement of objectives from a distance.

In addition, it is important to note that the shift to telework and a social climate has in turn had a negative effect on intangible compensation. The latter is manifested in the decline in confidence, well-being and personal development among employees.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the performance of companies. As a result, companies have been forced to lay off employees or even implement job protection plans, and in the best of cases resort to partial unemployment policies in France, for example. It should be noted that the job protection plans refer to redundancies for economic reasons. This practice aims to limit the number of redundancies and to facilitate the redeployment of employees whose redundancy is inevitable. As for partial unemployment, it refers to a system partly financed by the State and which makes it possible to avoid redundancies, insofar as the employees receive almost 80% of their salary.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that recruitment in the context of the pandemic is also a major HRM issue. First, it is important to note that the recruitment process is complex in the current context. While it commonly refers to hiring an employee for a job position, the recruitment process is far from being limited to the simple selection of the "good guy" on the basis of academic excellence and professional experience, to include other parameters such as human qualities and professionalism. On the other hand, the move to telecommuting, and by extension e-recruitment, can be daunting and confusing.

However, some companies have maintained the recruitment projects validated beforehand. Others have postponed or even cancelled recruitment projects due to a lack of visibility and uncertainty. Another category of companies has created new opportunities adapted to the context, particularly in the digital field. This observation can be supported by the investment in platforms and virtual workspaces, interactive software and videoconferencing, as well as by the digitalization of "B to B" and "B to C" relationships. This observation is in line with the results of a study conducted by McKinsey, covering the period from 2007 to 2020. The study shows that the pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of companies by about 7 years, and that companies adapted to digitalization 20 to 25 times faster than expected.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Since the emergence of the coronavirus, human resource management has been at the heart of the debate. This microscopic and invisible virus is difficult to control. On the one hand, it is a godsend for companies in terms of flexibility and experimentation with telework. On the other hand, it stirs up xenophobia and hatred, especially against employees of Asian origin.

The pandemic is also an opportunity to revisit health and safety charters in the workplace. It invites companies to place the health and safety of employees at the top of their concerns. Similarly, it places new challenges in front of HRDs such as the deciphering of official texts issued daily by the government, the use of information and communication technologies, remote management, e-recruitment, web-conferences, e-work contracts, the setting of objectives, the

measurement of the involvement and the achievement of the objectives of the employees, the remuneration, the sorting out of the profiles essential to the continuity of operations in a perspective of safeguarding jobs, and the monitoring of the mental and physical health of the employees psychosocial risks related to the pandemic and disruptive organizational changes, such as stress, anxiety and burn-out, must be taken seriously to reconcile social and financial performance.

In terms of recruitment, the pandemic has highlighted new ways of doing things, such as remote interviews and simple selection based on applications. But to what extent are these practices capable of selecting the best? Aren't remote interviews a way to approach the "good student"? Will companies that have delayed or even cancelled recruitments, validated upstream, be more competitive? Are human resources managers suitable for remote recruitment? The absence of feedback in this sense is confusing and leads to several debates.

Are short-time working and layoffs for economic reasons really necessary? Or is it an opportunity for less responsible companies to take advantages of the context? Will this digitalization imposed by the pandemic bring good results? And to what extent are SMEs able to meet the challenge of digitalization? And above all, what will the "post-Covid" economic and organizational context look like? Will COVID 19 mark a return to protectionism or the start of a new era of globalization? Will telework be a post-crisis norm? Will companies learn the right lessons? However, the "post-crisis" is far from being a simple return to order.

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