



The Possible Changes to the Human Resource Management of Thailand's Hotel Industry Post-COVID Pandemic

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Abstract: It has been over a year, and the COVID pandemic is still impacting many industries, such as the hotel industry. Globally, numerous organizations had to lay off millions of people to cope with the effects of COVID. Although it is not as critical in Thailand as it initially was, it led to an increase in unemployment rates and hotels closing down temporarily and permanently. An optimistic perspective predicts that the hotel industry may recover soon, but that does not mean that Human Resource Management will stay the same. Many people have gained hope from remote working, but hotel employees do not have that option. Since they have to show up in person, it is evident that Human Resources will have to apply some changes to the protocols and workplace. To foresee the possible changes, the author tackles five main aspects of Human Resource Management: Recruitment, Training, Motivation, Healthy Environment, and Retainment of Employment. With each part, the author addresses the problems that the hotel industry in Thailand faces and then formulates a strategy to cope with them. The author concludes with a positive note that even though the COVID pandemic forced so much change to Human Resources, one can still be hopeful that the change will only bring growth and adaptation.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, COVID, Hotel Industry, Thailand

1. Introduction

More than a year has passed since the COVID pandemic, and most countries are doing a great job adapting to it. However, this does not mean that it was easy to cope with, nor will it get any easier in the following years. COVID had a massive impact on the global economy that forced the Human Resource Management (herein referred to as HRM) in numerous industries to apply many changes in the workforce, including letting go of thousands of staff and/or temporarily shutting down [3].

HRM has been (and still is) heavily influenced by the COVID pandemic, especially with the skyrocketing unemployment rates and the requirement for many industries to work from home [17]. However, not everyone has the luxury to work from home, such as employees in the hotel

industry. The author examines the current situation regarding global unemployment as well as the hotel industry in Thailand, the main focus of this paper. Then the author explores the possible changes that HRM will face post-COVID, specifically in the recruitment and training process, motivation, a healthy environment, and the retainment of employment. The author will then explore strategies and solutions that HRM can implement to deal with the changes. Finally, the author will express her overall thoughts on the future of HRM.

2. Current Situation

2.1. Around the World

The United Nations' (UN) International Labor Organization (ILO) evaluated the reduction in work hours to calculate the

number of jobs that were lost all around the world. It was equivalent to having roughly 160 million people unemployed in the first quarter of the year and 500 million people in the second quarter [17]. Their estimation for the third and fourth quarters of the year reached a total of around 600 million job losses [17]. We are now at the last month of the year, and many people are still unemployed either because the jobs that they once had do not exist anymore or companies are not hiring [17, 13]. It makes it concerning when the pandemic is over. There may be a little hope for the future with the COVID vaccination distributed in some parts of the world, but it may be difficult to compensate for the work hours that were lost this year [7, 17].

2.2. In Thailand

In contrast to other countries, the current COVID situation in Thailand is not as critical as it was in the beginning. By the second half of the year, the government eased the restrictions for both citizens and foreign businessmen because the number of COVID cases was low [16, 12]. However, because of the restrictions that were initially in place, the hotels in Thailand were severely impacted to the extent of cutting jobs and temporarily or permanently closing [18, 3]. Although some are optimistic about the recovery of the hotel industry [9], it is the HRM that will undoubtedly face many changes from the effects of COVID.

3. The Role and Changes to Human Resources Post-COVID

Despite the low number of cases and the country gradually going back to normal, there is still a risk of contracting the virus because vaccinations have not been distributed to Thailand yet. Therefore, this puts certain types of workers at risk for their health and safety. Those workers include employees that work for hotels since they do not have the option to work from home. Furthermore, domestic tourism is gradually coming back with travel restrictions easing [9]; this only makes it riskier. To keep their workforce safe from COVID, HRM would have to implement different changes in the workplace. It just might end up being costly for HRM [8].

3.1. Recruitment

The first part of HRM to address is the Recruitment process, as it is one of the aspects that become digitalized [6]. The recruitment process before COVID involved interviews that are face-to-face. However, because of the COVID precautions that people have to take, the new trend for organizations is to do virtual interviews [6]. It can appear to be disadvantageous because one of the benefits of having a face-to-face interview is being able to read and understand body language and facial expressions [10]. Additionally, face-to-face interviews help recruiters easily obtain more information about the applicants by making the questions and answers seem more like a simple conversation [10]. However, the good thing about shifting to virtual interviews is that the talent pool for recruiters increases. Organizations, such as hotel industries, can reach more people

that have the potential to fulfill available positions rather than being limited to people in specific locations [6]. Essentially, recruiters would have more options [6]. Though, the author believes that there is another part that HRM has to focus on.

As mentioned before, the employees are putting their health at risk of contracting the virus by going to work in-person. To solve this problem, HRM would have to do everything they can to eliminate their fears. They can do so by reviewing the safety regulations and ensuring that they contain updated measures to guarantee employee safety and health amidst the pandemic. The updated protocols would have to include a proper procedure to dry-clean the uniforms so that employees do not contract the germs. To guarantee everyone's health is optimal, temperature-checking will have to be implemented every time an employee clocks in and clocks out. Finally, it will have to be mandatory for staff, especially those in housekeeping, to wear facemasks and gloves at all times to avoid the spread of germs. These changes may help reassure candidates that they are safe to work, and if it still does not help, candidates should feel comfortable enough to ask other questions that they are concerned about to the manager.

3.2. Training

The next aspect of HRM is Training, and it may face a few changes. For most industries, the process of training employees can be done virtually during the pandemic. However, since hotel employees will have to show up to work in-person, more precautions will have to be implemented. Training and developing employees are essential for hotel industries in Thailand to regrow and become successful again [15]. It has proven to increase employee satisfaction, morale, and retention [15]. Although training the employees have always been protocol for HRM, the Training must now include more ways to stay hygienic and safe from COVID. As mentioned before in Recruitment, the HRM will have to update the safety regulations with procedures to prevent anyone from contracting the virus. Therefore, they will have to train employees to go through routine temperature-checks as soon as they get to and leave the workplace. They also have to equip the employees with masks and gloves and teach them to dispose of them sustainably. Moreover, since housekeeping staff have a routine to clean the rooms, they will also have to be trained to socially distance themselves from the guests to ensure both the staff and guests' safety. Followed by Training is the Motivation aspect of HRM.

3.3. Motivation

Motivation will be hard to tackle for HRM because like the majority of the world, Thailand's economy was affected that many people were laid off [17, 13, 3]. An employee's motivation essentially stems from job satisfaction, a feeling of enjoyment that a person gets from their job, and job security, the state of having a secure job with the unlikelihood of being fired. When many people get laid off during a tough time like this pandemic, it decreases job satisfaction and increases job

insecurity among people who either remained in the job or were fired, which in turn affects the level of motivation [2]. This is what happened when the world was struck with an economic crisis between 2008 and 2009 [2], thus it is possible that this will occur post-COVID but HRM can solve this problem. To increase the level of motivation among current and future employees, employers and HRM can try (1) challenging them with tasks, (2) acknowledging the effort they bring into the job, and (3) providing support and proper training [2]. While HRM has been doing this since before the pandemic, they should be more attentive after the pandemic. By doing these three things, employees will feel motivated enough to increase their job performance, and in turn, increase the organization's efficiency and overall condition. [2]. One's environment could also be a factor in the level of motivation.

3.4. Healthy Environment

As it has been mentioned several times in the paper, the employees' health and safety is a priority for them to be able to come to work. Thus, the author thinks that for employees to believe they are in a healthy environment, the HRM will have to think about the environment from two perspectives: physically and mentally. An unclean environment for employees is probably going to cause more stress and worry because they will think about how easy it is for them to contract the virus. However, when a workspace is physically clean and organized, it yields many benefits for the employees, such as (1) increased physical health, (2) improved hygiene, and (3) increased productivity and motivation [4]. The benefits result in an overall increase in performance and effectiveness in an organization. Regarding the mental aspect of a healthy environment, employees need to feel like the company they work for is a safe space for them, especially with the COVID pandemic.

After the pandemic, COVID's impact on mental health will most likely last for a long while. There is a study done in the United Kingdom (UK) concerning the mental health of citizens before and during the COVID pandemic [14]. Their results revealed that there indeed was an increase in mental health deterioration. People in Thailand have likely been facing this problem as well, but it is not known since little to no research has been done in Thailand. The first step for HRM is to get rid of the stigma against mental health by speaking openly about it [1]. It may also help ease the worries of employees if HRM provides access to information and communication that are up to date [2], but not too often that it will worry them even more. With the amount of stress that people get from worrying about the pandemic, their job, money, etc., allowing employees to take days off would be good to prevent their mental health from getting worse [1]. Employees should also feel like they have a balanced time with their work and life. Thus, HRM should give them flexible hours [11]. Most importantly, HRM should always be ready to help their employees the moment they notice that something is wrong. Watching over the employees' mental health is related to employee retention.

3.5. Retainment of Employment

Employment retention is the ability of an organization to retain or keep its employees. After the pandemic, people are likely going to hunt for jobs in places where they think they will benefit more. Thus, hotel industries need to know how to retain their employees. The first part to consider is their mental health: Has their wellbeing improved while working for the hotel? HRM can guarantee that by making the employees aware that they have a support network in their workplace [11]. Having a good support network is said to increase psychological health and improve coping mechanisms with stress [5]. It is also helpful to offer regular meetings to check on the wellbeing of employees and make sure that they are in the condition to work [11]. Finally, providing incentives and benefits (i.e., gym membership, meditation) would make employees feel valued in the workplace, which in turn decreases the chances of them leaving. Other things that HRM can do to convince employees to stay in the company are in the Motivation aspect: challenge them with tasks, acknowledge their efforts, and provide support.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, HRM is going through various changes because of the COVID pandemic. After a year of the coronavirus, unemployment rates increased drastically, most industries shifted to remote working, and the lifestyle changed for workers who have to show up in person. Even when the pandemic comes to an end, HRM will not return to the state it once was. Instead, HRM will develop in ways that can match our New Normal and become even better. The hotel industry in Thailand was impacted heavily by COVID, but there is room for HRM to be hopeful and optimistic that they will rise again.

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