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Review Article

Unveiling HR roles: Fostering employee gratitude amidst pandemic like Covid19

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ABSTRACT

Human resource managers are taught the value of acting in a socially responsible manner by COVID-19 and giving employees social assistance and psychological recovery, which can foster a feeling of gratitude for the employers. The body of knowledge on HR roles and employee gratitude is fragmented and a gap still exists in understanding HR roles and employee gratitude in times of crisis. This scientific investigation attempts to trace the relationship between HR roles and employee gratitude during India's peak of the COVID-19 crisis. The sample consists of n=331 employees operating in the NCR of Delhi, India. A causal survey design was adopted to measure employee gratitude through analysis of quantitative data and was subjected to SPSS and AMOS. The results indicate a causal relationship between employee gratitude and four HR roles – HR communication, HR leader-member exchange, HR adaptive capacity & HR networking. This study has industrial implications.

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1. Introduction

Crisis always creates a great amount of uncertainty and anxiety amongst the organisational members (Ulmer et al., 2015).¹ During COVID 19 employees showed various emotions ranging from anxiety to relief. Research on gratitude has shown that when employees feel grateful, they indulge in organisational citizenship behaviours and are ready to give back more than expected (Spence et al, 2013).² Employees are bound to harbour feelings towards HR, who is the face of management during the time of crisis. Their feelings are a reflection of the efficiency and effectiveness of initiatives of HR. Millions of people died in the second wave of coronavirus in India (Zachariah, 2021)³ and more than 10 million jobs were lost (Business Today, 2021). Companies struggled to retain and support employees and tried to offer monetary and

non-monetary support (Zachariah, 2021). Benefits ranged from one-time compassionate payment, continuation of salary till retirement of the deceased employee, education to surviving children and employment opportunities for surviving spouses, and many more (Zachariah, 2021).³ HR departments took special initiatives to provide support in the form of flexible work systems, leaves, logistical support, counselling, vaccination drives etc. The initiatives led to positive psychological outcomes like wellbeing, psychological empowerment, affective commitment and employee gratitude. When organisations move beyond psychological contracts gratitude arises (Hinrichs et al., 2019). Organisations can benefit immensely from employee gratitude in terms of organizational resilience, job performance, organizational citizenship behaviour and employee engagement (Fehr et al., 2017; Kaplan et al.,⁴ 2014; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010).⁵⁻⁷

HR is the face of the organisation and the actual link between the management and the employees. In order to sail

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