

INNOVATIONS

Pandemic (Covid 19) Lockdown in Kuwait and Human Resource Management Emergency Policy Intervention

Lorna Del Rosario¹ Danilo Vargas²

Disaster Risk and Reduction Team, Kuwait¹

Central Luzon State University, Philippines²

lgdelrosario@dotclsu.edu.ph¹ dsvargas@clsu.edu.ph²

Abstract

This study assesses the emergency policy intervention of the Human Resource Department (HRD) at the employee's housing during the Curfew and Pandemic Lockdown in Kuwait. In this case, the study applies interviews using a structured questionnaire and observation. This study is a qualitative study that primarily uses interviews and observations. Interview and observations are used to gather some feedback from the respondents while comparing the regular or normal-day protocol and emergency protocols in the employees' housing. The researcher makes use of the total population sampling as a type of purposive sampling. The respondents' demographics show that majority are mature employees who have reached their level of expertise in doing the right things for the right reasons in policy execution that contributed to the success of their policy execution. The Disaster Risk and Reduction Team (DRRT) regarded the implementation to be responsive since the majority of the employees abide by the policies and that, the housing is not infiltrated by the virus. The role of HRD is vital in Risk management. HRD plans according to considerations, primarily in the promotion of the welfare of its people. It serves as the backbone of policy planning, while the DRRT serves as the frontlines of the housing. They are the implementor of the plans served by HRD. Yes, there is a significant relationship between the emergency policies and the safety of employees. It is the policies that limit the actions of the employee actions that are distinctive during the regular free-pandemic days. Without the emergency policies, the safety of the employees may be at risk that could probably infect employees in the organization and cause the rise of COVID – 19 patients in the country.

Keywords: 1. Pandemic 2. covid 19 3. Lockdown 4. Human resource management 5. Emergency 6. policy intervention

Introduction

Little information has the world known about how organizations operated a hundred years ago due to Influenza Pandemic since the access on the World Wide Web is not prevalent as it is today. This can be pointed out as the exact difference between the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic and the Corona Virus Pandemic of 2020, primarily due to the current technological revolution that disseminates news swiftly like a forest wildfire. If those organizational emergency crisis policies that they had before were available, it would be best so that HR could have a basis of the previous successes of Human Resources in a situation that it is facing right now once again. Among this simple bit of information was written by Dorney, Girard, in his HRM Online article on July 08, 2020. He recalled that during the 1918 Flu Pandemic, in countries all over the world, it was the poorer and more marginalized who suffered the most. They had been neglected that ensured the virus lives longer in the population and increases the suffering of all. In Korea, ethnic Koreans were twice as likely to die as Japanese occupiers, even though their infection rates were similar. In France, it was servants, collected into cramped, poorly ventilated, and unclean shared sleeping spaces, who suffered the most. A quarter of the women who died from influenza in France were maids. John Barry's "The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History, wrote that one of the most dangerous responses to the virus was 'censorship'. This statement backed up the statement of HR Consultant and AHRI South Australia state president, Susan Sadler when she said in an article for HRM that it's detrimental to censor such issues. In the US, Barry wrote that no national official 'ever publicly acknowledged the danger". The man overseeing the nation's shipyards, Colonel Doane, went so far as to tell the Associated Press, "The so-called Spanish influenza is nothing more or less than old-fashioned gripped. The Flu Pandemic wasn't 'only the flu', it infected a third of the world and killed somewhere between 17-100 million people approximately due to censorship. This little bit of information can be the basis of the present states and Human Resource Management so that they can serve the utmost care to safeguard the welfare of their people, as well as the organizations to safeguard the welfare of their workers.

The state of Kuwait is a country in Western Asia. It is situated on the northern edge of Eastern Arabia at the tip of the Persian Gulf, it borders Iraq to the north and Saudi Arabia to the south. Kuwait has reported 1, 335,712 Kuwaiti citizens in 2019, and the remaining number constitutes the population of expatriates in Kuwait which is about 65 % of the total population of the State during that time. The current population of Kuwait is 4,297,721 as of December 7, 2020, based on the World meter elaboration of the latest United Nations data. It is a constitutional sovereign state with a semi-democratic political system. Kuwait has a World Bank high-income economy backed by the world's sixth-largest oil reserves. The Kuwaiti dinar is the highest valued currency in the world. According to the World Bank, the country has the nineteenth highest per capita income. And due to the pandemic, it is anticipated that its annual capita income will decrease due to its early State closure to an International connection such as the closure of air and seaports.

Kuwaiti citizens are health-conscious individuals. Health is one of their priorities. The country itself allows a good amount of budget for its public healthcare sector accounting for more than 80% of the healthcare spending in the country, ([export.gov.](http://export.gov), 2016). In addition, some indications to showcase this health importance are the following: 1) There are 16 public hospitals in the entire country with the biggest consisting of 4,462 beds and a plan of expansion to add a

total of 7,762 by the year 2023. 2) Private clinics are a total of 28 clinics in the entire State, (en.wikipedia.org). 3) Kuwait Fitness Service Market is a hit. Such is “Fitness First for Men and Women”, “Champion”, “Oxygen”, “Cross-Fit Kuwait”, and “Gold Gym” are only a few of the popular ones. 4) Medical charges are free at a reasonable rate for both citizens and expatriates. 5) Healthy and good restaurants are all over its States. These are the reasons why the Kuwait government made a swift response to restrict the entrance of people who are possibly positive for the virus.

Just like any other country, Kuwait’s priority is to secure its entire State from the infected disease. In connection, Kuwait has imposed strict rules in relevance to the COVID -19 Pandemic. Kuwait was one of the first States in the world to close the airport for international flights, and later on domestic flights into and from its neighboring Gulf countries. The imposition of strict rules during the Curfew and Lockdown phases has been strictly abided by its citizens and expatriates because its laws are firm and serious. Kuwait News Agency, KUNA, was the primary agency that was tasked to do some COVID -19 related public announcements. When Kuwait’s first COVID 19 case was discovered on February 24, 2020. The first concern of the public was the children, thus the suspension of classes was implemented on the first week of March 2020. After this enforcement, classes remained closed until even by September, which is the opening of schools. That is why every school’s initiative was to introduce Online Distance Learning. Aside from the suspension of classes, all other establishments remained functional and operating, however, due to the persistent increase of Coronavirus cases, the Kuwait government started to impose curfew hours on March 22, 2020, from 4:00 a.m. till 5:00 p.m. All residents in Kuwait, including operating companies, became very keen on their ways and were compliant with this restriction. However, a very few of the residents, about 1%, – mostly its citizens could not follow rules. Curfew Laws during this time have a corresponding fine and punishment for those who will be caught to do so. 1)Individual Violators: Any curfew violators are pronounced to settle the amount KD 100, 000.000 fine which is equivalent to roughly P 1,600,000.00, and imprisonment of three years without any exaggeration. 2)Company Violators: If operating companies have employees in active duty that are tested COVID positive, the company’s operation will be shut down and the workplace will be closed or suspended as well. This becomes a huge predicament to every company because they want to operate; they want to meet up with the company’s financial losses during the entire lockdown period. These firm laws compelled nearly 99.9% of its citizens and residents to comply.

Expectedly, the majority of Kuwait residents have been too cautious in protecting themselves. Some of them prefer to wear face shields and gloves while they go to the grocery or any public place. Thermometers have also become a must in any establishment to ensure that anyone who enters a certain establishment has no fever, which is one of the symptoms that a person is a corona virus-positive carrier. In this foreign setting, company employees are challenged financially. Their companies – large or established companies - do not assure the comfort and security of their employees. On the other side, many smaller companies went downhill; they closed while others declared bankruptcy. The financial burdens they have to extend to their employees during the entire curfew and lockdown periods are undeniably burdensome to them, too. Thus, larger and established companies have been challenged, the majority of smaller companies and businesses have depleted funds that is the fact, several of them closed because they have not sustained the financial outlay for both economic and business needs. This current situation has been quite a challenge for big and small companies because

they have to put forward the welfare of their people, who although they do not render services during the time of lockdown, have to be supported by their companies. This support is a major manifestation to convey their compassion and care to their employees whom they hired from their home countries majority of which come from the Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia, India, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Africa. These foreign workers are also housed in company housing, while others are in their rented flats with their employers shouldering their monthly rentals. This may not be the case for all company employees, yet however, in Kuwait's economic and business setting, companies are obliged to abide by the terms prescribed by the Labor Law of Kuwait because Labor Law is what safeguards the rights and wellness of every worker here abroad. This is also the reason why employers have to take care of their people in compliance with the Labor Law imposed by the Kuwait government.

About the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Kuwait, among them, is mostly torn between two decisions during the Pandemic. Their decision is confused into two: 1) to remain as an OFW and let the pandemic pass, 2) go home to the country of origin for good and join the family during this tough time. These are the two weighing sides of an OFW while he is away from his family during a pandemic. The decision made can be inferred as usually based on emotion and not on their economic needs during the prevailing worldwide phenomenon. The same dilemma has been experienced by other foreign nationals. They are to choose between – to stay or to just go home. This only proves that the Pandemic has brought not only economic provocations but also a personal struggle to do the right decision – a beneficial decision not only for themselves but also for the people or employees relying upon them. While these employees await the resumption of their work schedule after lock the imposed lockdown by the Kuwait government, several challenges in company housing are also met. The Human Resources Department of each company is the only department that is active on duty during the entire lockdown. Furthermore, the employee housing became the only company site that is active for 24 hours that DRRT has to secure so that no virus could penetrate the accommodations and that the company will be placed under a seized operation if business resumes. Among these challenges are placed under the care of the Human resources department, therefore, HRD has to be strategic to retain protocols and introduce new procedures, to ensure the safety of the entire housing, as well as maintaining the discipline of those emotionally and financially struggling employees housed in the company housing.

Objectives of the Study

This study assesses the emergency policy intervention of the Human Resource Department at the employee's housing during Curfew and Pandemic Lockdown in Kuwait.

Specifically, it seeks to :

1. Describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of age, sex nationality, position, and length of service in the company
2. Determine the safety measures and new policies against Corona, Virus Pandemic have been imposed in the housing of the employees.
3. Determine the implementation of lockdown and curfew policy in the employee's housing as perceived by the respondents.

Scope and Delimitation

This study focuses on Emergency Policy Intervention during the country's imposition of Curfew hours and lockdown in the entire State of Kuwait to ensure the safety of their employees and the initiative of the Human Resources Department with the aid of the Disaster Risk Reduction Team (DRRT) to take the precautionary measures in the staff housing so that no employees could be infected by Corona Virus. The variables included within the implementation are the policies and the socio-demographic features of the respondents who are members of the DRRT: age, sex, nationality, position in the company, and their length of service in the company.

The data results on an interview with the Human Resources Personnel and in-charge of the housing and the DRRT are limited only to this research.

Time and Place of the Study

The study covers only three housing in Kuwait along with the aid of the DRRT. The duration of this study lasted for several weeks -including weekend observations, there is no specific timing to indicate, but due to the availability of time of the respondents. Some of the interviews are done virtually since that is the luxury of time, of the respondents and the researcher.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Many studies and disciplines share articles and talk about the importance of 'planning'. The term 'planning is known as a systematic plan for approaching emergencies, (SHRM, 2020. Managing through Emergencies and Disasters). Every organization would agree that 'planning' is certainly one of the primary considerations that should be placed beforehand. In a company or organization, although a certain department such as risk management and safety professionals are in-charge of planning, human resource management still plays a vital role in planning for any disaster or emergency, whether for staffing and workforce planning, training, reorganization, or revising plans and policies to accommodate changing needs and priorities including recruitment and selection affect the performance and stability of an organization.

In the present social scenario of the COVID -19 pandemic, we see every government or public officials work for the welfare of their people. They try to secure them, provide for them, and even rebuke them when necessary. They create emergency public plans for the safety of their people. Thus, in organizations as well, Human Resources leaders create plans for the entire organization's sustainability during emergencies. The article 'Managing through Emergencies and Disasters' by SHRM, 2020, added that emergency planning involves basic steps namely 1) Program Management, 2) Planning, 3) Implementation, 4) Testing and Exercise, and 5) Program Improvement. The Implementation step should involve a preparedness plan which addresses the following needs: First, operational and closed worksite contingencies. Plans should include contingencies for both operational and closed worksite contingencies. Second, alternative business operation sites. To prepare for the possibility that organizations will be able to maintain their operations even if worksites are inaccessible. Third, categorization of employees by the degree of impact - Employers will have three employee groups based on the nature and magnitude of the emergency: employees who are severely affected (including those who have lost family members or homes and those who are personally affected by severe illness);

employees who have experienced issues such as energy or transportation losses as a result of the disaster; and employees not directly affected. Fourth, compliance with government reporting requirements. Emergency planning should take into consideration government reporting requirements. Fifth, safety and security practices. Business continuity and recovery and emergency response are important elements of a safety and security program. Finally, the communications plan. Communicating with employees, customers, and other stakeholders during emergencies is a critical role. Through effective communications, customers may remain loyal, employees will know not only what is expected but also what resources they can turn to for support during the crisis, and others can know about their role in the emergency.

However, 'emergency plans' are quite different from 'urgency plans'. The term 'urgency' seems to require quick planning and implementation due to unavoidable circumstances that arise such as natural disasters, Jobsite accidents, or state pronouncement of lockdown which means that there is very little time of preparedness, unlike an emergency plan which could have been the result of anticipation and a period of observation. Having a sense of urgency means doing what needs to be done immediately, without being asked, and in the most thorough way possible to create change. This is what exactly happened in company organizations in the Kuwait locale wherein curfew hours have been imposed by the government starting on March 22, from 4:00 in the morning until 5:00 in the afternoon. This curfew progressed into State full curfew or lockdown on May 10, 2020, due to the persistent rising of COVID -19 positives. Upon announcement of curfew and full curfew hours, different organizations began to stagger with urgency planning and disseminate tasks and proceed with urgent implementations of the emergency policies. This is where the role of strategic HR became so much required.

According to the same book by Zorlu Senyuçel, (2009), it is important to have HRM on the strategic level because it provides a broader range of solutions to complex problems generated by the changing nature of work, employee diversity, changing customer needs, and globalization. Strategic HR function is connected to the idea known as the resource-based view'. It can be argued that competitive advantage can only be achieved through creating and developing core competencies that are better than the rivals. Organizations gain a competitive advantage by adapting faster to changes that occur in their environment. HR function should be managed and developed alongside the overall strategy to establish the best fit between the organization, its employees, and its environment. This requires aligning organizations' goals and processes with employees' needs and capabilities in a systematic way. Doing so will enable various training, development, and learning opportunities to arise for employees to benefit.

However, the recent trends in organizations seem that any crisis management becomes a task for HR or assigned to HR. This could make them more engaged in their organizational matters, learn from the setting and crisis, as well as save the company from any financial outflow instead of hiring or building a new team. Yet, of course, crisis management specialists have a set of special skills and strategies to address the crisis of any organization which allows them to work out the problems with efficiency.

According to [sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com), natural disasters are catastrophic events with atmospheric, geological, and hydrological origins such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and landslides that can cause fatalities, property damage, and social environmental disruption, (International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, 2016). In the event of an unpredictable natural disaster, a prepared HR has an ensured plan in place to care for employees before, during, and after a natural disaster. In the United States, municipal human resource teams

play such an important role in natural disaster planning. Responsive staff management plans are necessary for sustainable civic operations.

Not only are HR professionals concerned about employees' health and well-being during the pandemic, but they are also under the strain of processing the paperwork and providing solace to the millions of workers who have been laid off or furloughed. For employees still, on the job, HR managers are trying to keep their workers productive, motivated, engaged, and connected—all factors that are moving targets in the new normal. The company swiftly implemented updates to its remote-work policy to offer different work hours and provide a kind of flexibility that the company had never proposed to its workers before.

Matt Collington, a Senior HR Practitioner, (April 2020), publishes an article regarding The New role for HR following the Covid-19 Pandemic. Collington stated that to establish a refreshed role, HR teams will need to be brave, challenging, and work together to assert professional standards and create better and more consistent systems in which people can flourish. Shaping our organizations, leaders and ensuring the best way to work is a huge responsibility for those working in HR. These three out of 5 core roles of the People Team that he presented in his article is to ensure the purpose, culture, and values of the organization fully connect the stakeholders: A business culture that distributes value to its customers, employees, and investors and provides an ecological benefit to the planet; An organization that integrates with the communities in which it operates, and contributes to diversity inclusion, and belonging and to social mobility through its hiring and career development program; The voice of the employee is listened to and advocated for in each decision made by the company.

The Pandemic brought several challenges in communities and organizations, however, it also reveals the key workers needed to keep business and society afloat in a crisis. HR Team structures need to shift from a few strategic relationships with senior leaders to be the connector for the business, understanding the situation of each layer from the front line to the executive. They need to ensure there are clear plans to fill communication or skills gaps at each level and create inclusive career and information flows.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design using a case study. Respondents were selected using purposive and convenience sampling. Data were collected using a combination of the questionnaire, interview schedule, and observations.

Results and Discussions

Demographical Characteristics of the Respondents

The frequency distribution reveals that all DRRT members are all-male members. The age of the correspondents that dominate is by the bracket of 41-45 with a percentage of 54.55. The majority of the DRRT are Indians with a percentage of 54.55 while the remaining members of the team were Filipinos, Nepali, and Sri Lankan. By position, there is one Supervisor, 1 team leader, and 9 team members dominating the total percentage of 81.82.

Considering the demographic characteristics of the respondents, it can be interpreted that the members of DRRT may have reached the level of their expertise and maturity in disaster

management knowing that the majority of them are in the age range of 41-45. According to Davidson Johnson et al. of the article “The Employee Experience Maturity Assessment”, at Forrester.com, successful employee experience initiatives start with doing the right things for the right reasons, turning small wins into a momentum that lifts employee engagement and creating a virtuous cycle of peak performance. The all-male members of the DRRT are skilled in policy execution and protocol handling as reflected in their age, and length of service in the Disaster Risk Reduction Department. Their length of service also reveals that their compassion and attachment to the company motivated them to carefully serve as frontlines in the housing buildings. In addition, the advantage of this is that the majority of the DRRT, through their experience and skillfulness, can apprentice the new joiners in the team. It is overwhelming to know that the teamwork in unity for the policy implementation regardless of their nationality and position in the team.

Implementation of Emergency Policy Intervention

Based on the interview with the key informant of the organization handling the emergency policy implementation is an admittance that the pandemic has caught the entire organization by surprise. She says that crisis management of the company is new and still not fully finalized, however since the circumstance is already at hand, she has to proceed with a concrete plan to safeguard the welfare of the organization and its people. She diverts into ‘Risk Management’ which means the identification, evaluation, and prioritization of risks, followed by coordinated and economical application of resources to minimize, monitor, and control the probability or impact of unfortunate events or maximize the realization of opportunities. The key informant also mentioned that Risk Management requires a short period before execution, rather than Crisis Management since the risk which is - employees contacting the virus – has already been identified. He adds that as the personnel incharge, she has to maintain proactive thinking which is the key skill to plan for safety measures and response to COVID -19 risk. She also states that her seventeen (15) years of experience in the field, allow her to see possible scenarios ahead of time, and make them a basis for decision making. According to her, the biggest challenge is to see how effective the Policies they have to implement so that ‘no’ employee could be infected by the virus which is a result if one acquires it, the curfew operation of their company after lockdown could be ceased as per Ministry policy. Thus, the following steps are done: Formulate Procedures to combat the virus; and Implementation of the procedure. Meanwhile, findings in this case study reveal that the respondents’ demographic details affect the effectiveness of the policy implementation, including the procedure they have undertaken, show that it contributes to its success.

The organization has its existing policies however, only the circumstance is different, the need for urgent emergency policies is vital. The respondents strongly favorable to a policy no. 1 states “It is a protocol that whenever an employee leaves and arrives at the housing, he is obliged for a temperature check, hand sanitizing, and sanitizing shoes or slippers by spraying on the soles of each pair by the DRRT on duty. Polices no. 6- “During curfew hours every staff is not allowed to loiter in the lobby area in an open area or the exit doors” and 7 –“Observe social distancing even within the housing s premises” also receive 100% strong favorability from the team, policy no. 8 –“ It is everyone responsibility to report to housing supervisor if anyone among the staff shows signs of sickness i.e. fever, flu, coughing or colds receive 81.81% strong favorability. Policy no. 5, which is no posting of gathering on social media receives 81.81%

which means strong favorability. It can be interpreted that, posting could be one of the few ways for employees to strain themselves from boredom while they gather around, and another way to inform that relatives in distant places that they doing fine abroad, however, the necessity of this policy is also in compliance to state ruling that no social gathering should be held in places since it is elusive to maintain 'social distancing'. While policy no.2, which are employees spending one day off and given 2 hours outside is rated from favorable to rarely favorable. 72.73% of the respondents with the reason that this is still a part of safety measures because the danger of virus infection is always at hand, to most of the DRRT, it is better that way rather than having one acquiring the virus could also infect others in the housing vicinity. Although 18.18% go to rarely favorable since the typical reasoning of employees is that 2 hours is not enough for marketing, and cue lines are always long, so they arrive late at the housing. Overall, the given policies are assessed by the respondents as favorable to strongly favorable since the majority of the employees abide by the policies, otherwise, they are also avoiding sanctions or disciplinary sanctions from HR which starts from Verbal warning; First written warning; Final written warning and Dismissal from the housing.

The findings in this study show that the emergency policies implemented during lockdown due to COVID-19 are responsive to the existing situation. The actualization of Risk Management theory becomes effective firstly, due to the competent and proactive HR personnel who handled the policy implementation, the step-by-step procedure of abrupt planning, as well as the team who are already mature by age and experience to execute policies with firmness.

Conclusions

The overall results of the present research provide convincing and concrete evidence of the relevance and importance of emergency policy intervention during pandemics (2020).

Given these findings, it seems reasonable to conclude that the emergency policy intervention of the Human Resource Department of the organization remains effective due to its abrupt response to the State announcement of curfew and lockdown, selecting the competitive HR Personnel to take charge of the implementation of Risk Management, since their Crisis management is still new and young in the organization, along with as well as empowering the firm and strategic DRRT that execute these policies. All housing is free of infectious viruses. And the company can operate after the lockdown stage. The researcher believes that this research makes an important contribution to guiding away forward on how Human Resource Department might respond to the emergency crisis issues. Whatever limitations of the interview and observations employed on this study as a whole, the findings and analysis demonstrate relevant to accurate transfer of meaning and interpretation.

The overall results of this study also indicate that the risk management, HRD's abrupt response, close monitoring, proactivity, and competence of the Senior HR Personnel and housing in-charge, along with firm and directed security team to implement the policies, HR's emergency policy intervention affects the effectiveness of these policies.

Recommendations

Without focusing so much attention on the individual or group labor and the strain of COVID -19, effective execution of the emergency policies in the organization are a result of the organization's crisis management plan, competent HR in-charge, and abrupt response by the Human Resource Department (HRD) to impose policies that promote the welfare of both the company and its people. Secondary to that are the firm implementation, experience, and proper handling of the procedure by people who are tasked with the execution. The findings of the study show that most policies are strongly favorable to DRRT and employees that they could be carried out even during the regular days. However, at least 2 of them are straining for the others to follow such as the two hours once a week off for employees to follow.

Although the emergency policies are deemed responsive, the researcher wishes to make some recommendations, which, if taken into consideration, might bring some positive changes to the current approach.

- Human resources should begin to establish crisis management or urgency plans with a broader scope, to be more prepared for any emergency-related incidents in the organization, in the State, or most especially to the world such as a pandemic.
- DRRT should undergo more training in handling conflicts and unexpected circumstances such as employees' compliance towards the policies being implemented.
- Another study on the same title should be done involving employees as respondents.
- HRD should also devise a systematic rewards strategy for the housing group that relatively complies with the policies imposed by HRD. Criteria for the selection of this reward system shall be prepared by the housing HRD incharge, which will be rated by DRRT along with him since he also does visits.

The researcher also highlighted several points of some researchable aspects that could be pursued and contribute to this development and thus, recommending further study about the same study.

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Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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