

Chapter 16

COVID–19: New Order for Employment Relations and Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT

The onset, spread, control measures, and the behaviour of society, government, and businesses have far reaching implications—social, economic, and legal—for the immediate and future of employment relations and human resource management in Nigerian organisations. This chapter, drawing from available COVID-19 literature, ILO, and WHO protocols, examined various concerns and challenges posed by ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the regimes of measures which are modeled after developed economies of the world but are at best ad-hoc, panicky, ill-digested and their operations execution not based on empirical/objective assessment. COVID-19 has evidently brought job losses and unprecedented changes in work modes and some of the lessons and fallouts may live with us for a long time. Post-COVID-19 economic recovery though expected to be slow will leave the workplace and society with routines and rituals, lessons to learn and corrections to be made, not to avert future pandemics but to manage it in more precise manner with less panic and greater forthrightness.

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INTRODUCTION

The world indeed panicked when news filtered in, by December 8, 2019 from Wuhan China of public health concern about pneumonia of unknown etiology resembling the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The novel coronavirus, now christened COVID-19, has since raged on a scale perhaps only comparable to the *Spanish influenza* of 1918 which was said to spread to all continents and claiming estimated worldwide deaths of over 20-50 million people. Thankfully, and in relative terms, COVID-19 deaths have been less severe at global 405, 168 people with Nigeria accounting for 361 (June 8, 2020). One hopes that concerted efforts by World Health Organisation (WHO), scientists and medical officers in many nations will soon tame the spread and flatten the curves of COVID-19 which has reached at least 213 countries and still counting.

This paper is to review the situation of Nigerian Employment Relations and Human Resource utilizations and Management within the enveloping context of hysteria created by the ongoing pandemic which has led to the lockdown of the economy and various strategies of organisations to maintain pulse and breathing while the COVID-19 outbreak last and after-effects of the pandemic. Critical questions as to whether COVID-19 pandemic is the real course of lockdown or it's as a result of fear and pandemonium induced by what is seen as blow-out marketing of coronavirus and the conspiracy theory bothering on politics of control of world economy by subterranean means and moves.

By that insight, we know that, this kind of uncertainties, panic anxiety and massive human and economic losses the world is experiencing is not entirely new. In history, epidemiologists had accounted for at least 10 successive outbreaks of diseases at the scale described as pandemic. Scientist's concept of the term pandemic is that *there is a widespread occurrence of disease, in excess of what might be expected in a geographical region*. The current COVID-19 pandemic is however unprecedented and lessons are being drawn from other disease outbreaks over the past several decades. Some of the diseases outbreak in history are:

When this table is juxtaposed with table 2, one may soon see that both in terms of spread and deaths, coronavirus will most likely be a baby virus to some of the major global viral outbreaks. In recent history, we have seen Ebola (spread by human contact) and Lassa fever (spread by rat), which comes with hemorrhagic fever, and are endemic to Africa. China publicly acknowledged the existence of the coronavirus with the speculation that the origin might have been the Huanan seafood Wholesale Market at Wuhan – also called Wuhan Wet Market – which was closed down in January 1, 2020. The sequence of activities are as follows:

- i. By January 31, 2020, though acknowledging low risks to US citizens, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a public health emergency response to the coronavirus (2019-nCoV), by this time, 9976 cases had been reported in 21 countries, the first reported case in the country being in January 20, 2020. The Centre for Diseases Control (CDC) put in place droplet and airborne precautions with eye protection. Presentation on admission includes persistent dry cough, and 2-day history of nausea and vomiting.
- ii. By 30 January 2020, Director General of World Health Organisation' (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, announced that 2019-nCov would be a considered a Public Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). He had observed that:

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