

Chapter 4

Strategies to Combat the COVID-19 Pandemic in the UAE: A Guide to Encounter Human Resource Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the playing field and overall operations for organizations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the world at large. In this chapter, the authors explore the biggest human resource (HR)-related challenges that firms in the UAE have faced as a result of COVID-19. The chapter outlines the skills and competencies required by professionals to overcome the challenges they have experienced. This groundbreaking chapter also undertakes an analysis of the extent to which COVID-19 and the lockdown have influenced the ability of human resource departments to achieve their key strategic objectives. It has been found that skills are among the most important competencies that professionals must possess today to keep pace with recent developments and in order to navigate the “new normal.” The chapter concludes with a review of the competitive survival strategies that UAE organizations are applying in order to remain sustainable during and post COVID-19.

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INTRODUCTION

When the Coronavirus hit the world especially in March 2020, it quickly became something of a roller coaster ride for organizations and employees across the world. The global spread is considered as the black swan event of the decade that has affected the world by storm. Millions of people across most countries have lived through lockdowns and have made the abrupt shift to working from home, some have suffered from a lack of safety and labor protections, and yet millions of others have lost jobs. As the future has looked increasingly uncertain, the human resource sector remains a crucial element of employee well-being within businesses, regardless of their scope and size. To meet a new set of organizational needs, it is critical that human resources (HR) grow and evolves in every aspect. Since the virus affected the entire globe, its effects have been felt across all industries in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The governments around the world have taken several steps as a primary measure collectively to combat the spread of the disease. Measures included, essentially putting economies on hold, suspending flights, and enabling working from home. Businesses across the world recognize how important the HR function is, and how many leaders have lost out by failing to include Human resource professionals in discussions to achieve their business goals. This is so because in their mind heretofore or in the past some have thought that business was about manufacturing and customer delivery of sales, and they didn't really appreciate how much of that was dependent upon people. Pandemics are a severe wake-up call for HR professionals and global firms to prepare multiple alternate strategies in different parts of the world to avoid the danger of such catastrophic conditions. As traditional resilience planning doesn't do enough to prepare for a pandemic this chapter will provide the input in supporting the targeted audience to incorporate pandemic planning considerations into existing resilience management activities to provide a comprehensive response.

BACKGROUND: COVID-19's DISRUPTIONS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates with one of the most diversified and non-oil-dependent economies in the Gulf. Its economy is heavily reliant on areas such as hospitality, tourism, entertainment, real estate, and retail. The UAE boasts a well-developed infrastructure, a stable political system, and one of the Gulf region's most free trade regimes. The UAE market benefits from a strategic geographic location (Dubai is considered a regional center and commercial capital

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