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Master in Business Administration (MBA)

Postgraduate Dissertation

**Human Resources Management at the Ministry of
Education During & After the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the changes in Human Resource Management (HRM) practices at the Ministry of Education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted with four officials from the Ministry's Human Resources Directorate to explore the implementation of telecommuting as an HRM practice, challenges faced in HRM changes, and the acceptance of these changes by public sector workers. The analysis reveals that implementing telecommuting as an HRM practice in the post-COVID era posed significant challenges, requiring policy and procedural adjustments. Ensuring data security, providing necessary technology and infrastructure, maintaining employee engagement and productivity, and adapting HR policies for remote work were key challenges. However, the HR department successfully overcame these challenges by introducing new policies, guidelines, and resources. Currently, telecommuting is applied in exceptional cases as regulated by the Ministry of the Interior. The pandemic brought about substantial changes in HRM practices, with remote work, digital tools, and online meetings becoming crucial. Communication, collaboration, and employee well-being were prioritized through mental health services, work-life balance guidelines, and empowering employees to utilize new technologies. The recruitment and selection process remained largely unaffected, following established guidelines. The impact of HRM changes on employees during the pandemic was significant, requiring adaptations to work routines and balance. The Ministry developed new policies, provided necessary equipment, and ensured data security while working remotely. Although most employees adapted well, concerns regarding lack of interaction and work-life separation were raised. The Ministry addressed these challenges by providing mental health services and guidelines for remote work.

Keywords: HRM practices, Telecommuting, Post-COVID era, Public sector

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1. Introduction

It is now argued that the role of HRM (Human Resources Management) in times of crisis is becoming more significant than in the past. Vardalier (2016) discovered that HR managers do not just focus on managerial issues, but that HRM also plays a strategic role when a crisis occurs and the following alternative outcomes occur:

- Internal company panic
- Loss of important staff and expertise
- High turnover
- Poor performance due to inexperience and lack of desire
- Cancellation of scheduled training
- Cancellation of recruiting

HRM can assist businesses avoid irreparable losses and mitigate the negative repercussions outlined above. Setting up a crisis management team should be one of the first measures in controlling a crisis, since it helps reduce panic and tension among staff. A decrease in the number of employees looking for work can be caused by the loss of previous employees or by the cancellation of recruitment. While traditional approaches to HRM help by devising more effective ways of arranging work, new HR practices emphasize on abilities and intellectual support in order to create loyalty that will persist throughout the crisis and after it is done (Vardalier, 2016).

When it came to significant employee turnover during a crisis, traditional HRM techniques did not aim to prevent it, but rather worsened it by cutting employment. Modern HRM methods, on the other hand, advocate for the creation of training programs to enable flexibility and, as a result, an easy and unavoidable transfer between responsibilities and duties. TD activities are a crucial aspect of human capital development in the pre-crisis era in order to cope with and handle a crisis in a way that benefits the firms (Natal'ya et al., 2016).

Furthermore, panic, the loss of productive staff, and excessive turnover will eventually lead to a lack of employee enthusiasm and morale, resulting in poor performance. Traditional HRM systems do not usually have a written strategy in place to prevent this. Modern HRM, on the other hand, promotes and maintains employee morale and motivation by supporting the human side of a company and organizing supportive programs for employees, such as training and mentoring programs (Malik & Sanders, 2021).

Another significant reason why organizations fail to regulate and mitigate the negative impact of a crisis is a lack of good communication between decision makers and subordinates regarding visitor satisfaction and feedback (Hamouche, 2021). Although social media can be used to spread misinformation, there is no mechanism to restrict its use. Companies could thus utilize them as communication channels to deal with defamation if and when it occurs (Vardalier, 2016). It appears that modern HRM might benefit from a communication plan that limits the spread of disinformation during a crisis and specifies how employees, customers, and other stakeholders should communicate (Ngoc et al., 2021).

HRM plays a critical role for a firm before, during, and after a crisis. HRM is concerned not just with the interests of the company, but also with the interests of its employees. As a result, human resource management is a critical component in efficiently preparing businesses for crisis management (Nizamidou & Vouzas, 2018).

2. HR During a Crisis: Theoretical Background

2.1.The importance of HR

Human resources (HR) is the department within an organization that is responsible for managing the people who work for the company. This includes everything from recruiting and hiring new employees to training and development, compensation and benefits, and employee relations. The primary role of HR is to ensure that the company has the right people with the right skills in the right positions to achieve its business objectives. HR also plays a crucial role in creating a positive work environment, promoting employee engagement and satisfaction, and maintaining legal compliance (Guest, 2011). One of the most important functions of HR is talent acquisition, which involves identifying and attracting qualified candidates to fill open positions within the company. This involves developing job descriptions, posting job advertisements, reviewing resumes and applications, conducting interviews, and making job offers. HR also plays a key role in training and development, which involves providing employees with the skills and knowledge they need to perform their job duties effectively and efficiently. HR is also responsible for managing employee compensation and benefits, which includes setting salaries and benefits packages, managing payroll, and ensuring that the company is in compliance with all relevant labor laws and regulations. Additionally, HR is responsible for managing employee relations, which involves resolving conflicts, managing performance, and ensuring that employees are treated fairly and with respect. Overall, HR is a critical function within any business as it helps to ensure that the company has the people and resources it needs to achieve its strategic objectives while also maintaining a positive and productive work environment (Boon et al, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also brought significant changes to the field of human resources. With the shift to remote work, HR has had to adapt to new challenges and find new ways to support employees in a virtual environment. This includes implementing new technologies for virtual communication and collaboration, developing policies and procedures for remote work, and providing support for employees' mental health and well-being during a time of heightened stress and uncertainty (Schur et al., 2020). In the following sections of this chapter, we will analyze these changes to HR at a theoretical level, drawing on research and best practices to understand how organizations can effectively manage their human resources in a post-pandemic world. We will examine topics such as

remote work, employee engagement and retention, and the role of HR in fostering a culture of resilience and adaptability. By understanding these theoretical frameworks, HR professionals can develop strategies to address the unique challenges presented by the pandemic and emerge stronger and more resilient in the face of future disruptions.

2.2.The impacts of the pandemic

The rapid spread of the pandemic virus in early 2020 did not give businesses and workers the necessary space to prepare themselves to realize the magnitude of the change and the catalytic intervention that would take place in the workplace and in the balance of economic indicators. Within a period of just one month from the appearance of the first case in our country, a state of emergency was declared and quarantine was imposed on the population as a consequence of social distancing and the interruption of personal contacts between individuals (Brundha & Chaturvedi, 2021).

Understandably, the business sector was the hardest hit as, in addition to a sharp drop in turnover, it was called upon to set a new basis for the adoption of a new framework to respond to the health restriction. Among these was the temporary and immediate suspension of their operation, a measure which put tens of thousands of workers out of work. Some of them were placed under a work suspension regime, receiving support from the state, which was also applied in the case of businesses following a forced closure, but there were many who, under the pretext of the pandemic, lost their jobs for good and at the same time had to meet their daily financial obligations (Collings et al., 2021).

The category of workers who were not put under a work stoppage and neither lost their jobs permanently, were put under a teleworking regime in which they took care of a basic amount of the daily work they used to do face-to-face but with the difference that it was carried out from their premises and protected them from the constant exposure and risk of infection by the virus. This could not, of course, be implemented overnight and with complete effectiveness and efficiency as it was a completely new and different reality for the majority of workers (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020).

At the same time, they had to meet all the demands that arose without having time as their ally, which was under increased pressure due to the unprecedented situations facing humanity and the need to maintain a significant percentage of the total turnover. Businesses were obliged to adapt to the new reality on a basis of the need to maintain production and to make

any adjustments necessary to restore their economic activity, which, once the crisis was over, would have the potential for recovery and profitability. Unfortunately, there were quite a few businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, which were unable to cope with the full range of the crisis, which for two years had been hitting the economy hard and led to their definitive closure. (Hamouche, 2021)

Those businesses that were engaged in the distribution of either goods or food adopted a series of measures aimed at eliminating the personal contact so that payments could be made online and delivery could take place right at the customer's entrance or outside the door. If the customer wished to receive the product or food in the physical shop, they would have to make a prearranged meeting of short duration and, while maintaining physical distances and taking precautions against contamination, they would go to the shop and receive the product they had ordered (Brundha & Chaturvedi, 2021).

As far as public services were concerned, they adopted specific protocols, now providing the possibility of service via the Internet in order to minimize the time spent by citizens in physical premises except in exceptional cases, which were served in a similar manner after a prearranged meeting. For public sector services in particular, since even in the period before the pandemic the problem of congestion and lack of service often occurred even within the same day, the advent of the pandemic brought a series of changes that proved beneficial to the multitude of citizens and necessary, as they should have been initiated much earlier without the need for a humanity-changing event to occur in order to be implemented. Beyond that, many of them were introduced even during the 'opening' periods and even after the major pandemic outbreaks indicating among others some of the positive changes that the pandemic brought to the general system (Karunaratne, 2021).

With regard to the private sector enterprises that were irreparably affected, the majority of those that reported a sharp decline in their turnover due to the sudden imposition of quarantine received financial support in the form of subsidies from the state, aiming at their viability but subject to certain criteria in order not to lose this benefit. Of course, there was also the category of businesses which, because of their services, had the alternative of using them through online platforms. These businesses were related to commerce, clothing, the sale of electronics and technology products and other related products that offered the possibility of online promotion (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020).

Many of the companies that had a similar object to the above-mentioned ones and did not have an online platform for the promotion of their products did that, considering it to be the only alternative lifeline in a period of uncertain economic viability. This action proved to be an important support for them, as it gave them a new basis for their activity at a time when the closure of their physical shops meant that they had lost all hope of maintaining their economic activity. Maintaining this option continued to be operated by them even with the 'opening' of the market, giving them an alternative viable option (Karunaratne, 2021).

2.2.1. HR Management Challenges in COVID-19 Era

COVID-19 has altered the way businesses work around the world, creating a complex and hard situation for managers and HR experts who must devise creative solutions to preserve the continuity of their businesses and assist their staff in dealing with this unusual crisis (Zehir et al., 2020).

The first question an HR manager must answer is whether his company's employees is capable of working remotely. Aside from the nature of the task, it is important to evaluate if the personnel have the essential equipment to perform their services remotely. In addition to a computer and a fast internet connection, employees will require software - Erp, Crm- that is required for the continuous operation of human resources. The firm's primary aim is thus to offer the infrastructure for labor, as it is not self-evident that a worker possesses it. If one or more employees lack the requisite abilities to work remotely, the employer must notify them of the plan so that they do not feel excluded (Wamsler et al., 2020).

The formation of a culture of positive remote collaboration is an essential feature of the HR department's efficient management of the pandemic problem. Employees must feel trusted by their employers in order to perform well in these unique circumstances. They must also have proper scheduling freedom.

Many employees are forced to make significant changes in their lives. Some of them are parents who must balance a new daily schedule with their work.

An extremely rigorous work schedule will inevitably lead to burnout in many employees. Employee morale will benefit greatly from the flexibility that a company can provide.

The right scheduling of online meetings is also critical. Because of the nature of these meetings, regulations should be established from the start to ensure that they are done properly and orderly. For example, prior to meetings, the agenda of the subjects should be developed, and appropriate time should be allotted for the participants in the conversation to prepare (Zehir et al., 2020).

The appraisal of employee performance is one area in which HR management should concentrate. Because of the specific circumstances and the digitalization of many of the organization's functions, the company must adapt its evaluation mechanisms accordingly, as many employees, for example, are more open to new ideas-technologies, while others are afraid to try, experiment, and adopt new digital tools. Some people are terrified of the negative consequences of digital transformation because they cannot see its beneficial features.

During this healthcare crisis, firms must retain and strengthen their performance management processes. They should provide relevant information about the company's strategic direction to their employees, collect meaningful data, and provide feedback to assist these businesses in maintaining workforce development (Wamsler et al., 2020).

In times of crisis, such as pandemics, training is critical. It aids in the development of necessary skills in workers, raises knowledge of COVID-19, reduces the danger of virus dissemination, and prevents mental health difficulties. It also assists workers who are in the process of switching to remote work (Azizi et al., 2021).

In reality, not all employees are equipped with the necessary digital skills to deal with these developments. The main challenge for HRM professionals may be to develop a training program that is tailored to the new reality of the organization and its employees, as well as to select the appropriate training methods while taking into account physical distance and the need for rapid employee engagement to sustain the business. This implies that managers and human resource experts must look beyond standard training methods (Adonu et al., 2020).

Government programs in several nations have been implemented to provide financial assistance to workers and organizations during this health crisis and to encourage them to comply with home stay orders. In the United States, for example, the federal government implemented temporary paid sick leave, allowing private and public sector employees 2 weeks of paid sick leave for isolation, COVID-19-related treatment, care of a

COVID-19-infected family member, and child care due to school or daycare closures (Collings et al., 2021).

A special purpose license was also introduced in Greece. Working parents are eligible for a special purpose permit if their business is closed. This can also occur if the in-person educational operations of care or education facilities/establishments, or sections thereof, are suspended in the context of responding to and restricting the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. The term of extraordinary leave is considered working time, paid and insured, and must be considered when establishing any employee rights emanating from their job connection. After cross-checking with data from the Ministries of Finance, Labour and Social Affairs, and the Interior, two-thirds (2/3) of the days of special-purpose leave shall be financed by the employer and one-third (1/3) by the normal budget (Adonu et al., 2020).

Where distance working is not practicable, employers are responsible for their workers' safety while at work. They must guarantee that there are no hazards in the workplace that could cause them psychological or physical harm or death. COVID-19 has introduced a new workplace danger, posing a large source of stress for employees and posing a huge problem for managers and human resource specialists (Wamsler et al., 2020).

COVID-19 is not only dangerous to one's physical health, but it is also dangerous to one's mental health. Employees who work from home may experience psychological harm as a result of feeling alone and torn between their job and personal lives. As a result, the organization should establish clear boundaries between work and personal life from the start.

Workers who are required to provide physical services may return to work in fear of contracting the virus or transmitting it to their families, which may increase their stress level and the risk of mental health problems, particularly for workers who were already facing high psychological demands at work prior to the pandemic. The major problem for managers is to give employees the impression that the organization is taking steps to support mental wellness in the workplace (Zehir et al., 2020).

There are numerous approaches, according to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (Adonu et al., 2020):

- "Health circles" to discover, discuss, and solve problems with employee participation
- the establishment of policies on mental health and related issues such as workplace violence and harassment, or the incorporation of mental health issues into the

company's general occupational health and safety policy, • the offer to train company managers on how to manage, how to recognize stress symptoms in employees, and how to find the right solutions to reduce employee stress,

- conducting a survey among employees using anonymous questionnaires to identify what causes problems or concern for employees at work, • evaluating the measures and programs adopted based on employee feedback,
- web portals to inform all employees about the measures and programs implemented in the workplace to improve mental well-being,
- courses/training for employees on how to deal with stressful situations,
- free counseling on a variety of and frequently conflicting issues relating to all employees' private or professional lives (preferably during working hours).

2.2.2. Main Changes Brought by the Adoption of Remote Working After the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a widespread shift towards remote work, leading to an increase in the number of people working from home (Wang et al., 2021). This shift has challenged traditional workplace norms and led to changes in workplace culture, including the accelerated adoption of digital tools and technologies to support remote work. However, remote work has also blurred the lines between work and personal life, leading to new concerns about work-life balance and mental health. The trend towards remote work has also raised questions about the future of commercial real estate and office spaces, and has prompted companies to rethink their hiring practices. Overall, the pandemic has brought about significant changes in the way work is done, and these changes are likely to have a lasting impact on the future of work (Dockery & Bawa, 2020). In more details:

- Increase in the number of remote workers: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a sudden and widespread shift towards remote work, leading to a significant increase in the number of people working from home. This has created new challenges for employers and employees alike, including managing remote teams and ensuring productivity.
- Shift in workplace culture: Remote work has challenged traditional workplace norms and is changing the way work is done. Employers are having to adapt to new ways of communicating and collaborating with their teams, while employees are learning to be

more independent and self-directed. This shift is likely to have a lasting impact on the workplace culture, even after the pandemic is over (Wang et al., 2021).

- Technological advancements: The shift to remote work has accelerated the adoption of digital tools and technologies, such as video conferencing, collaboration software, and virtual meeting platforms. This has improved communication and collaboration among remote teams, but has also created new cybersecurity concerns.
- Changes in work-life balance: Remote work has blurred the lines between work and personal life, leading to a need for better boundary-setting and work-life balance. Some people find it difficult to separate their work and personal life, while others struggle with isolation and loneliness. Employers are being forced to adapt to this new reality, by offering flexible work arrangements and support for mental health and well-being.
- Impact on mental health: Remote work has increased stress and isolation for some people, leading to concerns about mental health and well-being. Long hours and the absence of clear boundaries between work and personal life can take a toll on mental health, and employers are being forced to address this issue (Birimoglu Okuyan et al., 2022).
- Impact on commercial real estate: The trend towards remote work has raised questions about the future of commercial real estate and office spaces. With many companies now realizing that remote work is feasible, there are concerns that office spaces will become redundant and that the demand for commercial real estate will decline.
- Changes in hiring practices: Companies are rethinking their hiring practices and looking for remote-friendly solutions to attract and retain talent. This includes expanding their geographical reach, offering remote work arrangements, and investing in digital tools and technologies to support remote work.

Overall, the pandemic has brought about significant changes in the way work is done, and these changes are likely to have a lasting impact on the future of work (Wang et al., 2021).

2.3.How HR Facilitates Firms Against the Impacts of the Pandemic

As mentioned from the previous section, the teleworking scheme implemented by thousands of workers who were not suspended was the first and key component of continuing the functionality of significant business turnover and operations while maintaining the physical

distances required ensuring that both workers and employers were not directly exposed to the risk of virus infection (Mihalca et al., 2021).

The concept of teleworking is not a new one, since in a large number of organizations operating abroad, in all developed countries, teleworking is commonplace and is normally practiced on a weekly basis for a certain number of days, depending on the responsibilities and workload of the managers at any given time and for defined groups of employees. Indeed, through surveys conducted in the past that focused on the categories of employees who teleworked from their premises some days per week and the rest within their workplace showed high levels of efficiency and effectiveness in the tasks they undertook. The case of our country, with the exception of multinational groups and specific companies whose business was mainly conducted online, did not have a similar development and utilization of teleworking, with the result that many of the executives needed additional time to adapt to the new conditions for them during the period of the first quarantine (Schur et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, in the wake of the outbreak of the coronavirus, teleworking has introduced a new era in which the employee is given the flexibility to choose where he or she works from without restrictions and time delays in terms of the transition to the company. In addition, he is given the possibility of the comfort provided by his personal space, minimizing operational costs and transition costs and flexibility regarding the completion of his work task since the time frames are expanded (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020).

On the employer's side, the advantages are the assignment of tasks to the individual executive and the possibility of additional online monitoring of the completion of projects and adherence to schedules. The point that needs special attention with regard to telecommuting is calculated in the delimitation of the daily work on the part of the employee, since due to the presence on the site it is highly likely to be removed and work under overtime status, and not exceeding the responsibilities assigned on the part of the employer, as he should not overlook that the planned and pre-agreed working hours still exist and the employee has the right at the end of the work to close his computer (Contreras et al., 2020).

The introduction of teleworking during the pandemic enabled a large number of businesses to continue a significant part of their operations without potential consequences and many more to tailor their respective services based on a specific benefits and service framework yielding them profits and continued operations. On the occasion of the pandemic and the forced compliance and adaptation to this regime, an additional possibility was developed and

cultivated that was more than necessary in our country, since at European level teleworking constitutes the present and even more so the future. Through it, our country gained the opportunity to construct new patterns of work reality that are more in line with a member state of the European Union and in this way exploiting new jobs, giving a head start to the development of professions of all specialties which, by using the internet, can see their work taking on new possibilities and dimensions (Milić & Šapić, 2022).

2.3.1. Challenges of Teleworking for Enterprise Human Resource Management

The widespread adoption of remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic has brought several major changes to human resource management, including (Azizi et al., 2021):

- Rethinking recruitment and hiring practices: Companies are expanding their geographical reach and offering remote work arrangements to attract and retain talent. This may require the use of digital tools and technologies for recruiting, screening, and interviewing candidates. In addition, companies need to consider the logistics of onboarding and training remote employees, which can be more challenging than for on-site employees.
- Management of remote teams: Human resource managers are facing new challenges in managing remote teams, such as ensuring productivity, communication, and collaboration among team members. This requires new leadership and management skills, as well as the use of digital tools and technologies to support communication and collaboration. In addition, managers need to be mindful of the unique challenges faced by remote workers, such as isolation and loneliness, and provide support and resources to address these issues (De Leon, 2020).
- Employee engagement and well-being: The shift to remote work has increased stress and isolation for some people, leading to concerns about mental health and well-being. Human resource managers are being forced to address this issue and provide support for employee engagement and well-being. This may include offering resources such as mental health support, flexible work arrangements, and opportunities for virtual team building and socializing (Madero Gómez et al., 2020).
- Flexible work arrangements: Remote work has made flexible work arrangements more widely available, which has implications for work-life balance, employee satisfaction, and retention. Human resource managers need to consider how to provide flexible work arrangements that meet the needs of both employees and the

organization. This may include offering flexible hours, remote work options, and the option to work part-time (Risley, 2020).

- Changes in performance evaluation and development: With remote work, it may be more difficult for managers to observe and evaluate employee performance, which can make performance evaluations and development plans more challenging. Human resource managers need to consider new approaches to performance evaluations, such as using digital tools and technologies, setting clear expectations, and involving employees in the process.
- Data privacy and security: With remote work, companies need to ensure the privacy and security of sensitive data, which requires new policies and procedures to be put in place. Human resource managers need to educate employees on the importance of data privacy and security, as well as provide resources and support to help employees adhere to new policies and procedures.

Overall, the widespread adoption of remote work has brought significant changes to human resource management, requiring organizations to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. Human resource managers play a critical role in ensuring that organizations are able to support and engage their remote employees, while maintaining the privacy and security of sensitive data (Meyer, 2021).

The new teleworking regime seems like a challenge for the company's HR managers since most of the employees tend to be more efficient in this way and show higher productivity and therefore commitment and work engagement. Studies carried out mainly in countries where teleworking has become very active in recent years have shown more favorable results in terms of the speed of efficiency of individuals and their personal well-being. As can be understood, the performance of these results is directly linked to HR management, as they always focus on optimizing profit and progress. Through them, strategic design policies are put in place that focuses on balancing the overall work by all managers and individual work. Moreover, specific practices focus through the observance of telecommuting regime on balancing personal life and professional advancement considering that the individual works from his/her personal space where he/she can attend alongside his/her loved ones (Contreras, Baykal & Abid, 2020).

In case this balance, which is much desired, is realized along with the progress and increase in turnover of the business, then HR managers will have achieved a significant

accomplishment through which the business owners and managers of the organizations will also benefit. If one considers the creation and development of this relationship, i.e. the strategy implemented by HR managers for telecommuting, the way this model delivers to the business and the employees then it is much easier to identify those points that are working in a desirable way in order to further strengthen those points that are showing some dysfunction. Of course, it should be borne in mind that in order to achieve this, specific conditions must exist in the organization, with adherence to specific protocols that will work to assist rather than suppress productivity growth. Among these for example is the commitment and diligence of HR managers that will yield a competent model of progress and will be combined with the willingness of the managers and their adaptability to these modifications (Igeltjörn & Habib, 2020).

2.3.2. Redefining Recruitment Practices from Human Resource Management Departments

An HR department can manage the review of hiring practices after the pandemic by following these steps (Sikora & Ferris, 2014):

- Assess current practices: This step involves evaluating the current hiring practices to determine their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This could include analyzing data on time-to-hire, cost per hire, and candidate satisfaction. HR departments should also consider feedback from managers, employees, and candidates on their experiences with the recruitment process, selection criteria, and onboarding procedures.
- Gather data and feedback: This step involves collecting data and feedback from a variety of stakeholders to understand their perspectives on current hiring practices. This can include conducting surveys or focus groups with managers, employees, and candidates, as well as conducting one-on-one interviews with HR staff. The data and feedback gathered in this step will inform the changes that need to be made to improve hiring practices (De Leon, 2020).
- Identify areas for improvement: Based on the data and feedback gathered, HR departments should identify areas for improvement in their hiring practices. This may include updating the recruitment process to be more efficient and effective, creating

new selection criteria that better align with the needs of the organization, or improving the onboarding experience for new hires.

- **Implement changes:** HR departments should implement the changes they have identified to improve their hiring practices. This may involve updating policies and procedures, using new technologies and tools, or providing training to managers and HR staff. The changes should be designed to address the areas for improvement identified in the previous step and align with the needs of the organization and its employees (Meyer, 2020).
- **Monitor and evaluate:** HR departments should monitor and evaluate the impact of the changes they have made to their hiring practices. This can be done through regular surveys and feedback sessions, as well as tracking metrics such as time-to-hire and employee satisfaction. This step helps to ensure that the changes are having the desired impact and provides an opportunity to make further improvements if needed.
- **Continuously improve:** Based on the results of the monitoring and evaluation, HR departments should continue to make improvements to their hiring practices over time. This could involve refining the recruitment process, updating selection criteria, or improving the onboarding experience for new hires. The goal of this step is to ensure that the organization is attracting and hiring the best talent in the most effective and efficient manner.

Overall, the review of hiring practices after the pandemic should be a continuous process of assessment, implementation, and improvement, aimed at ensuring that the organization is attracting and hiring the best talent in the most effective and efficient manner. HR departments should stay abreast of trends and best practices in hiring, and continually gather data and feedback to make informed decisions about how to improve their hiring practices (Manjula, 2021).

2.3.3. Managing Employee Engagement and Well-Being from HR Departments After the Pandemic

An HR department can manage employee engagement and well-being after the pandemic by following these steps (Agarwal, 2021):

- **Assess employee needs:** To assess the needs of employees, HR departments can use a variety of methods such as online surveys, focus groups, or one-on-one interviews. The assessment should gather information on employees' experiences and perspectives on the impact of the pandemic on their well-being and engagement, as well as any challenges or concerns they may have. The data collected can be analyzed to identify common themes and areas of need that the organization can address (Sharma & Kumar, 2022).
- **Implement well-being initiatives:** Based on the results of the assessment, HR departments can implement initiatives aimed at improving employee well-being. These initiatives can include flexible work arrangements such as remote or part-time work, offering resources for mental and physical health such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and promoting work-life balance through time-off policies and wellness programs. Providing mental health support and resources can help employees manage stress and anxiety during these challenging times (Marino & Capone, 2021).
- **Foster a sense of community:** For employees who are working remotely, HR departments can foster a sense of community by promoting virtual team-building activities and encouraging remote workers to connect with each other. This could include virtual happy hours, online games, or discussion groups. Additionally, promoting a supportive and inclusive workplace culture can help to foster a sense of community and support among all employees (Madero Gómez et al., 2020).
- **Encourage regular check-ins:** Regular check-ins between managers and employees can help to maintain a sense of connection and address any concerns. These check-ins can be in the form of one-on-one meetings, regular team meetings, or an employee engagement survey. Managers should be trained on how to have effective check-ins that prioritize employee well-being and engage employees in a productive dialogue.
- **Offer training and development opportunities:** HR departments can offer training and development opportunities to help employees grow professionally and personally. This could include offering courses, webinars, and workshops on topics such as mental health, time management, and stress management. Providing opportunities for employees to learn and grow can help to boost their engagement and well-being (Risley, 2020).
- **Monitor and evaluate:** HR departments should regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of their initiatives aimed at improving employee well-being and engagement.

This can be done through regular surveys and feedback sessions, as well as tracking metrics such as employee satisfaction, turnover rates, and productivity. This step is important to ensure that the initiatives are having the desired impact and to make changes if needed.

Overall, managing employee engagement and well-being after the pandemic requires a multi-faceted approach that involves assessment, implementation, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. HR departments should work closely with employees and other stakeholders to ensure that their initiatives are effective and responsive to the changing needs of the organization and its employees (Su et al., 2021).

2.3.4. Managing remote teams from Human Resources Departments After the Pandemic

Human Resources (HR) departments have a crucial role to play in managing remote teams, particularly after the pandemic (Sikora & Ferris, 2014). Here are more detailed steps HR departments can take to manage remote teams:

- **Clearly Define Expectations:** To ensure that remote workers have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and the company's expectations, HR departments should clearly define expectations for remote work. This includes guidelines for communication, collaboration, and work hours. The expectations should be communicated to all remote workers, and a remote work policy should be created to outline the guidelines (Meyer, 2021).
- **Provide Technology and Resources:** For remote teams to be productive, they need the right technology and resources. HR departments should ensure that remote workers have access to laptops, secure internet access, and any other tools required for their specific role. Providing remote workers with the right technology and resources can improve their job satisfaction and overall productivity (Swain et al., 2020).
- **Encourage Regular Communication:** Communication is key to the success of remote teams. HR departments should encourage regular communication among remote workers and with the rest of the organization. Regular virtual team meetings, online collaboration tools, and video conferencing can help to keep remote workers informed and engaged.

- **Support Remote Workers:** Remote work can be challenging, and HR departments should provide support to remote workers to help them adjust. This can include providing resources and training on time management, stress management, and work-life balance. HR departments should also offer support for mental health, such as access to Employee Assistance Programs, and resources to manage stress and anxiety (Prasad, 2021).
- **Evaluate Performance:** To ensure that remote workers are contributing to the success of the organization, HR departments should evaluate their performance. This can be done through regular performance evaluations, feedback sessions, and tracking metrics such as productivity and customer satisfaction. Regular performance evaluations can help HR departments identify areas for improvement and provide remote workers with feedback to help them grow and develop.
- **Promote Inclusivity:** HR departments should promote inclusivity by treating all employees, including remote workers, equally and fairly. This includes offering the same benefits and opportunities for professional development, regardless of location. HR departments should also create a culture of inclusiveness, where remote workers feel valued and included as part of the team (De Leon, 2020).
- **Foster a Sense of Community:** It can be easy for remote workers to feel isolated and disconnected, particularly if they work in different time zones or locations. HR departments should work to foster a sense of community among remote workers by creating opportunities for virtual social events, team-building activities, and other initiatives that promote collaboration and connection.
- **Address any Challenges:** Managing remote teams can come with its own set of challenges, such as managing remote workers who are working in different time zones, or dealing with communication issues. HR departments should be proactive in addressing any challenges that may arise, and work with managers and remote workers to find solutions that work for everyone.

In conclusion, HR departments play a critical role in the success of remote teams. By implementing clear expectations, providing technology and resources, encouraging regular communication, supporting remote workers, evaluating performance, promoting inclusivity, fostering a sense of community, and addressing any challenges, HR departments can ensure that remote teams are successful and beneficial for both the organization and its employees (Peiris, 2021).

2.3.5. Management of Flexible work arrangements by HRM After the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant shift in the way work is performed, with remote and flexible work arrangements becoming increasingly common. In response, Human Resources (HR) Departments have had to adapt their policies and practices to support this new way of working. This analysis aims to examine how HR Departments have managed flexible work arrangements in the aftermath of the pandemic (Chanana, 2021).

Firstly, it is important to note that HR Departments have had to be proactive in addressing the needs of employees for flexible work arrangements. This has involved offering flexible hours, telecommuting options, and other accommodations that allow employees to balance their work and personal commitments. This has helped to maintain employee morale and engagement, while also ensuring that the company's operations continue smoothly (Hamza Shuja et al., 2020).

Furthermore, HR Departments have had to be proactive in providing support and resources to employees working remotely. This has included providing adequate technology and equipment, as well as offering training and support to help employees adapt to the new way of working. This has been critical in ensuring that employees are able to perform their tasks effectively and efficiently, regardless of their location (Khan et al., 2020).

Another key aspect of managing flexible work arrangements is the need for clear communication and collaboration between HR Departments and other departments within the organization. This has involved developing policies and processes that facilitate effective communication and collaboration, and ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of the expectations and responsibilities associated with flexible work arrangements (Becker et al., 2022).

Finally, it is important to note that HR Departments have had to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to managing flexible work arrangements. This has involved monitoring the effectiveness of their policies and practices, and making changes as needed to ensure that employees are supported and the company's operations are not negatively impacted (Peiris, 2021).

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant shift in the way work is performed, with flexible work arrangements becoming increasingly common. HR Departments have played a critical role in managing this shift, by offering support and

resources to employees, fostering clear communication and collaboration, and being adaptable in their approach.

2.3.6. Management of Changes in performance evaluation and development by HRM After the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the way organizations operate and has resulted in significant changes in the way performance evaluations and development are managed by Human Resources (HR) Departments (Peiris, 2021). This analysis aims to examine the changes in performance evaluation and development that have been implemented in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Firstly, it is important to note that the shift to remote work has challenged the traditional methods of performance evaluation, with HR Departments having to find new ways to assess employee performance in the absence of face-to-face interactions. This has involved the use of digital tools and remote communication methods, as well as the adoption of new performance metrics that are more suitable for a remote work environment (Cooke et al., 2020).

Furthermore, HR Departments have had to be proactive in providing support and resources to managers and employees, in order to ensure that performance evaluations are conducted effectively and efficiently. This has included offering training and guidance on the use of digital tools, as well as providing support for managers who may be new to remote performance evaluations (Meyer, 2020).

Another key aspect of the changes in performance evaluation and development is the need for greater collaboration and communication between HR Departments and other departments within the organization. This has involved developing policies and processes that facilitate effective communication and collaboration, and ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of the expectations and responsibilities associated with performance evaluations and development (Manjula, 2021).

Finally, it is important to note that HR Departments have had to be flexible and adaptable in their approach to performance evaluations and development, in order to ensure that they remain relevant and effective in a rapidly changing work environment (De Leon, 2020). In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant changes in the way performance evaluations and development are managed by HR Departments. These changes

have involved the use of digital tools and remote communication methods, greater collaboration and communication, and a flexible and adaptable approach. HR Departments have played a critical role in ensuring that performance evaluations and development continue to be effective and efficient, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

2.3.7. Management of Data privacy and security by HRM After the Pandemic

The global pandemic has brought about significant changes in the way organizations operate, including their Human Resources (HR) departments. With remote work becoming the new norm, the management of employee data privacy and security has become increasingly challenging for HR departments. In order to understand the impact of the pandemic on data privacy and security in HR departments, it is important to consider the following factors (Manjula, 2021):

- Remote work infrastructure: With the shift to remote work, HR departments have had to implement new systems and technologies to manage employee data. This has resulted in an increased risk of data breaches, as employees may be using personal devices that are not secure (Jacks, 2021).
- Data storage and access: HR departments are responsible for storing sensitive employee information, including personal data, payroll information, and other confidential information. With remote work, it can be challenging to control who has access to this information and to ensure that it is stored securely.
- Cybersecurity threats: The pandemic has led to an increase in cyberattacks, as cybercriminals have taken advantage of the disruption caused by remote work. This has put HR departments at a higher risk of data breaches, as they often hold sensitive employee information that is valuable to hackers (Gorlick, 2020).
- Employee training and awareness: HR departments have a critical role in ensuring that employees understand the importance of data privacy and security, especially when working remotely. This includes training employees on the use of secure technologies and best practices for protecting sensitive information.

To summarize, the pandemic has brought about significant challenges for HR departments in managing data privacy and security. As such, it is important for HR departments to take proactive steps to ensure that sensitive employee information is protected, including investing in secure technologies, implementing strong data access controls, and training employees on data privacy and security best practices (Dockery & Bawa, 2020).

2.3.8. Productivity, Burnout and Work-Life Balance

Burnout, which has been one of the issues that have occupied numerous researchers and scientists over the decades, took on different dimensions during the pandemic crisis, this time affecting in a particular way workers who followed the remote working pattern. This pattern, which is already very popular in all European countries, was used in such a way, especially during the first period of quarantine but also afterwards, that it was not easy to check its effectiveness and proper functioning. And when reference is made to proper functioning, it relates to the axis that should be taken into account and on the basis of which the workers should move (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020).

To begin with, it should not be forgotten under any circumstances that it is the very work that the employee in question undertook when he or she was operating within the operational area. This practically means that there were predetermined hours and specific responsibilities and tasks that had to be routed and achieved within the day. The same happens when the employee is telecommuting, since the fact that he or she is working from the premises does not set new bases or working conditions, unless this has been agreed with the employer. Having therefore received confirmation to work under teleworking from their premises, and in circumstances in which a large number of workers were losing their jobs day by day, a number of individuals, wanting to satisfy the demands of their employers and possibly gain their favour and secure the position they held, undertook regular overtime and took on many different tasks, thinking that they had the advantage of the comfort of their personal space and the time savings they would have had under (Mihalca et al., 2021).

As a result, in order to cope with an increasing number of responsibilities they were taking on and at the same time struggling to adequately respond to the telecommuting they were not familiar with in the pre-pandemic era, many of them developed symptoms of burnout. This was of course not limited to the first period of confinement, but given the specific recurring regime over a period of two years; they put themselves under constant pressure and responsibility that went far beyond the limits of normal. Through surveys in particular conducted as to levels of burnout, around 65% of workers claimed to be working for more than 40 hours a week, an increase of around 14% compared to 2020 levels. What they specifically expressed was that on the one hand, working more hours could help them achieve their work goal and the amount of responsibilities they were taking on, but on the other hand this had a significant impact on their mental health (Saragih et al., 2021).

In addition, what the workers who participated in the survey were faced with was the difficulty in taking time off throughout the pandemic. This further contributed to the strain on their mental and physical health and exacerbated their burnout rates. Another point that was found through these surveys is the comfort and familiarity of employees to hold online meetings, which pushed them to schedule successive appointments, often losing the concept and sense of time. On the other hand, due to their daily workflow, the companies were not able to have constant supervision to provide them with the appropriate support and assistance to manage their workload, therefore leading them to show the first and subsequent signs of burnout.

The issue that workers had to face was related to the proper management of working limits and even more so to their implementation. Having the comforts of their personal space associated with amenities, food, the comfort of remaining in looser clothing, etc. many times individuals stated that they were losing track of the time they had worked and when their employer assigned them some additional responsibilities they proceeded to see them to close them out immediately. Understandably this led to the first feelings of fatigue on a psychological and physical level and after a long time a large percentage of them reported the opposite results to those they had in the first time of implementing distance working. Among these were aversion to work, inefficient completion of their obligations and skipping many key projects they should have completed. Regarding their productivity under teleworking conditions, 82% of individuals claimed that in the last 12 months during which they had worked exclusively or partially from their home location, they had been as productive or even more productive than in the period and conditions before the pandemic (Igeltjörn & Habib, 2020).

The implementation of the teleworking scheme and the attempt to maintain a balance between one's personal and professional life has been the subject of research over the years since it is a very popular working pattern abroad, not only by multinational companies but also by other organizations, facilitating the flow of work within the company. Specifically, the telecommuting scheme was first implemented in the 1970s attributing it as "work applied remotely using information and communication technologies (ICT)" or alternatively as "working from home" (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). It is easy to understand that the application of telecommuting is directly related to the personal space of the individual within which his/her family or loved ones are located, but the question is calculated on how much time the individual ultimately has with his/her loved ones and at the same time how much

time is available to the individual and how much time he/she can spend with his/her family or loved ones (Felstead & Henseke, 2017).

It is those in charge of organizations who take a stand on this and argue that individuals who have set the necessary limits in terms of time and quantity can achieve the desired work-life balance. Through this, employees are provided with the opportunity for an optimal quality of life since they set limits on their professional tasks giving maximum efficiency and at the same time devote the required time to their personal life. Through this, the fulfillment of the individual can be achieved and this delimitation can be recognized as a right that the individual has and is in addition to the work that rewards him/her, therefore it should be widely accepted in the sense that it can only work for the benefit of the individual personally and the company itself thereafter. There are of course the positions of scholars regarding the much desired balance between the professional and personal life of the individual according to which when the individual feels that his social, personal and professional roles are performed in the best possible way and feels satisfied with their functioning then this balance has been achieved (de Macêdo et al., 2020).

2.4. The Pandemic's Legacy: Key Changes and Challenges in Human Resource Management

2.4.1. The New Era of HRM: Pandemic-Driven Changes and Their Lasting Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM). The pandemic has accelerated the shift towards remote work, which has challenged HR departments to find new ways to maintain employee morale, productivity and engagement (Gorlick, 2020).

One of the most notable changes in HRM is the adoption of technology. Many organizations have turned to digital solutions for tasks such as onboarding, performance management and employee engagement, leading to a significant increase in the use of virtual tools for HR activities (Bolisani et al., 2020)

Another change is the increase in the importance of employee well-being. With the rise of remote work, HR departments have had to find new ways to support employees' mental and physical health. This includes offering virtual wellness programs, mental health support, and flexible working arrangements (George et al., 2022).

The pandemic has also intensified the focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. With remote work and the increased visibility of social and political issues, organizations have been forced to re-evaluate their DEI strategies and take a more proactive approach to creating an inclusive workplace culture (Yoosefi et al., 2021).

Finally, the pandemic has intensified the need for HR departments to be agile and flexible. With the rapid pace of change, HR departments have had to be adaptable and responsive to new challenges, while also ensuring they continue to meet the evolving needs of their employees and organization.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in HRM, with a focus on technology, employee well-being, DEI initiatives, and agility. These changes are expected to persist in the post-pandemic era, and HR departments will continue to play a crucial role in supporting organizations and their employees as they navigate this new normal.

Here are the most important changes in Human Resource Management brought about by the COVID pandemic and consolidated in the post-COVID era (Risley, 2020):

- Adoption of technology: An increased use of virtual tools for HR activities, such as onboarding, performance management, and employee engagement.
- Increased focus on employee well-being: Organizations are finding new ways to support employees' mental and physical health through virtual wellness programs, mental health support, and flexible working arrangements.
- Emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI): The pandemic has intensified the focus on DEI initiatives, forcing organizations to re-evaluate their DEI strategies and take a more proactive approach to creating an inclusive workplace culture.
- Need for agility and flexibility: HR departments are expected to be adaptable and responsive to new challenges, while ensuring they continue to meet the evolving needs of employees and organizations.
- Remote work: The shift towards remote work has challenged HR departments to maintain employee morale, productivity and engagement in a virtual setting.

These changes are expected to have a lasting impact on HRM and organizations will need to be prepared to adapt to these shifts in the post-pandemic era (Sikora & Ferris, 2014).

2.4.1.1. Adoption of technology

The adoption of technology has been one of the most significant changes in Human Resource Management (HRM) brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has accelerated the shift towards remote work, leading organizations to find new ways to support their employees and carry out HR activities virtually (Ipsen et al., 2021).

One of the ways organizations have adapted to this new reality is through the increased use of technology for HR activities. From onboarding and performance management to employee engagement and communication, organizations are relying more on virtual tools to support HR processes. For example, many organizations have implemented digital solutions for performance evaluations, remote training, and virtual team-building activities (Lal et al., 2021).

The benefits of this increased adoption of technology in HRM are numerous. Firstly, it allows HR departments to reach a larger audience and engage with employees more efficiently, even when they are working remotely. Secondly, technology has made it easier to collect and

analyze data related to employee performance, satisfaction, and engagement, which can inform HR decision-making (Ipsen et al., 2021).

Benefits of the Adoption of Technology in HRM:

- Increased efficiency: The use of technology has allowed HR departments to automate repetitive tasks, such as tracking employee attendance, processing payroll, and managing benefits. This has allowed HR departments to focus on more strategic initiatives, such as employee engagement and talent management.
- Improved data analysis: Technology has made it easier to collect and analyze data related to employee performance, satisfaction, and engagement. This data can be used to make informed HR decisions, such as identifying training needs and recognizing high-performing employees.
- Virtual engagement: Technology has enabled HR departments to engage with employees virtually, regardless of location. This includes conducting virtual training sessions, team-building activities, and performance evaluations.
- Improved communication: Technology has made it easier for HR departments to communicate with employees, whether they are working remotely or in the office. This includes instant messaging, email, and virtual meetings, which have all become integral to HR communications.

Challenges of the Adoption of Technology in HRM (Ipsen et al., 2021):

- Data privacy and security: With sensitive employee information being stored and processed virtually, HR departments must ensure that this data is protected and secure. This includes ensuring that technology systems are regularly updated with the latest security features and that employees are trained on best practices for protecting data.
- The digital divide: Not all employees may have access to the technology or the skills necessary to use it effectively. HR departments must be mindful of this and ensure that all employees have the necessary technology and training to participate in virtual HR activities.
- Change management: Adopting new technology can be a significant change for HR departments, and employees may need time to adjust. HR departments must be proactive in communicating the benefits of technology, training employees on how to use it, and addressing any concerns they may have.

- **Cost:** Implementing new technology can be expensive, and HR departments must ensure that they have the budget and resources necessary to invest in the right tools and systems.

However, the adoption of technology in HRM also presents some challenges. One of the main concerns is ensuring data privacy and security, as sensitive employee information is being stored and processed virtually. Additionally, HR departments need to be mindful of the digital divide, as not all employees may have access to the technology or the skills necessary to use it effectively (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the adoption of technology has been a key change in HRM brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift has brought about numerous benefits, including increased efficiency, improved data analysis, and the ability to engage with employees virtually. However, HR departments need to be mindful of the potential challenges, such as data privacy and security, and ensure that all employees have access to the technology they need to participate in virtual HR activities (Kaushik & Guleria, 2020).

2.4.1.2. Increased focus on employee well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased focus on employee well-being as a key change in Human Resource Management (HRM). The pandemic has resulted in a significant shift in the way people live and work, with many employees facing new challenges such as remote work, health concerns, and financial stress. As a result, HR departments have had to place a greater emphasis on supporting the well-being of their employees (Prasad et al., 2020).

One of the ways in which organizations have addressed employee well-being is by providing additional support services, such as employee assistance programs, mental health resources, and financial support. This has included offering virtual counseling services, training managers on how to support employees, and providing financial assistance to employees who have been financially impacted by the pandemic.

Another way organizations have addressed employee well-being is by promoting work-life balance. This has included flexible work arrangements, such as allowing employees to work from home or adjusting work schedules to better accommodate family responsibilities. This

has helped to reduce stress and increase job satisfaction among employees (Parham & Rauf, 2020).

The benefits of increased focus on employee well-being are numerous. Firstly, it helps to create a positive work environment and promote employee engagement. Secondly, it helps to reduce turnover and increase employee retention, as employees are more likely to stay with organizations that prioritize their well-being. Additionally, supporting employee well-being can result in improved productivity, as employees are better able to focus on their work when they feel supported and healthy (Chanana, 2020).

The benefits of increased focus on employee well-being in the post-COVID era include (Prasad et al., 2020):

- Improved employee engagement: A focus on well-being helps create a positive work environment and fosters employee engagement, as employees feel valued and supported.
- Reduced turnover: By prioritizing well-being, organizations can improve employee retention and reduce turnover. Employees are more likely to stay with organizations that prioritize their health and well-being.
- Increased productivity: Supporting employee well-being can result in improved productivity, as employees are better able to focus on their work when they feel supported and healthy.
- Improved mental health: Providing resources and support for mental health can help reduce stress and anxiety among employees, resulting in improved overall well-being.
- Better work-life balance: Promoting work-life balance through flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or adjusting work schedules, can help reduce stress and increase job satisfaction among employees.

However, there are also some challenges associated with increased focus on employee well-being. One of the main challenges is measuring the impact of well-being initiatives, as it can be difficult to determine the effectiveness of these programs. Additionally, there may be concerns about the cost of implementing these programs, and HR departments must ensure that they have the budget and resources necessary to invest in employee well-being initiatives (Stankevičiūtė & Kunskaia, 2022).

The major challenges associated with increased focus on employee well-being, including (Madero Gómez et al., 2020):

- Measuring the impact of well-being initiatives: It can be difficult to determine the effectiveness of well-being initiatives, making it challenging for organizations to assess the impact of their efforts.
- Cost: Implementing well-being initiatives can be costly, and HR departments must ensure that they have the budget and resources necessary to invest in these programs.
- Resistance to change: Some employees may be resistant to changes in work arrangements or the introduction of new support services, requiring HR departments to manage these changes effectively.
- Ensuring compliance: HR departments must ensure that their well-being initiatives are compliant with labor laws and regulations.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased focus on employee well-being as a key change in HRM. Organizations have responded by providing additional support services and promoting work-life balance. The benefits of this increased focus on well-being include improved employee engagement, reduced turnover, increased productivity, and a positive work environment. However, HR departments must be mindful of the potential challenges, including measuring the impact of well-being initiatives and ensuring that they have the necessary resources to invest in these programs (Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2021).

2.4.1.3. Emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a heightened emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as a key change in Human Resource Management (HRM). The pandemic has highlighted the systemic inequalities and discrimination that exist in society, and organizations have had to respond to calls for greater diversity and equity in the workplace (Clark et al., 2022).

One of the ways in which organizations have addressed DEI is by conducting diversity audits and reviewing their hiring practices to ensure that they are inclusive and equitable. This has included implementing more diverse and inclusive recruitment processes, such as using

diverse interview panels, and offering training and development programs to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Another way organizations have addressed DEI is by creating diverse and inclusive work environments. This has included creating employee resource groups, offering cultural competency training, and promoting a culture of inclusiveness and belonging (Jewkes et al., 2020).

The benefits of a greater emphasis on DEI in HRM are numerous. Firstly, it helps to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace, where employees from different backgrounds and perspectives are valued and supported. Secondly, it helps to reduce discrimination and promote equity, as organizations work to address systemic inequalities and ensure that all employees have equal opportunities. Additionally, promoting DEI can result in improved innovation and creativity, as a diverse workplace can bring new perspectives and ideas (Gibson et al., 2021).

The benefits of a greater emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in HRM include (Ferraro et al., 2022):

- Improved workplace culture: A more diverse and inclusive workplace promotes a culture of belonging and respect, where employees from different backgrounds are valued and supported.
- Reduced discrimination: Addressing systemic inequalities and promoting equity helps to reduce discrimination and promote equal opportunities for all employees.
- Improved innovation and creativity: A diverse workplace can bring new perspectives and ideas, leading to improved innovation and creativity.
- Increased employee engagement and satisfaction: Employees are more likely to be engaged and satisfied when they feel valued and supported, and when the workplace culture is inclusive and diverse.
- Improved reputation: Organizations that prioritize DEI are viewed more favorably by customers, employees, and stakeholders, which can enhance the organization's reputation and improve brand image.

However, there are also some challenges associated with a greater emphasis on DEI in HRM. One of the main challenges is ensuring that DEI initiatives are authentic and not just window-dressing. Additionally, there may be resistance from employees who are

uncomfortable with the changes or who do not see the need for greater diversity and inclusion. HR departments must work to address these concerns and ensure that their DEI initiatives are inclusive and equitable (Ferraro et al., 2022).

The challenges associated with a greater emphasis on DEI in HRM, including:

- Resistance to change: Some employees may be resistant to changes in work arrangements or the introduction of new support services, requiring HR departments to manage these changes effectively.
- Cost: Implementing DEI initiatives can be costly, and HR departments must ensure that they have the budget and resources necessary to invest in these programs.
- Ensuring authenticity: HR departments must ensure that their DEI initiatives are authentic and not just window-dressing, in order to be effective.
- Measuring the impact of DEI initiatives: It can be difficult to determine the effectiveness of DEI initiatives, making it challenging for organizations to assess the impact of their efforts.
- Addressing unconscious bias: HR departments must be mindful of unconscious bias, which can perpetuate discrimination and inequality, and work to address this in their DEI initiatives.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a heightened emphasis on DEI as a key change in HRM. Organizations have responded by conducting diversity audits, creating diverse and inclusive work environments, and offering training and development programs. The benefits of this emphasis on DEI include a more diverse and inclusive workplace, reduced discrimination and promoting equity, and improved innovation and creativity. However, HR departments must be mindful of the potential challenges, including ensuring that DEI initiatives are authentic and addressing resistance from employees (Risley, 2020).

2.4.1.4. Need for agility and flexibility

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about the need for agility and flexibility in Human Resource Management (HRM). This has resulted in several key changes that have been consolidated in the post-COVID era (Putra et al., 2020)

Benefits of agility and flexibility in HRM include (Sullivan, 2012):

- Improved productivity: By allowing employees to work remotely or have flexible working hours, organizations can improve their productivity, as employees are able to work in a way that suits their individual needs and circumstances.
- Improved employee well-being: By providing employees with more flexible work arrangements, organizations can support their well-being and reduce stress, leading to improved health and satisfaction.
- Increased employee engagement: By supporting employees in their personal lives and reducing stress, organizations can increase employee engagement and satisfaction, leading to improved performance and retention.
- Better talent retention: By providing employees with flexible work arrangements, organizations can improve employee retention and reduce turnover, as employees are more likely to stay with organizations that support their needs.
- Increased competitiveness: By being more agile and flexible, organizations can be more competitive and better equipped to respond to changes in the business environment, such as market trends or changing customer needs.

However, there are also challenges associated with increased agility and flexibility in HRM, including (Arunprasad et al., 2022):

- Maintaining communication and collaboration: With employees working remotely or in different locations, it can be more difficult to maintain communication and collaboration, which may impact the effectiveness of teams.
- Ensuring security and privacy: By allowing employees to work remotely, organizations must ensure that they have the necessary security and privacy measures in place to protect sensitive information.
- Managing work-life balance: While flexible working hours can support employees' work-life balance, it can also be challenging for HR departments to manage this balance and ensure that employees are not overworked.
- Measuring performance and accountability: With employees working remotely or in different locations, it can be challenging to measure performance and hold employees accountable, as they may not be physically present in the workplace.

In conclusion, while the need for agility and flexibility in HRM brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic presents many benefits, including improved productivity, employee well-being, and competitiveness, HR departments must be mindful of the potential

challenges, including maintaining communication and collaboration, ensuring security and privacy, and managing work-life balance, in order to effectively promote agility and flexibility in the workplace (Al-Habaibeh et al., 2021).

2.4.1.5. Remote work

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant shift towards remote work, which has had a profound impact on Human Resource Management (HRM) practices. This change has been consolidated in the post-COVID era, and is now a permanent feature of the modern workplace.

Benefits of remote work include (Franken et al., 2021):

- Increased flexibility: Remote work provides employees with the ability to work from anywhere, at any time, which supports a better work-life balance and improved well-being.
- Reduced commute time and costs: By eliminating the need to commute, remote work can reduce travel time and costs, as well as reduce stress and improve employee satisfaction.
- Improved access to talent: By allowing organizations to hire employees from anywhere in the world, remote work provides access to a wider pool of talent, improving organizational competitiveness.
- Increased productivity: Research has shown that remote workers can be more productive than those who work in a traditional office environment, as they are able to work in an environment that suits their individual needs and preferences.
- Improved employee retention: By providing employees with more flexibility, remote work can improve employee retention, as employees are more likely to stay with organizations that support their needs.

However, there are also challenges associated with remote work, including (Guangul et al., 2020):

- Isolation and loneliness: Remote workers may experience feelings of isolation and loneliness, as they do not have the same level of interaction with their colleagues as they would in a traditional office environment.

- Difficulty in maintaining work-life balance: Without clear boundaries between work and personal time, remote workers may struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance.
- Technology issues: Technical issues such as poor connectivity, hardware problems, and software compatibility can impact the effectiveness of remote work.
- Management challenges: Remote work can also present challenges for managers, as they must find ways to effectively communicate and collaborate with their remote teams, and ensure that remote workers are held accountable for their performance.

In conclusion, while remote work presents many benefits, including increased flexibility, improved access to talent, and increased productivity, HR departments must be mindful of the potential challenges, including isolation and loneliness, difficulty in maintaining work-life balance, technology issues, and management challenges, in order to effectively support remote workers and promote remote work as a viable option in the workplace (Putra et al., 2020).

2.4.2. Embracing HRM Changes Amid the Pandemic

2.4.2.1. Employee Acceptance of Pandemic-Induced HRM Changes: Insights and Implications

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in HRM, and these changes have been consolidated in the post-COVID era. The acceptance of these changes by employees has been a crucial factor in the success of these changes.

Studies have shown that employees have largely accepted the changes brought about by the pandemic, although the level of acceptance has varied depending on factors such as age, income, and employment status. For example, younger employees and those with higher incomes have generally been more accepting of remote work and other HRM changes (Am et al., 2020).

Benefits of remote work and other HRM changes have played a significant role in employees' acceptance of these changes. The increased flexibility and work-life balance provided by remote work, as well as the cost savings associated with reduced commute time and costs, have been well received by many employees. The emphasis on employee well-being and the increased focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion have also been well received by employees, who value these issues and recognize the benefits they bring to the workplace (Songsangyos & Iamamporn, 2020).

However, there have also been challenges associated with the acceptance of these changes. For example, some employees have struggled with the isolation and loneliness associated with remote work, while others have found it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance. The management challenges associated with remote work have also been a source of concern for some employees, who have reported difficulties in communicating and collaborating with their remote teams (Bollestad et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the acceptance of the key changes in HRM brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has been influenced by a range of factors, including employee demographics, the benefits of these changes, and the challenges associated with their implementation. While some employees have struggled with the changes, the majority have accepted these changes and embraced the benefits they bring to the workplace. HR departments must continue to monitor employee attitudes towards these changes and take steps to address any concerns or challenges in order to promote a positive work environment and foster employee well-being.

2.4.2.2. Business Acceptance of Pandemic-Induced HRM Changes: Insights and Challenges

Studies have shown that employers and businesses have generally accepted the changes brought about by the pandemic, although the level of acceptance has varied depending on factors such as company size, industry, and the geographical location. For example, companies in the tech industry and those with a more flexible organizational culture have been quicker to adopt remote work and other HRM changes (Hamouche, 2021).

The benefits of remote work and other HRM changes have been a significant factor in the acceptance of these changes by employers and businesses. The reduced costs associated with reduced commuting time and expenses, as well as the increased flexibility and work-life balance provided by remote work, have been well received by many employers and businesses. The emphasis on employee well-being and the increased focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion have also been well received, as these issues have become increasingly important to employees and consumers (Gonçalves et al., 2021).

However, there have also been challenges associated with the acceptance of these changes. For example, some businesses have struggled with the management challenges associated with remote work, including difficulties in communication and collaboration with remote teams. The loss of face-to-face interaction and the difficulties in maintaining a positive company culture have also been sources of concern for some employers and businesses.

In conclusion, the acceptance of the basic changes in HRM brought by the COVID-19 pandemic has been influenced by a range of factors, including company size, industry, and the organizational culture. While some employers and businesses have struggled with these changes, the majority have accepted them and embraced the benefits they bring to the workplace. Employers and HR departments must continue to monitor their companies' attitudes towards these changes and take steps to address any concerns or challenges to promote a positive work environment and maintain employee well-being (Risley, 2020).

2.4.2.3. COVID-19 and HRM Evolution: Differences in Key Changes between the Private and Public Sectors

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in Human Resource Management (HRM), and these changes have been entrenched in the post-COVID era. While

these changes have affected both the private and public sectors, there are some notable differences between the two in terms of the adoption and implementation of these changes.

In the private sector, the changes in HRM have been largely driven by market forces, such as competition for talent and the need to remain competitive in an ever-changing business environment. Companies have embraced changes such as remote work, increased focus on employee well-being, and the adoption of technology to improve HR processes, in order to remain competitive and attract top talent. The private sector has generally been more flexible and agile in adapting to these changes, and has been quicker to adopt new HR policies and practices (Vnoučková, 2020).

In contrast, the public sector has been slower to adopt these changes, largely due to the bureaucratic nature of government organizations and the complex regulations and procedures that they must follow. Despite this, the public sector has still seen a significant shift towards remote work and an increased focus on employee well-being, as governments have sought to respond to the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the public sector has been working to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in their workforces, as well as to promote more flexible and agile HR policies.

The differences in the acceptance of these changes between the private and public sectors can also be attributed to their different funding models. The private sector is often more financially agile and can more easily adapt to changes in the business environment, whereas the public sector is often more limited in terms of its financial resources and must follow strict budgetary constraints (Gigauri, 2020).

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in HRM, and these changes have been entrenched in the post-COVID era. While both the private and public sectors have been impacted by these changes, there are notable differences in their acceptance and implementation of these changes, due to factors such as the nature of their organizations and their funding models. Nevertheless, both sectors are continuing to work towards improving HR policies and practices in response to the demands of the post-COVID era.

2.5. Research Gap and Research Questions

Although there has been extensive research on the theoretical framework regarding the changes that the pandemic brought to HR management in organizations, there is a lack of

studies that focus on the Greek reality, especially in the public sector. Therefore, the purpose of the following chapters is to present the research part of the work, which aims to investigate the extent to which HR management practices have changed during the pandemic period and which of these changes have become permanent in the post-Covid era.

The research questions that will be studied are as follows:

- How is telecommuting implemented as an HR management practice in the post-COVID environment by the Ministry of Education?
- What are the challenges of post-COVID HRM changes for the public sector?
- To what extent did the employees of the Ministry of Health accept the HR management changes in the post-COVID era?

The study organization chosen is the Ministry of Education, one of the most significant and numerous ministries in Greece. The reason for this choice is that this ministry's role is essential for all governments, as it is responsible for implementing policies related to the future labor market. Through this study, we aim to shed light on the challenges faced by the public sector and identify best practices that could be adopted by other organizations.

By investigating these research questions, we hope to provide valuable insights into the changes that the pandemic has brought to HR management practices and their impact on employees and organizations in the public sector in Greece. This study could serve as a reference for other countries facing similar challenges and assist organizations in adapting to the new normal.

3. Methodology

3.1. Purpose of the Research

As stated in the previous section, the purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which HRM practices have changed during the pandemic period and which of these changes have become permanent in the post-Covid era. Sub-objectives of the study are to explore the ways in which telecommuting has been implemented as an HRM practice in the post-COVID era in the Public Sector, to explore the challenges of HRM changes in the post-COVID-19 era as well as the extent to which the public sector workers accepted these changes.

3.2. Research Methodology and Research Tool

To achieve the purpose of the research, the qualitative method was chosen, in order to understand the experiences and perceptions of the executives of the human resources management departments (investigation of experiences, comments and expressions, visual and my own observations). The research took place in the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, one of the most populous Ministries in Greece in terms of employees working in it. The semi-structured interview with closed-ended questions was chosen as the research tool.

3.3. Sample

The sample of the research was four employees of the Directorate of Human Resources of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and the sampling was done in a random way based on their willingness and willingness to contribute to its elaboration. Conditions that were set were: a) the interviewees work in positions of responsibility (being Managers or Heads of Departments), b) work in the Human Resources Department and c) consent to having their voice recorded. Given that human behavior cannot be described with generalities and the social world can only be understood by the individuals who make it up, qualitative research is considered the most appropriate for the topic examined in this study.

3.4. Description of Qualitative Analysis

The methodology followed to conduct the present research work was entirely qualitative research and analysis. Literature and theoretical models related to the immigration and refugee issue are presented, focusing on human resources management practices during and after the pandemic period, and then the research results are analyzed in a qualitative manner.

Through qualitative research data are collected which describe issues and concepts from human life. Data comes from interviews, observations, participant observations, stories, case studies, personal

experiences, life stories and archival analyzes (Neuman, 2003). The qualitative research method was considered the most appropriate and effective for the needs, goals and questions of this work.

In qualitative research, researchers collect data, which they transform and interpret, through analysis, into information. This information, when repeatedly applied in practice in various social situations, becomes knowledge (Neuman, 2003).

The interview tool is the most common method of data collection in qualitative research. In this way, the oral communication between the interviewer and the interviewee is organized so that the former collects information and data from the latter regarding the object and topic of his research. Our sample was not drawn from random sampling, but from purposive, non-random sampling.

The selection and formulation of the specific questions was carried out after a thorough research in the relevant literature. The aim was to identify the interesting parts of the subject, as well as those points which deserve to be studied more and for a variety of reasons significantly concern the issue of the application of human resource management practices in the Public Sector during the period of the pandemic as well as after she.

In particular, the way in which the questions were formulated to each interviewee concerns their status, position and role, as well as their potential contribution to our research (Neuman, 2003). For this reason, the questions to the interviewees were common to all. Through this process, everyone's work is grouped together, where possible, and more clear and universal conclusions are drawn. The questions were chosen based on the status of the women and their experiences, while other questions clearly emerged along the way, as is the case with in-depth interviews (Eisner, 1991).

Then, after observation and research, we focused on analyzing the data and evidence collected in a qualitative manner (Neuman, 2003).

3.5. Validity and Limitations of Process

The validity of the procedure is provided by the literature review and theoretical background, which frames the question of the implementation of HRM practices in the Public Sector during the period of the pandemic as well as after it. According to them, the organization of the questionnaire was formed in order to obtain safe results. It was judged that the validity of the interview questions lies in the organization and inclusion of the parameters of the issue of the implementation of human resources management practices in the Public Sector during the period of the pandemic as well as after it. Credibility is ensured by the research subjects, the respondents, who are employees in positions of responsibility in the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs with previous experience and experiences in relevant issues. It is believed that they can offer the best possible answers to the questions put to them because of the real experiences they have faced.

At this point it is necessary to point out that this research work has clear limitations. In particular, the discussion, as well as the conclusions that will follow, are not generalized to the entire Public Sector in Greece, but relate to the case under study. In order to draw universal conclusions, it is necessary to carry out more extensive research covering all Public Sector organizations in Greece. Such a thing, of course, belonged neither to the objectives nor to the conditions of the present work.

3.6. Ethical Issues

During the conduct of the research, all ethical and ethical rules were observed. In particular, the written consent of all participants in the research was requested, after they were fully informed about their rights and obligations provided for by law. It was made clear to the participants that complete anonymity would be maintained and that their personal data would be protected. Finally, they were informed that the final paper resulting from this research will be sent to them in electronic form (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

4. Results - Qualitative Analysis

Next, the qualitative analysis of the interviews given by the 4 officials of the Ministry of Education is presented. For ethical reasons, their names have been coded as 'Interviewee 1', 'Interviewee 2', 'Interviewee 3' and 'Interviewee 4'.

4.1.Implementing Telecommuting as an HRM Practice in the Post-COVID Era

4.1.1. Process of implementing telecommuting in the post-COVID era and challenges faced

Based on the interviews with the four officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs, it is evident that implementing telecommuting as an HRM practice during the post-COVID era was a challenging task that required significant changes in policies and procedures. The common challenges reported by the interviewees include ensuring the security of sensitive information while working remotely, providing employees with the necessary technology and infrastructure to work efficiently, and maintaining employee engagement and productivity. Additionally, legal and regulatory challenges were encountered when developing policies and procedures to accommodate telecommuting as an HRM practice.

Interviewee 1 stated that one of the main challenges faced during the implementation of telecommuting was ensuring the security of sensitive information while working remotely. The HR department had to develop new security measures, such as VPNs and two-factor authentication, to ensure that employees could securely access the organization's network and systems. The relevant Directorate responsible for electronic communications during the pandemic took on this task. In the post-COVID era, teleworking is only applied in cases of employees with specific and serious illnesses, following the provisions of the Ministry of the Interior.

Interviewee 2 described that the implementation of telecommuting as an HRM practice was gradual, with the program being expanded after identifying which positions could be performed remotely. The main challenge faced was ensuring that employees had the necessary technology and infrastructure to work efficiently from home and secure their personal data. The HR department ensured that employees had remote access to their mail and the "Papyrus" system, which is the Ministry's electronic protocol. The Directorate of

E-Governance and Process Simplification developed VPN technologies to protect employees' personal data.

Interviewee 3 highlighted that one of the main challenges faced during the implementation of telecommuting was ensuring that employees could maintain a work-life balance while working remotely. The HR department had to provide guidelines and resources to help employees manage their time effectively and avoid burnout or mental fatigue. The Heads of the Directorates and the Departments under them were instructed to show flexibility and understanding to achieve a balance in this new regime formed during the pandemic. Telecommuting is currently only applied in exceptional cases of risk, such as extreme weather or for employees with serious illnesses, following the provisions regulated by the Ministry of the Interior.

Interviewee 4 noted that implementing telecommuting as an HRM practice was not a significant change for the organization as they had already been following a similar path since the pandemic. However, during the pandemic, HR policies and processes had to be adapted to accommodate remote work, including performance management, communication, and collaboration. The HR department had to implement new tools and resources, such as virtual team building activities, to maintain employee morale and productivity. Teleconferencing instead of face-to-face conferencing is now more generally applied across the spectrum of the Public sector, but telecommuting in its extended form as applied during the pandemic is no longer applied, following a relevant circular from the Ministry of the Interior.

In conclusion, implementing telecommuting as an HRM practice during the post-COVID era in the organization was challenging and required significant changes in policies and procedures. The common challenges faced by the HR department were ensuring the security of sensitive information while working remotely, providing employees with the necessary technology and infrastructure to work efficiently, maintaining employee engagement and productivity, and adapting HR policies and processes to accommodate remote work. However, the HR department was able to overcome these challenges by developing new policies and procedures, providing guidelines and resources to employees, and implementing new tools and resources, such as virtual team building activities, to maintain employee morale and productivity. The circular from the Ministry of the Interior regulated the use of

telecommuting in exceptional cases only, and it is not applied in its extended form as was used during the pandemic.

4.2.Challenges to HRM Changes in the Post-COVID-19 Era

4.2.1. Impact of the pandemic on Human Resource Management practices

In general, all four interviewees agreed that the pandemic had a significant impact on HRM practices in the organization. The main areas that were affected were remote work, communication, employee engagement and motivation, and employee wellbeing. However, there were differences in the specific HRM practices that were most affected and the reasons for their impact.

Interviewee 1 mentioned that one of the main challenges faced during the pandemic was adapting to a virtual work environment and ensuring the security of sensitive information while working remotely. They had to develop new policies and procedures and implement new security measures such as VPNs and two-factor authentication. The pandemic also increased fear and stress levels among employees, making it difficult to maintain productivity and engagement. They had to be flexible and creative in finding solutions to these challenges, such as implementing flexible work arrangements and providing additional support and resources to employees. Communication was another practice that was affected, and the organization had to find new ways to engage and communicate with employees, such as video conferencing.

Interviewee 2 mentioned that performance management was one of the practices most affected, as they had to find new ways to monitor and evaluate the performance of remote workers. They had to implement new tools and resources such as online performance appraisals and feedback systems to ensure that employees received timely and constructive feedback. Employee wellbeing was another practice affected, as additional resources and support were required to help employees manage stress and maintain a work-life balance. The Heads of Departments and Departments were instructed to maintain flexibility and understanding of the needs of their employees and manage potential conflicts or confrontations.

Interviewee 3 mentioned that training and development were one of the practices that were most affected, as they had to move all training online. They had to find new ways to provide training and provide employees with the necessary resources and support to work remotely.

Teleconferences and training videos were used to achieve this, and a support group for technical issues was created by the Directorate for E-Government and Simplification of Processes. Employee engagement and motivation were also affected, and new ways had to be found to keep employees connected and motivated in a remote work environment. The Heads of Directorates and Departments were responsible for this, after being properly informed by the HR department.

Interviewee 4 mentioned that communication was one of the practices that were most affected, and new tools and resources such as video conferencing and instant messaging systems had to be implemented to ensure employees stay connected and informed. They also used pre-existing tools such as Viber, Skype, and Messenger, which were already known and familiar to employees and supervisors. Employee wellbeing was another practice affected, and the Heads of Directorates and Departments had to ensure that support was in place to help employees manage stress and maintain a healthy work-life balance in a remote work environment. The HR department provided guidelines for constructive conflict management and flexibility to achieve this.

In summary, the pandemic had a significant impact on HRM practices in the organization, affecting various areas such as remote work, communication, employee engagement and motivation, and employee wellbeing. Each interviewee mentioned specific HRM practices that were most affected, such as virtual interviews, performance management, training and development, and communication. However, all agreed that new tools and resources had to be implemented to ensure that employees could work effectively and efficiently from home, and that support was in place to help them manage stress and maintain a work-life balance. The Heads of Directorates and Departments had a crucial role in implementing these practices and ensuring that employees remained engaged and motivated in a remote work environment.

4.2.2. Making HRM changes permanent in the post-COVID era

One of the common points raised by the interviewees is that the pandemic had a significant impact on HRM practices in the organization. They had to adapt to the new working conditions and adopt new practices to ensure that employees were engaged and motivated, that they had the necessary resources and support to work remotely, and that their wellbeing was taken care of. All interviewees stated that they had to find new ways to communicate and

collaborate with employees, such as through virtual meetings, video conferences, and webinars. This practice has now become permanent in the post-COVID era.

Interviewees 1, 2, and 3 mentioned that remote work arrangements have become permanent for specific groups of employees. Interviewee 1 stated that flexibility in working arrangements is now only applicable to employees with specific chronic diseases, while Interviewee 2 mentioned that telecommuting is now applied individually to people with serious and specific health problems. Interviewee 3 stated that meetings between partners from different Directorates of the Ministry now take place online when several Directorates are involved or external bodies that need to be moved.

In addition to remote work arrangements, Interviewee 1 mentioned that employee engagement and communication are now emphasized, while Interviewee 2 emphasized the use of digital systems, which everyone can access from their home. Interviewee 3 stated that the emphasis on employee engagement and communication has become permanent, along with the use of online tools that can be accessed from home.

Regarding the impact of HRM changes on employees, Interviewee 1 stated that workers did not seem to be significantly affected by the changes implemented to deal with the pandemic. However, there were isolated concerns raised by some workers about the challenges of remote work, such as a lack of interaction with colleagues and difficulties in separating work and personal life. Interviewee 2 stated that several employees were affected by the changes in HRM due to the pandemic, particularly those who had to adapt to remote work, which required a significant change in work routines and work-life balance. Several employees also expressed fears regarding the security of their personal data. Interviewee 3 stated that remote working created new challenges for employees, such as difficulties in communicating and collaborating with their colleagues. Employees also expressed concerns about the lack of interaction and socialization in a remote work environment. Interviewee 4 stated that many employees had to adapt to remote working, which required a significant change in the way they worked. However, this was a challenge for everyone, whether in the public or private sector, and there were reactions to the use of the new systems and tools. However, these were isolated and quickly overcome with the help of the Heads of Departments.

From the above analysis, it is clear that the pandemic had a significant impact on HRM practices in the organization, which led to the adoption of new practices to ensure that employees were engaged, motivated, and had the necessary resources and support to work

remotely. Remote work arrangements have become permanent for specific groups of employees, while digital tools and online meetings have become permanent for all employees. There were some concerns raised by employees regarding the challenges of remote work, but the Heads of Departments provided support and resources to help them manage these challenges.

Another notable difference between the interviews was the focus on employee concerns and issues related to HRM changes in response to the pandemic. Interviewee 1 noted that there were isolated concerns raised by some workers about the challenges of remote work, such as a lack of interaction with colleagues and difficulties in separating work and personal life. In response, additional support was provided, such as mental health services developed by the Department of Health and guidelines for remote working, to help employees manage these challenges. Interviewee 2, on the other hand, noted that several employees were affected by the changes in HRM due to the pandemic, including concerns about the security of personal data and challenges in maintaining productivity and staying motivated while working remotely. The HR department responded by providing support through online video conferencing to train and guide employees, and implementing new policies and procedures such as flexible working hours and remote working arrangements to help employees balance work and personal responsibilities.

Interviewee 3 highlighted the difficulties that employees faced with remote working, such as difficulties in communicating and collaborating with colleagues and concerns about the lack of interaction and socialization in a remote work environment. In response, HR provided additional support and resources such as educational teleconferences and guidelines for effective and safe remote working to help employees manage these challenges. Finally, Interviewee 4 noted that many employees had to adapt to remote working, which required a significant change in the way they worked. While there were reactions to the use of new systems and tools, these were quickly overcome with the help of the Heads of Departments, and HR provided support in the form of teleconferences and issuing instructions to guide employees and help them cope.

In terms of permanent changes that have been made in HRM practices, Interviewee 1 noted that the use of virtual meetings, video conferences, and webinars had become permanent in the post-COVID era, as they have proven to be an effective way to communicate and collaborate with colleagues. Flexibility in working arrangements, such as telecommuting, has

also become permanent, but only for employees with certain chronic diseases. Interviewee 2 echoed this, noting that most meetings are now held remotely through teleconferences, and all functions and processes are increasingly being carried out through digital systems that can be accessed from home. Telecommuting is now only applied individually to people with serious and specific health problems mentioned in a relevant Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of the Interior. Interviewee 3 noted that the practice of video conferencing has become permanent, as it has proven to be more effective than face-to-face meetings. Additionally, there is an emphasis on employee engagement and communication, as well as the use of online tools that can be accessed from home. Finally, Interviewee 4 noted that in the post-COVID era, the use of online collaboration tools has become permanent, as they have proven to be an effective way to communicate and collaborate with colleagues and are always available at any time from any location.

In conclusion, the interviews with the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs revealed several important insights into the changes that were made to HRM practices in response to the pandemic and which of these changes have become permanent in the post-COVID era. All of the interviewees noted the significant impact that the pandemic had on HRM practices, particularly in terms of remote working and the need to find new ways to communicate and engage with employees. There were some differences in terms of the specific changes that were made and the focus on employee concerns, but overall there was a clear emphasis on providing additional support and resources to help employees manage the challenges of remote work. Finally, there was consensus among the interviewees that several HRM changes made during the pandemic have become permanent in the post-COVID era, particularly the use of virtual meetings and video conferences.

4.2.3. Strategies to ensure the effectiveness of Human Resource Management practices

The qualitative analysis of the interviews conducted with the four officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on HRM practices. The interviewees report that remote working, digital tools, and online meetings were among the main changes implemented during the pandemic. Most of the employees have adapted well to the new working conditions, although there were some concerns raised by employees regarding the

challenges of remote work, such as difficulties in separating work and personal life, lack of interaction with colleagues, and maintaining productivity and motivation.

Regarding the strategies used to ensure that HR practices remained effective in the post-COVID era, the interviewees reported several common points. First, there was a focus on providing additional resources and support for remote working, such as guidance and training on the use of digital tools, and developing new platforms that support remote work. Second, communication and collaboration were prioritized, with the implementation of video conferencing tools and regular virtual meetings. Finally, there was a focus on employee wellbeing, with the development of mental health services and guidelines to support work-life balance.

However, there were also differences in the approaches taken by each interviewee. Interviewee 1 reported that the organization prioritized employee wellbeing by publicizing mental health services developed by the Department of Health and guidance to support work-life balance. Interviewee 2 emphasized the importance of training employees to use new technologies and tools and developing online management systems and digital platforms accessible from anywhere. Interviewee 3 reported that the organization had adapted existing HR policies and procedures for remote work, such as developing remote work and performance management guidelines. Finally, Interviewee 4 reported that the organization focused on developing the appropriate legislative framework to ensure the protection of employees' personal data and set up measures in an optimal way.

In terms of permanent changes in HRM practices in the post-COVID era, all interviewees agreed that the use of digital tools and online collaboration platforms would remain essential. Video conferencing and virtual meetings were also considered a more effective way to communicate and collaborate than face-to-face meetings in some cases. Additionally, some changes in remote work policies and guidelines were made permanent, such as the provision of flexibility in working arrangements and the empowerment of workers to use new technologies and tools.

In conclusion, the qualitative analysis of the interviews conducted with the four officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs highlights the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HRM practices. Remote working, digital tools, and online meetings were among the main changes implemented during the pandemic. In the post-COVID era, the use of digital tools and online collaboration platforms

will remain essential, and some changes in remote work policies and guidelines will be made permanent. The strategies used to ensure that HR practices remained effective in the post-COVID era focused on providing additional resources and support for remote working, prioritizing communication and collaboration, and supporting employee wellbeing.

4.2.4. Impact of the pandemic on the recruitment and selection process

The interviews with the four officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs suggest that the recruitment and selection process has not been significantly impacted by the pandemic. All interviewees indicate that the selection process follows the guidelines set by ASEP and is based on a specific framework, with some differences in the selection process for teachers who wish to work in the Ministry on secondment.

Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 3 state that the pandemic has not had a significant impact on the recruitment and selection process. They both emphasize that the recruitment of new employees is carried out through ASEP competitions and selection is based on merit, with no major changes made to the process. Interviewee 1 adds that the organization has followed ASEP guidelines to adapt to the new conditions, but the process remains consistent with the established procedures.

Interviewee 2 echoes the sentiments of Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 3 and states that the overall recruitment process has remained consistent with the established procedures set by ASEP. They do not think the pandemic has significantly affected the process, except for the way exams are conducted. However, they also note that this is not something that falls under their responsibilities as a Ministry.

Interviewee 4 reiterates that the recruitment and selection process is solely the responsibility of ASEP and that the Ministry of Education has not been involved in the process for years. They mention that the exams are conducted normally, based on merit, and are assessed on the basis of the results of the writings.

Overall, the interviews suggest that the recruitment and selection process has not been significantly affected by the pandemic. All interviewees emphasize that the process is governed by ASEP regulations and is based on merit. However, there may have been some changes to the way exams are conducted, although this is not something that falls under the Ministry's responsibilities.

4.2.5. Challenges in implementing HRM practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era

From the analysis of the interviews, it is clear that there were several strategies used to ensure that HR practices remained effective in the post-COVID era. For example, Interviewee 1, 2, and 3 all mentioned providing employees with the necessary digital tools to implement telecommuting, such as web services and digital information systems, and facilitating regular communication through dedicated platforms to maintain engagement and collaboration between members of Ministry Department teams. Furthermore, all interviewees mentioned prioritizing employee wellbeing, providing additional resources and support for remote working, and adapting existing HR policies and procedures for remote work.

However, there were also some differences in the approaches taken by the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs to maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic. For example, Interviewee 2 emphasized the importance of regular bone-chilling meetings to facilitate collaboration and engagement, while Interviewee 3 mentioned that the agency, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and following its instructions, introduced flexible working arrangements to enable its employees to achieve a balance between their personal and professional responsibilities. In addition, Interviewee 4 emphasized the importance of training employees to use new digital tools and platforms that support remote work, as well as developing the appropriate legislative framework that ensures the protection of employees' personal data.

Similarly, when it comes to the impact of the pandemic on the recruitment and selection process in the organization, there were differences in the responses of the interviewees. For example, Interviewee 1 and 3 stated that the recruitment and selection process has not been affected by the pandemic, and is carried out at fixed times through ASEP competitions. However, Interviewee 2 mentioned that the way the exams are conducted has changed and that the Ministry of Education provides information to ASEP about the vacant organizational positions and the needs that arise. Meanwhile, Interviewee 4 stated that the recruitment and selection process is purely about ASEP, and the Ministry of Education has not been involved in this for years.

Regarding the challenges faced in implementing HR practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era, all interviewees acknowledged that there were challenges that needed to be addressed. For example, Interviewee 1 mentioned the need to adapt to a virtual work

environment and to be flexible and creative in finding solutions to maintain productivity and engagement, while Interviewee 2 highlighted the need to overcome employees' fear of using digital tools from home and to find effective ways to communicate and collaborate with team members. Similarly, Interviewee 3 stated that employees had to adapt to the new data, and finding effective ways to communicate and collaborate with team members was imperative, while Interviewee 4 mentioned that it was not easy for workers to adapt to the new data and that effective methods of communication and collaboration between employees and their Supervisors were vital.

Overall, the interviews revealed that the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs implemented several strategies to ensure that HR practices remained effective in the post-COVID era, such as providing employees with the necessary digital tools to implement telecommuting, facilitating regular communication through dedicated platforms, and prioritizing employee wellbeing. However, there were also some differences in the approaches taken by the Ministry to maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic, and there were challenges that needed to be addressed.

In terms of supporting employee mental health during the pandemic, there were some differences in the responses. Interviewee 1 stated that the organization did not take specific measures, as it was the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. Interviewee 2 mentioned that the Ministry of Education had held webinars and mass briefings for employees, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. Interviewee 3 also stated that the Ministry provided employees with timely information about the provisions of the Ministry of Health and organized talks and informative discussions with experts. Finally, Interviewee 4 stated that the Ministry had provided information about the available services of the National Health System and facilitated open channels of communication for employees to voice their concerns.

Overall, it seems that the organization prioritized providing employees with the necessary resources and support to work remotely, such as technology and training, to maintain engagement and productivity during the pandemic. Communication and collaboration were also emphasized, with regular online meetings and feedback sessions being implemented. Employee well-being was addressed through the provision of mental health services and guidance on work-life balance. However, there were some challenges in implementing HRM practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era, such as adapting to a virtual work

environment, maintaining productivity and engagement, and finding effective ways to communicate and collaborate with team members.

In conclusion, the four interviewees from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs provided insightful responses on how HRM practices changed during the pandemic period and which of these changes became permanent in the post-Covid era. The responses highlighted the importance of providing employees with the necessary resources and support to work remotely, prioritizing communication and collaboration, and addressing employee well-being. However, there were some challenges in implementing HRM practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era, such as adapting to a virtual work environment and finding effective ways to communicate and collaborate with team members. Overall, it is clear that the pandemic has had a significant impact on HRM practices, and organizations must continue to adapt and innovate to ensure that employees remain engaged, productive, and healthy.

4.3. Acceptance of HRM Changes by Employees in the Post-COVID-19 Era

4.3.1. Impact of Human Resource Management changes on employees

Based on the interviews of the four interviewees, it can be concluded that the pandemic had a significant impact on HRM practices in the organization, particularly in terms of remote work and communication. The organization had to develop new policies and procedures to ensure employees had the necessary equipment and resources to work remotely. In addition, new security measures had to be implemented to ensure the security of sensitive information while working remotely. Furthermore, employees had to adapt to the new working environment, which required a significant change in work routines and work-life balance.

Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 4 reported that employees quickly adapted to the changes implemented to deal with the pandemic. However, there were isolated concerns raised by some workers about the challenges of remote work, such as a lack of interaction with colleagues and difficulties in separating work and personal life. Interviewee 1 and Interviewee 4 reported that additional support, such as mental health services developed by the Department of Health and guidelines for remote working, were provided to help employees manage these challenges.

Interviewee 2 reported that several employees were affected by the changes in HRM due to the pandemic. Many employees had to adapt to remote work, which required a significant

change in work routines and work-life balance. Additionally, there were concerns about the security of personal data, as well as concerns from the Heads of Departments about maintaining productivity and motivation. In response to these concerns, the organization provided support in the form of online video conferencing, training, and guidance.

Interviewee 3 reported that employees had difficulties in communicating and collaborating with their colleagues in a remote work environment. Employees also expressed concerns about the lack of interaction and socialization. As HR, the organization provided additional support and resources, such as educational teleconferences and guidelines for effective and safe remote working, to help employees manage these challenges.

In conclusion, the pandemic had a significant impact on HRM practices in the organization, particularly in terms of remote work and communication. While employees quickly adapted to the changes implemented to deal with the pandemic, there were concerns raised about the challenges of remote work, such as a lack of interaction with colleagues and difficulties in separating work and personal life. The organization provided additional support, such as mental health services and guidelines for remote working, to help employees manage these challenges. Overall, the organization has developed new policies and procedures, such as flexible working hours and remote working arrangements, to help employees balance work and personal responsibilities.

4.3.2. Supporting the mental health of employees during the pandemic

The interviews with HR officials of YPAITH revealed that several changes in HR practices made during the pandemic have become permanent in the post-COVID era. These include the use of virtual meetings, video conferencing, and webinars, which have proven to be effective ways to communicate and collaborate with colleagues. Flexibility in working arrangements, such as telecommuting, has also become permanent in certain cases. However, there was no significant impact on the recruitment and selection process during the pandemic, and the process continued to be governed by ASEP regulations. Moreover, the organization provided timely information about the available services of the National Health System to support employee mental health during the pandemic.

The interviews revealed several common points among the interviewees. All the interviewees emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration, particularly through the use of digital tools, to ensure effective HR practices during and after the pandemic. Additionally,

all interviewees noted the importance of providing information and guidance to employees on the use of new digital tools and platforms to support remote work. Moreover, all interviewees highlighted the importance of supporting employee mental health during the pandemic, with some noting that the responsibility for this falls under the remit of the Ministry of Health.

Despite these common points, there were some differences in the responses of the interviewees. For instance, Interviewee 1 did not mention any specific measures taken by the organization to support the mental health of employees during the pandemic, whereas Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 3 mentioned webinars and informative discussions with experts. Interviewee 4, on the other hand, noted that the organization provided information about the available services of the National Health System and facilitated open channels of communication for employees to voice their concerns. Another difference was in the responses of Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 4 regarding the impact of the pandemic on the recruitment and selection process. While Interviewee 2 stated that the overall process remained consistent with the established procedures set by ASEP, Interviewee 4 emphasized that the recruitment and selection process is purely governed by ASEP regulations.

Characteristic passages of the answers of the interviewees include Interviewee 1's statement that the organization had not taken specific measures but encouraged employees to prioritize their personal care and manage their stress levels, Interviewee 2's mention of the Ministry of Education's webinars and mass briefings in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Interviewee 3's comment on the Ministry's organization of talks and informative discussions with experts, and Interviewee 4's provision of information about available services and facilitation of open channels of communication for employees to voice their concerns.

Overall, while the Ministry of Education did not take specific measures to address the mental health of employees during the pandemic, all interviewees acknowledged the importance of providing information about mental health services to employees and supporting their well-being. It is clear that the Ministry recognized the need for employees to have access to mental health resources and information, even if they did not take a proactive role in providing these resources themselves.

In conclusion, the interviews with officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs provide valuable insights into how Human Resource Management practices changed during the pandemic period and which of these changes became permanent in the post-Covid era. The interviews suggest that some HR

changes made during the pandemic have become permanent in the post-COVID-19 era, such as the use of virtual meetings, video conferences and webinars, flexibility in working arrangements, and the use of online collaboration tools. The Ministry of Education also took steps to ensure that their employees had access to the necessary resources and information regarding mental health services, even if they did not take a proactive role in providing these resources themselves. These insights can be useful for other organizations looking to adapt their HR practices to the changing needs of their employees in the post-Covid era.

4.3.3. Practices to Maintain Employee Engagement and Productivity

The interviews with the officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs (YPAITH) provided valuable insights into the Human Resource Management practices that were implemented during the pandemic period and how these changes were sustained in the post-COVID era.

One of the main findings from the interviews was that the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs placed a high priority on ensuring that employees had the necessary resources and support to work remotely. Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 4 all agreed that the provision of digital tools, guidance and training on remote working, and the facilitation of regular communication through dedicated platforms were essential strategies to maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic.

Another common theme across the interviews was the focus on employee wellbeing. Interviewees 1 and 2 emphasized the importance of providing mental health services developed by the Department of Health and guidance to support work-life balance, while Interviewee 3 highlighted that the agency introduced flexible working arrangements to enable employees to achieve a balance between their personal and professional responsibilities. These initiatives were seen as important in sustaining employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic and beyond.

While the majority of the interviewees suggested that the recruitment and selection processes had not been significantly affected by the pandemic, they also acknowledged the importance of adapting to new circumstances. Interviewees 1, 2, and 3 explained that the recruitment and selection processes are governed by ASEP regulations and these guidelines were followed to adapt to the new conditions. Interviewee 2 also mentioned that the Ministry of Education proceeded with webinars and mass briefings of employees, in cooperation with the Ministry

of Health, to inform them about the provisions of the Ministry of Health and the relevant Ministerial Decisions.

In terms of supporting the mental health of employees during the pandemic, the interviews revealed that the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs relied heavily on the Ministry of Health. Interviewees 1, 2, and 4 all mentioned that dealing with the mental health of employees during the pandemic was the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, but the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs provided information about the available services of the National Health System and carried out informative actions to the employees of the Ministry. Interviewee 3 stated that the support provided by the Ministry of Education was timely information to employees about the provisions of the Ministry of Health and informative discussions with experts.

To maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic, Interviewees 1, 2, 3, and 4 all agreed that communication and collaboration were key. Regular online meetings and feedback sessions were established, and flexible working arrangements were introduced to allow employees to better manage their personal and professional responsibilities. The provision of digital tools and the necessary support and guidance to use them effectively were also seen as important factors in maintaining employee engagement and productivity.

In summary, the interviews with the officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs (YPAITH) provided valuable insights into the Human Resource Management practices that were implemented during the pandemic period and how these changes were sustained in the post-COVID era. The findings suggest that the provision of digital tools, guidance and training on remote working, and the facilitation of regular communication through dedicated platforms were essential strategies to maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic. Additionally, initiatives to support employee wellbeing, adapt to new circumstances, and improve recruitment and selection processes were identified as important factors in sustaining employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic and beyond.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Basic Conclusions

This work is a qualitative study aimed at investigating the extent to which Human Resource Management (HRM) practices have changed during the pandemic period, particularly in terms of telecommuting and communication, and which of these changes have become permanent in the post-Covid era . The study used interviews as the primary data collection method, and four officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs (YPAITH) participated in the study. The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges of HRM changes in the post-COVID-19 era, how telecommuting was implemented as an HRM practice in the public sector, and the extent to which public sector workers accepted these changes.

Regarding the 1st research question, it was examined how telecommuting was implemented as an HR management practice in the post-COVID environment by the Ministry of Education. The qualitative analysis of the interviews showed that implementing telecommuting as an HRM practice during the post-COVID era was a challenging task that required significant changes in policies and procedures. The interviews with the four officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs revealed that the common challenges faced by the HR department included ensuring the security of sensitive information while working remotely, providing employees with the necessary technology and infrastructure to work efficiently, maintaining employee engagement and productivity, and adapting HR policies and processes to accommodate remote work. Despite these challenges, the HR department was able to overcome them by developing new policies and procedures, providing guidelines and resources to employees, and implementing new tools and resources, such as virtual team building activities. As a result, telecommuting is currently applied in exceptional cases only, such as extreme weather or for employees with serious illnesses, following the provisions regulated by the Ministry of the Interior.

The qualitative analysis of the interviews conducted with the officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs revealed valuable insights into the impact of the pandemic on HRM practices and the strategies used to ensure their effectiveness. The responses suggest that remote working, digital tools, and online meetings were among the main changes implemented during the pandemic, and these

practices will continue to be essential in the post-COVID era. Communication, collaboration, and employee well-being were also prioritized through the provision of mental health services, work-life balance guidelines, and the empowerment of workers to use new technologies and tools.

Regarding the recruitment and selection process, the interviewees indicated that the pandemic did not significantly impact the process, and the selection was based on merit following ASEP guidelines. However, some changes to the way exams are conducted may have been made. The responses also highlighted the challenges faced in implementing HRM practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era, such as adapting to a virtual work environment, maintaining productivity and engagement, and finding effective ways to communicate and collaborate with team members. The interviews revealed that organizations must continue to innovate and adapt to ensure that employees remain engaged, productive, and healthy. In conclusion, the qualitative analysis of the interviews with officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs highlights the significant impact of the pandemic on HRM practices. The responses suggest that organizations must prioritize the use of digital tools and online collaboration platforms, communication, collaboration, and employee well-being to ensure the effectiveness of HRM practices in the post-COVID era. However, challenges such as adapting to a virtual work environment and maintaining productivity and engagement must be addressed.

The impact of HRM changes on employees during the pandemic was significant, particularly in terms of remote work and communication. Employees had to adapt to the new working environment, which required a significant change in work routines and work-life balance. The organization had to develop new policies and procedures to ensure employees had the necessary equipment and resources to work remotely. In addition, new security measures had to be implemented to ensure the security of sensitive information while working remotely. The interviews with the HR officials revealed that the employees of the Ministry of Health quickly adapted to the changes implemented to deal with the pandemic. However, there were isolated concerns raised by some workers about the challenges of remote work, such as a lack of interaction with colleagues and difficulties in separating work and personal life. The organization provided additional support, such as mental health services developed by the Department of Health and guidelines for remote working, to help employees manage these challenges.

The interviews revealed that some HR changes made during the pandemic have become permanent in the post-COVID-19 era, such as the use of virtual meetings, video conferences and webinars, flexibility in working arrangements, and the use of online collaboration tools. The Ministry of Education also took steps to ensure that their employees had access to the necessary resources and information regarding mental health services, even if they did not take a proactive role in providing these resources themselves. The HR officials emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration, particularly through the use of digital tools, to ensure effective HR practices during and after the pandemic. All interviewees noted the importance of providing information and guidance to employees on the use of new digital tools and platforms to support remote work. Moreover, all interviewees highlighted the importance of supporting employee mental health during the pandemic, with some noting that the responsibility for this falls under the remit of the Ministry of Health.

Furthermore, the interviews revealed that the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs placed a high priority on employee wellbeing during the pandemic. All interviewees acknowledged the importance of providing mental health services, guidance, and resources to support work-life balance, and flexible working arrangements to enable employees to achieve a balance between their personal and professional responsibilities. The Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs recognized that the pandemic had caused significant disruptions to employees' personal and professional lives, and they were committed to providing support to help employees manage these challenges. The interviews also shed light on the challenges that employees faced during the pandemic period. The lack of interaction with colleagues and difficulties in separating work and personal life were cited as some of the significant challenges. These challenges had the potential to affect employee well-being and productivity negatively. To address these challenges, the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs provided additional support, such as mental health services and guidelines for remote working, to help employees manage these challenges.

In conclusion, the interviews with officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs provided valuable insights into the extent to which the employees of the Ministry of Health accepted the HR management changes during the pandemic period. The findings suggest that the majority of employees adapted well to the changes in HRM practices, such as remote work and communication. However, there were concerns raised about the challenges of remote work, such as a lack of interaction with colleagues and difficulties in separating work and personal life. The Ministry of Education &

Religious Affairs provided additional support, such as mental health services and guidelines for remote working, to help employees manage these challenges.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs placed a high priority on employee wellbeing during the pandemic. They recognized the significant disruptions that employees faced in their personal and professional lives and provided support to help employees manage these challenges. The provision of mental health services, guidance, and resources to support work-life balance and flexible working arrangements were identified as essential strategies to maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic. The Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs also provided additional support and resources to help employees manage the challenges of remote work, such as educational teleconferences and guidelines for effective and safe remote working.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs was proactive in adapting their HRM practices to the changing needs of their employees during the pandemic period. They recognized the importance of employee wellbeing and provided support to help employees manage the challenges they faced. The Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs also identified the importance of communication and collaboration to maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic. These insights can be useful for other organizations looking to adapt their HR practices to the changing needs of their employees in the post-Covid era.

5.2.Limitations And Future Studies

The present study had several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted using a qualitative methodology and based on interviews with only four officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs. While these interviews provided valuable insights into the changes in HRM practices and the extent of their acceptance by employees, they cannot be generalized to other organizations or sectors. A larger sample size with diverse perspectives could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the acceptance of HRM changes in the post-COVID era.

Second, the study focused on only one ministry in the public sector, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other organizations and sectors. The acceptance of HRM changes may vary across different organizations and sectors based on their unique context and challenges. Therefore, future research should explore the acceptance of HRM changes in

other sectors of the public and private sector to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on HRM practices.

Third, the study only focused on the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs, which limits the scope of the study to one specific sector. The public sector consists of various organizations and sectors with diverse operations, workforce, and challenges. Therefore, future studies should explore the acceptance of HRM changes in other sectors of the public sector to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on HRM practices in the public sector.

Fourth, the study focused on the acceptance of HRM changes from the perspective of officials from the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of Education & Religious Affairs. Future studies should include the perspectives of employees and managers from different levels of the organization to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the acceptance of HRM changes in the post-COVID era.

Finally, the study did not explore the impact of HRM changes on organizational performance and productivity, which could provide useful insights for future research. Future studies should explore the relationship between HRM changes and organizational performance to determine the extent to which HRM changes in response to the pandemic have affected organizational productivity and success.

In the future, it is suggested to carry out surveys that follow a quantitative methodology so that a larger number of employees and managers participate. Additionally, future research should explore the acceptance of HRM changes in other sectors of the public and private sector to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on HRM practices. Studies that focus on the impact of HRM changes on organizational performance and productivity could provide valuable insights for policymakers and organizations. Finally, future research could also explore the long-term impact of HRM changes implemented during the pandemic and whether they are sustainable in the post-COVID era.

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Appendix - Interview Responses

Can you describe the process of implementing telecommuting as a HRM practice in the post-COVID era in the organization? What were the main challenges faced during implementation?

Interviewee 1: The process of implementing telecommuting as an HR practice in the post-COVID era has been challenging. We had to develop new policies and procedures to ensure employees had the necessary equipment and resources to work remotely. One of the main challenges we faced was ensuring the security of sensitive information while working remotely. We had to implement new security measures, such as VPNs and two-factor authentication, to ensure that employees could securely access the organization's network and systems. This was undertaken by the relevant Directorate responsible for electronic communications during the pandemic. Now, in the post-COVID era according to the new provisions of the Ministry of the Interior, teleworking is only applied in cases of employees with specific and very serious illnesses.

Interviewee 2: Implementing telecommuting as an HRM practice was a gradual process. We started by identifying which positions could be performed remotely and gradually expanded the program. The main challenge we faced was ensuring that employees had the necessary technology and infrastructure to work remotely. We had to ensure that employees could work efficiently from home and secure their personal data. In any case, the employees had remote access to their mail and to the "Papyrus" system, which is the Ministry's electronic protocol, so they had access to all the cases they had undertaken. However, VPN technologies were developed by the Directorate of E-Governance and Process Simplification for the security of employees' personal data.

Interviewee 3: The implementation of telecommuting was a new experience for the Ministry and I can say that there were quite a few challenges during the process. First there were legal challenges to deal with. This was resolved after the issuance of the corresponding legal framework by the provisions regulated by the Ministry of the Interior and applied universally throughout the Public sector.

However, for the Ministry of Education's Human Resources Directorate, one of the main challenges was ensuring that employees could maintain a work-life balance while working

remotely. We needed to provide guidelines and resources to help employees manage their time effectively and avoid burnout or mental fatigue. We have instructed mainly the Heads of the Directorates and the Departments under them to show flexibility and understanding to their existing employees in order to achieve a balance in this new regime formed during the pandemic. Today, in the post-COVID era, telecommuting is only applied in exceptional cases of risk, such as for example in cases of extreme weather or for employees with serious illnesses.

Interviewee 4: The process of implementing telecommuting as an HR practice in the post-COVID era was not such a significant change for the organization as we followed the already familiar path that had been set since the pandemic era. Besides, teleworking in the public sector does not exist anymore, except in cases of employees with chronic and very serious illnesses or universally for all employees in cases of exclusion due to weather phenomena such as snow or heat, which rarely happens. However, during the pandemic, we have had to adapt HR policies and processes to accommodate remote work, including performance management, communication and collaboration. One of the main challenges we faced was ensuring that employees remained engaged and motivated while working remotely. We had to implement new tools and resources, such as virtual team building activities, to maintain employee morale and productivity. Perhaps now, in the post-COVID era, what has remained is teleconferencing instead of face-to-face conferencing, which is more generally applied across the spectrum of the Public sector. However, telecommuting, in its extended form as applied during the pandemic, is no longer applied, following a relevant circular from the Ministry of the Interior.

2. How has the pandemic affected HR practices in the organization? Which HRM practices were most affected and why?

Interviewee 1: The pandemic has had a significant impact on HRM practices in the organization. We had to conduct virtual interviews and provide employees with the necessary resources and training to work remotely. The Directorate of Electronic Government and Process Simplification helped in this, developing the appropriate tools. Another practice affected was employee engagement and communication. We had to find new ways to engage and communicate with employees, such as video conferencing, to ensure employees stay

connected and informed. Initially we informed the Heads of the Departments and Departments who in turn informed their employees.

Interviewee 2: The pandemic has had a profound effect on HRM practices in the organization. One of the practices most affected was performance management, as we had to find new ways to monitor and evaluate the performance of remote workers. We had to implement new tools and resources, such as online performance appraisals and feedback systems, to ensure that employees received timely and constructive feedback. This authority passed to the Heads of Directorates and Departments who were responsible for the supervision of their employees. Another practice affected was employee wellbeing, as we needed to provide additional resources and support to help employees manage stress and maintain a work-life balance. We informed the Heads of Departments and Departments to maintain a flexibility and understanding of the needs of their employees and to properly manage potential conflicts or confrontations.

Interviewee 3: One of the practices that was most affected was training and development, as we had to move all training online. We had to find new ways to provide training and provide employees with the necessary resources and support to work remotely. We have achieved this through a series of teleconferences and by posting training videos on the use of various online tools that have been developed and should be used by Ministry of Education employees during telework. In addition, the Directorate for E-Government and Simplification of Processes created a support group for technical issues that employees faced with their connection or use of the new digital tools. Another impacted practice was employee engagement and motivation, as we had to find new ways to keep employees connected and motivated in a remote work environment. This responsibility has been passed to the Heads of Directorates and Departments, after they have been properly informed by us.

Interviewee 4: The pandemic strongly affected HRM practices, as measures had to be implemented that were unprecedented for the Public Sector in general. One practice that was strongly affected was communication, as we had to find new ways to communicate with remote workers. We've had to implement new tools and resources, such as video conferencing and instant messaging systems, to ensure employees stay connected and informed. This was helped by the relevant Department of the Ministry which developed the appropriate online tools. However, well-known tools such as Viber, Skype, Messenger, etc. were also used, which both the employees and their supervisors knew. In general there was a freedom to use these tools, to communicate with colleagues. However, pre-existing systems

such as Papyrus were used to process documents, which were accessed remotely by employees anyway. Maybe several of them didn't know about it or hadn't remotely used them but in the pandemic period I could say it was common. Another practice affected was employee wellbeing, as support needed to be in place to help employees manage stress and maintain a healthy work-life balance in a remote work environment. This was undertaken by the Heads of Directorates and Departments, after our own briefing, during which we indicated ways of management such as flexibility, understanding and constructive conflict management.

3. How have employees been affected by HRM changes in response to the pandemic? Were there any concerns or issues raised by employees about the changes?

Interviewee 1: The workers did not seem to be significantly affected by the changes implemented to deal with the pandemic, as they quickly adapted to the changes. However, there were isolated concerns raised by some workers about the challenges of remote work, such as a lack of interaction with colleagues and difficulties in separating work and personal life. For this reason there has been additional support, such as mental health services developed by the Department of Health and guidelines for remote working, to help employees manage these challenges.

Interviewee 2: Several employees were affected by the changes in HRM due to the pandemic. Many employees had to adapt to remote work, which required a significant change in work routines and work-life balance. Also, several expressed their fears regarding the security of their personal data. Also, there were concerns mainly from the Heads of Departments about the challenges of remote working, such as maintaining productivity and staying motivated. For these reasons we have moved to support employees with online video conferencing to train and guide them and help them overcome these challenges.

Interviewee 3: Undoubtedly, remote working has created new challenges for employees, such as difficulties in communicating and collaborating with their colleagues. Employees also expressed concerns about the lack of interaction and socialization in a remote work environment. As HR, we have provided additional support and resources, such as educational teleconferences and issuing guidelines for effective and safe remote working, to help employees manage these challenges.

Interviewee 4: Many employees had to adapt to remote working, which required a significant change in the way they were used to working. However, this was a challenge for everyone, whether in the public or private sector, so there was quick adaptation. There were reactions to the use of the new systems and tools but I believe they were isolated and quickly overcome with the help of the Heads of Departments. For our part, we provided support in the form of teleconferences and issuing instructions to guide employees and help them cope. We have also implemented new policies and procedures, in line with regulations issued by the Home Office from time to time, such as flexible working hours and remote working arrangements, to help employees balance work and personal responsibilities.

4. Have any HR management changes made during the pandemic become permanent in the post-COVID era? If so, which ones and why?

Interviewee 1: Yes, some of the HR changes made during the pandemic have become permanent in the post-COVID-19 era. One of the changes that has become permanent is the use of virtual meetings, video conferences and webinars, as they have proven to be an effective way to communicate and collaborate with colleagues. Another change that has become permanent is flexibility in working arrangements, such as telecommuting but no longer universally applicable to all staff. They apply only to cases of employees with certain chronic diseases. But even they come to work normally. There are very few who work from home.

Interviewee 2: Yes, several changes in HRM practices made during the pandemic have become permanent in the post-COVID-19 era. Now, most meetings are held remotely through teleconferences, while increasingly all functions and processes are carried out through digital systems, which everyone can access from their home. As for telecommuting now, it is applied individually to people with serious and specific health problems mentioned in a relevant Ministerial Decision of the Ministry of the Interior.

Interviewee 3: Yes, some HR changes made during the pandemic have become permanent in the post-COVID-19 era. One of the changes that has become permanent is the practice of video conferencing, which has proven to be more effective than face-to-face meetings. Of course, most meetings between partners from different Directorates of the Ministry take place in person, but when several Directorates are involved or external bodies that need to be moved, then the meetings are held online. Another change that has become permanent is the

emphasis on employee engagement and communication, as well as the use of online tools that can be accessed from home.

Interviewee 4: In the post-COVID era, one of the changes that has become permanent is the use of online collaboration tools, as they have proven to be an effective way to communicate and collaborate with colleagues and are always available at any time from any location. In general, there is a trend towards using digital tools that save resources, as documents are now circulated digitally and not printed, and can also accommodate remote work. However, teleworking, after 2022 and following the directives of the Ministry of the Interior, is only applicable for cases of employees with very serious illnesses, which are minimal. However, in exceptional cases, such as for example the recent case of snow, the teleworking measure was implemented for employees who could not travel. In other words, telecommuting seems to be a measure that can now be applied at any time when there is a need, as there is now the necessary infrastructure, resources, and experience of the employees.

5. What strategies did the organization use to ensure that HRM practices remained effective in the post-COVID era?

Interviewee 1: The organization used several strategies to ensure that HR practices remained effective in the post-COVID era. One strategy was to provide additional resources and support for remote working, such as guidance and training for remote working and in the use of digital tools adopted by the Ministry, such as the Papyrus information system. Another strategy was to prioritize communication and collaboration, such as implementing video conferencing tools and establishing regular virtual meetings. We also focused on employee wellbeing by publicizing mental health services developed by the Department of Health and guidance to support work-life balance.

Interviewee 2: For the post-COVID era we have adopted practices to empower workers to use new technologies and tools that since the pandemic era have been seen as essential for every worker. Through training and informing the employees, we believe that each service of the Ministry can cope with the needs of remote work in the most efficient way. Now, new online management systems and digital platforms have been developed to be accessible from anywhere. Another strategy was to prioritize communication and collaboration, such as creating a platform that supports remote meetings. We also focused on employee wellbeing,

where in collaboration with other Departments, such as the Department of Health, we issued guidance to support employees in managing stress and work-life balance.

Interviewee 3: In the post-COVID era and after experiencing the extensive teleworking that was implemented during the pandemic, I believe that both the institutional and technological framework exists to support teleworking at any time, whenever it needs to be implemented. One strategy to ensure that HR practices remained effective was to adapt existing HR policies and procedures for remote work, such as developing remote work and performance management guidelines. Another strategy was to prioritize communication and engagement, such as establishing regular online meetings and feedback sessions.

Interviewee 4: We mainly focused on training and informing employees to use new digital tools and platforms that support remote work. We also focused on developing the appropriate legislative framework that ensures the protection of employees' personal data, as during the pandemic period all decisions were made very quickly and hastily due to the circumstances required. I believe that in the post-COVID era there is the time and experience to set up all these measures in an optimal way.

6. How has the pandemic affected the recruitment and selection process in the organization? Have changes been made to these procedures?

Interviewee 1: The pandemic has not greatly affected the recruitment and selection process of employees in the organization. The selection and recruitment process is governed by ASEP regulations and we followed these guidelines to adapt to the new conditions. The recruitment of new employees continues to be done through ASEP competitions and based on a specific framework.

Interviewee 2: The overall process has remained consistent with the established procedures set by ASEP. I don't think the pandemic has affected these processes. It's possible that the way the exams are conducted has changed, which to tell the truth I don't think has changed much, but anyway this is not something that falls under our responsibilities as a Ministry. We inform ASEP about the vacant organizational positions and the needs that arise. We do not participate in ASEP competitions.

Interviewee 3: I don't think the recruitment and selection processes have been affected by the pandemic. These are carried out at fixed times through ASEP competitions. Perhaps the selection process for teachers who wish to work in the Ministry on secondment for a year has

changed. They submit their supporting documents and their applications through the OPSYD online system. However, this system existed even before the pandemic.

Interviewee 4: The recruitment and selection process is purely about ASEP. The Ministry of Education has not been involved in this for years. As far as I know, the exams are done normally without any problem, as they were done in the past. But again this is a matter for ASEP. The selection of the candidates is done on merit based on the result of their writings.

7. How has the organization supported the mental health of employees during the pandemic?

Interviewee 1: The organization had not taken specific measures to address the mental health of employees during the pandemic, as this was the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and was done universally throughout Greece. However, we provided information about the resources available through the NHS and encouraged employees to prioritize their personal care and manage their stress levels.

Interviewee 2: Although the responsibility for supporting the mental health of employees during the pandemic falls under the remit of the Ministry of Health and concerns the entire Public sector in Greece, the Ministry of Education proceeded with webinars and mass briefings of employees in this regard the issues. But these were always done with the cooperation of the Ministry of Health and were based on the relevant provisions of its Ministerial Decisions.

Interviewee 3: In essence, the support provided by the Ministry of Education was timely information to employees about the provisions of the Ministry of Health, which provided clear instructions to employees of the wider Public Sector throughout Greece. For our part, as a Ministry, we organized talks and informative discussions with experts and provided appropriate information to employees about the available services of the Ministry of Health.

Interviewee 4: We did not take specific measures voluntarily. Dealing with the mental health of employees during the pandemic is an issue that is the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. However, we provided information about the available services of the National Health System and carried out in various ways informative actions to the employees of the Ministry. In addition, we facilitated open channels of communication to allow employees to voice their concerns and provided guidance to Heads of Departments and Departments on supporting the mental health of their subordinates.

8. How did the organization manage to maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic?

Interviewee 1: The organization maintained employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic by providing employees with the necessary resources and support to work remotely. We ensured employees had access to the technology they needed to perform their jobs effectively and provided guidance and training on how to work remotely. We also facilitated regular communication through dedicated platforms to maintain engagement and collaboration between members of Ministry Department teams.

Interviewee 2: To maintain employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic, the Department has focused on employee communication and collaboration. We provided the employees with the necessary digital tools to work remotely, such as web services, the digital information system of "Papyrus" and others. Also, to facilitate collaboration and engagement we held regular bone-chilling meetings and provided appropriate support to all employees for whatever problem they faced. In addition, we encouraged Heads of Departments to hold regular teleconferences with their teams to provide support and guidance.

Interviewee 3: To ensure that employees remain engaged and productive during the pandemic, as a Ministry we have provided the required digital tools to implement telecommuting. In addition, a group of ministry employees had undertaken to support the employees in any problems they encountered. Effective communication and collaboration were given top priority, with regular online meetings held and employees having access to all the information and resources required to perform their duties effectively. In addition, the agency, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and following its instructions, introduced flexible working arrangements to enable its employees to achieve a balance between their personal and professional responsibilities.

Interviewee 4: The organization has maintained employee engagement and productivity during the pandemic by prioritizing informing and training employees in the use of the necessary digital media to implement teleworking as well as optimal communication and collaboration between them. More generally, there was a group of people to support the employees of the Ministry in any problem that arose, and many online informational meetings were organized to train the employees. Finally, we implemented flexible work arrangements to allow employees to better manage their personal and professional

responsibilities and provided support and guidance to Department Heads to maintain employee engagement and productivity.

9. Have there been challenges in implementing HRM practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era? If so, what were they?

Interviewee 1: There have been some challenges in implementing HRM practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era, such as the need to adapt to a virtual work environment, as this required significant changes in the way employees communicate and collaborate. In addition, it is clear that the pandemic has increased fear and stress levels among employees, making it difficult to maintain productivity and engagement. We have had to be flexible and creative in finding solutions to these challenges, such as implementing flexible work arrangements and providing additional support and resources to employees.

Interviewee 2: Implementing HR practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era has presented a number of challenges. One of the biggest challenges was getting employees to overcome their fear of using digital tools from home. Several didn't think it was safe while others thought they couldn't do it. With proper information and support, this seems to have been overcome. In addition, another challenge was finding effective ways to communicate and collaborate with team members, but this was undertaken by the Ministry of Education's e-Government Directorate. Finally, we have also had to adapt our training and development programs to ensure that employees have the necessary skills to work effectively in a virtual environment.

Interviewee 3: There were certainly challenges in implementing HR practices in the public sector in the post-COVID era as the situations were unprecedented for all of us. Employees would have to adapt to the new data, which was not simple. Finding effective ways to communicate and collaborate with team members was imperative. We have had to be creative in finding solutions to these challenges, such as providing additional support and resources to employees, implementing flexible work arrangements and frequent employee updates.

Interviewee 4: The public sector faced numerous obstacles in implementing HR practices in the post-COVID era as we were all dealing with an unprecedented situation. It was not easy for the workers to adapt to the new data. Therefore, it was vital to devise effective methods of communication and collaboration between employees and their Supervisors. Finding

innovative solutions to these problems, such as extending additional help and resources to workers, implementing flexible work arrangements, and frequently debriefing workers, was essential.