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The People Management
Shaping young HR leaders

Innovative HR Practices During Crisis | Aparna Sharma | Senior HR Professional & Certified Corporate Director I Editor's Collection

The world at large, & India in particular is witnessing a severe global pandemic- COVID-19. A crisis of this magnitude acts as a true litmus test for each one of us in our personal & professional lives.

While a lot has been written about "Do's & Don'ts" during any crisis, this Corona pandemic has taken everyone by surprise.

The age old saying "Tough times don't last, Tough people do!" holds good even more in these challenging times. As Leadership teams & HR folks are trying to steer organisations in these times of uncertainty, health scare & economic slowdown, there is a constant need to stay connected with employees, work on innovative ways to ensure Business Continuity & keep guiding & motivating them.

Most organisations have announced "Work from Home" as the way to work during the lockdown period, employees are experiencing anxiety & frustration, also fear. If unattended, these feelings

can affect their productivity & engagement, leading to poor work quality, errors & eventually influence an organisation's ability to survive in these difficult times.

Building Resilience during such times can be a key differentiator to help organisations deal with and bounce back from future challenges. And Resilient Culture is built on trust, accountability and agility which would give organisations the ability to navigate and thrive in an unpredictable, dynamic and hostile environment.

Here are a few steps to help managers –

1. **Sense employees' need for support:**

Managers need to recognize signs of distress among their people, both directly through conversations and indirectly through observation. To facilitate regular conversations between managers and employees, HR should provide managers with guidance on how best to broach sensitive subjects arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, including alternate work models like Work from Home (WFH), job security and prospects, impact on staffing, and tension in the workplace. This guidance can include discussion guides, training, or email reminders with the latest updates on the situation and general principles for how to deal with it.

2. Foster a Healthy Workforce:

Constantly try to build in psychological safety amongst employees which breeds positive emotions like trust, curiosity and resilience. This will also give them strength to survive through unprecedented times with motivation, persistence and confidence.

3. Promote dialogue to build understanding:

To ensure communication efforts help, rather than hurt, engagement, managers must have a two-way dialogue with employees. Two-way communication with managers and peers provides employees with the information and perspective they need, while allowing them to express and process negative emotions and improve their feelings of control. HR leaders should help managers create opportunities for two-way dialogues that focus on a realistic picture of both the positive and negative implications of the current COVID-19 outbreak.

4. Use objectives to create clarity:

A direct link between individual performance and the achievement of business goals can boost employees' confidence in the importance of their job even in a challenging business environment. Clear objectives and regular updates on possible changes will help ensure employees maintain focus, energy and a sense of purpose. HR leaders can help managers reassert the link between

employees' work and organizational success by providing visibility into the current organizational goals and translating the organization's vision into their employees' context.

There is evidence from research which shows that one of the top engagement drivers for employees is seeing their work contribute to company goals. Employees who feel confident about the importance of their job to the success of the organization feel less anxious about their job security.

5. Reinforce organizational values to reduce the likelihood of misconduct:

Work well-being has the greatest impact on feelings of psychological safety —an unpleasant employee experience can negatively impact psychological safety by up to 35%. To make matters worse, during periods of uncertainty, employee misconduct increases by as much as 33%. Apart from modeling the right behaviors, managers should encourage whistleblowers to call out unethical behaviors, remind staff of the channels for reporting misconduct, and highlight punitive measures for noncompliance.

6. Tailor recognition to acknowledge employee efforts:

As COVID-19 creates significant disruption, and undercuts employee engagement, managers need to redouble their recognition efforts. Effective recognition not only motivates the recipient but can serve as a strong signal to other employees of behaviors they should emulate. Recognition can take many forms other than monetary rewards — public acknowledgment, tokens of appreciation, development opportunities and low-cost perks. For organizations facing a slowdown in business, managers can take this opportunity to provide development opportunities to employees who normally do not have capacity. This reinforces the organization's commitment to the long-term success of the employee.

7. Drive engagement via innovation:

While managers and employees may understandably become more risk-averse in this uncertain environment, it is these times of change and disruption that innovation and risk-taking become even more important for employee engagement and organizational success. The disengaging effect of constraints on innovation and risk-taking are particularly severe for high-potential (HIPO) employees who tend to have a stronger desire for these types of opportunities. Even when the organization has constraints on new investments, managers can emphasize the need and provide opportunities for incremental innovation or process improvements. This can be particularly meaningful if it addresses a challenge the team or organization is facing related to process disruptions or business impact.

It's absolutely important for the Board, Senior Management & HR of every organisation to back their employees by sincerely caring for them while they strive hard to do their best at work.

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