

Labour Welfare In Indian Industries Post Pandemic

Sudhir Kulkarni¹, Dr. Sonali Jadhav²

¹*Research scholar, Neville Wadia Institute of Management Studies & Research, Pune 411001. India.*

²*Principal, AISSMS's College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology, Pune 411005. India.*

Abstract

The novel Corona Virus (Covid-19) has already spread across the world. Many countries have suffered either two or three waves so far and it has created a lot of panic and problems in India too. It has created difficulties for each and every citizen in almost all the continents and countries worldwide. Apart from affecting the health of the citizens badly, it has created psychological, educational, financial, emotional, medical problems and uncertainty, fear of getting infected, loss of employment and even death in the minds of the people. The welfare and well-being of the human resource is of utmost importance for the industries. This conceptual research paper studies the change in pattern and practices of labour welfare measures post pandemic and suggests few important measures because taking care of employees' welfare is very important.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, Labour welfare, Stress due to Covid-19, Loss of employment due to Covid-19 pandemic, Fear of uncertainty

1. Introduction

It is said that human resource is an asset of the company not reflecting in the balance sheet. In today's Covid-19 pandemic, the companies have been trying to help their employees not to get demotivated or frustrated, but to pull them out of the critical situation. No company, or department or the sector has remained untouched from this pandemic. It is a proved fact that if the company takes care of its employees' welfare, then it can get lot of benefits by way of increased productivity, increased morale and motivation of the employees, control on overhead expenses, giving qualitative products and services to the customers etc. There are true examples of companies whose turnover and profitability have increased due to excellent welfare facilities given to the employees. But post pandemic, it is of utmost importance that labour or employee welfare needs to be handled from a totally different perspective. It is not sufficient to employ old and traditional ways of giving welfare facilities but to think out-of-the-box and give employees the best welfare facilities, keeping in mind the challenges posted by Covid-19 pandemic.

2.Literature Review

As per World Health Organization (2020), the novel Corona Virus (nCoV) was identified on 7th January 2020 and temporarily named as "2019-nCoV" and it was subsequently named as Covid-19 virus. Zhu (2020) says that due to Covid-19 pandemic, there is a need to adjust human resource in a more scientific way for facing the challenges successfully. The employees' health and safety are very important for running any business activity. All the industrial set-ups must follow the guidelines in order to avoid the employees getting infected with Covid-19. As stated by Singh (2020) due to Covid-19 pandemic, people prefer to stay away from each other to ensure social distancing, so that they do not get the infection from others. Man is a social animal. He cannot remain or work in isolation. Due to continuous isolation, he is undergoing mental depression, anxiety, fear, stress, mental disorders and health hazards, which leave greater impact on the employees and their companies. Sarma (2011) views labour welfare as formulating desirable standards and providing facilities like health, food, clothing, housing, medical and educational assistance, recreation etc. to the employees. These facilities help them to live a comfortable and stress-free life.

3.Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are 1) To study the labour welfare initiatives taken by the companies post Covid-19 pandemic. 2) To suggest remedial measures for effective implementation of labour welfare initiatives.

4.Methodology

This conceptual paper is based on the secondary data. This data are collected from already available and published sources on this subject like research papers, articles, books on labour welfare and human resource management.

The welfare initiatives:

Human resource management and top management of any organization ensures that their employees are given proper welfare facilities, so that they can give their whole-hearted participation for achieving pre-defined goals of the organization. Following are the initiatives where labour welfare is taken care of by Indian industries post-pandemic situation:

1.Flexi-time and work from home:

HR management takes care to follow the set rules and regulations as per HR Manual of the company. But during pandemic and lockdown period, it was not allowed to call employees to work and monitor the work done by them. So the companies allowed them to follow flexi-timing and work from home. This has helped them to do the official work and be at home, safe and secure. Employees' family members were also relieved to see them safe at home.

2.Counseling, Yoga and exercise sessions:

The Covid-19 pandemic has created huge mental stress and problems for wellbeing of the employees. They were not able to concentrate on their work due to mental stress and fear of unknown as well as death of their near and dear ones. The companies arranged online counseling sessions, Yoga or exercise sessions for the employees but ensuring full participation was a challenge. These measure certainly helped employees to fight with the mental stress and negative thoughts.

3.Online employee training:

During the lockdown period, it was not possible to give them training at one place and to all employees at a time. The companies started giving them training online using the online meeting platforms. Giving training online has helped companies to achieve the purpose of the training initiatives and employees got the relevant training sitting at home safely. They were trained to give their feedback about the training online, without visiting their workplace or taking risk of getting infected.

4.Employee retention ideas:

During pandemic, many employees could not meet their aged parents and few other dependents as they stayed at their native place. It was not advisable to allow them to stay with the employee at his place of work. So the organizations allowed them to use office vehicles for sending the food, grocery items, cash etc. to native place and to use office phone or internet connection to get in touch with parents/relatives at native place. This has helped organizations to retain good talent or top performing employees with the organization.

5.Confidence building to overcome uncertainty:

Employees used to carry fear of unknown and uncertainty, heavy medical costs etc. in their mind because they used to think that what will happen tomorrow and if they are infected or if they die, who will take care of their family members, how they will complete their educational and financial obligations etc. To overcome this fear, the companies assured their employees that they will not be removed from job and their wages will also not be deducted if they get infected with the virus. Even few organizations have started providing medical facilities for admission of the patient in the hospital, helping them with mediclaim facilities, providing ambulance whenever required etc. They have convinced employees that their future is in safe hands and they need not worry about these difficulties. This helped employees to overcome their financial and mental stress.

6. Overcoming societal stigma:

Even after the employee has recovered from Covid-19 virus infection and joins his duties, the other colleagues tried to avoid him or not to have lunch with him. This situation created bad psychological impact for the recovered employees. To help employees in this situation, various companies have started meeting employees at their place of work, give counseling sessions to them through trained Counsellors and NOGs and started giving them updated medical information about the virus and what precautions to be taken post-recovery instead of avoiding the recovered employees. The labour union leaders and the colleagues of the employees even tried to do crowd-funding to pay huge medical bills at the time of discharge from the hospital. Many companies settled full and final payments of the deceased employees immediately.

7. Government's intervention:

The State and Central Governments in India have intervened and advised the employers not to terminate the services of the employees or to reduce their wages during the pandemic and to grant employees paid leave for their absence due to Covid-19 infection. Also, it advised all citizens how to maintain safe distancing, wash hands frequently, use sanitizer and face masks and the importance of getting vaccinated. This has helped the employees to keep up high morale and motivation and relived them of their mental stress and tension. The Government has also directed public and private companies to provide vaccination doses to the employees (e.g. labourers working on construction projects) on priority. Some companies have made tie-up with the nearby hospitals for giving vaccination to their employees free of charge and they are giving one or two day's paid leave to the employees to manage post-vaccination temporary sickness. These vaccination drives have helped employees not to get seriously sick even if they catch infection in near future. The Government has relaxed majority of the deadlines for filing various statutory returns, paying income tax, issuing Form 16, file income tax returns, pay provident fund and ESI contributions etc. and made the process to claim or withdraw provident fund accumulations online, quick and hassle-free.

6.Limitations of the study

This study is the theoretical interpretation of the difficulties faced and the welfare measures adopted by the companies in general post pandemic. These measures may change as per the sector and the organization's philosophy, personal experiences, exposures and perceptions of the top management towards labour welfare.

7.Conclusions

It can be concluded that due to Covid-19 pandemic, both the employees and the companies have suffered a lot. But it was a good gesture of the companies, who came forward to help their employees in this critical and never-before situation. Many companies have changed their Welfare Policies to cater to the needs of the employees post pandemic and allotted more financial budgets for the same. The companies handled the challenges in a better way and helped employees to come out of it as quickly as possible. This has motivated the employees to concentrate on their daily work and to give their maximum output to the companies.

Suggestions

It is suggested that a permanent medical clinic or facility be made available or a vaccination drive can be arranged for the employees on a continuous basis henceforth at the place of work. The companies should develop a mechanism to ensure that employees are paid monthly salary on time and without any reduction as well as to waive off or reduce the amount of loans taken by them from the company. A Counsellor can be appointed for the employees to help them for solving their problems that may arise in future i.e. post-Covid complications, if any.

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