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## **Effect of Covid-19 on Human Resource Development and Management for Socioeconomic Sustainability of Organizations**

**Inuaesiet, Victoria Utitofon**

Department of Public Administration, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria  
[vicomonfoman@gmail.com](mailto:vicomonfoman@gmail.com)

**Okon, Ekaete Eyibio**

Department of Public Administration, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria  
[ekaeteokon@gmail.com](mailto:ekaeteokon@gmail.com)

**Akpan, Joseph Josaphat**

Department of Public Administration, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria  
[josephakpan@gmail.com](mailto:josephakpan@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The socioeconomic sustainability of organizations in Nigeria requires radical changes in workspace. Human Resources experts have taken reactive approaches to reposition organizations for sustainable growth in various sector of the economy. The need to maintain employees' work-life balance requires developing policies and procedures. This paper critically reviewed the importance of remote work environment, employee recruitment and selection, and employee compensation and benefits as measures to combat the impact of Covid-19 pandemic affecting organizations. Qualitative research was adopted to elicit relevant information which revealed that effective HR practices are driven by novel business model to promote safety workplace through remote working/training which require determining eligibility and durations, work expectation, and giving technological support to employees working from home. Effective HR models helps to identify competences required for employee recruitment and selection such as tolerance for ambiguity, employee resilience, and natural curiosity. Employees' compensation and benefits are being subjected to evaluations and must be scanned based on employment contract to determines employee that are in various employment contract such as compulsory employment, teleworking, partial temporary unemployment, and full temporary unemployment aimed at motivating employee with good pay package. It concludes that HR managers are dynamic change agents that develop agenda needed on how work should be done, the type of work, and how to organize and managed work for employee effectiveness and efficiency.

**Keyword:** Covid-19, HRM, remote work environment, employee recruitment and selection, employee compensation and benefits

### **1.1 Introduction**

Globally, Nigeria is among the 210 countries hit by the Covid-19 pandemic which has seen a rising number of cases across the country (Ajisegiri, Odusanya & Joshi, 2020). A report by United Nation Development Programme (UNDP, 2020) indicates that Covid-19 is a systematic human development crisis which affects social dimension of development and also erode gains being accumulated over the years. This affirms that Covid-19 has compounding effect on economy, health, education and also restricts social and economic activities across the world. The socioeconomic wellbeing of economies has made many organizations to reactively develop sustainable HR policies to address this health crisis (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020). The spillover has caused untold suffering and inhibits economic activities of the nations. Fear of contacting Covid-19 has made economic agents to be

unwilling to engage in strategic economic activities. This is why the emergence of Covid-19 has made HRM to face environmental challenges which organizational agents now seek to cope or adapt to radical changes such as working in remote work environment as alternative workspace (Chawla, MacGowan, Gabriel & Podsakoff, 2020).

Today, the unprecedented implications of Covid-19 pandemic on organizations have influenced HRM in a profound manner. Unforeseeable future is managed through HRM for employee to cope with issue of working remotely for organization to be sustained during Covid-19 pandemic (Gigauri, 2020). The ample opportunities created by the pandemic now require an integrated approach for solving the problem. With this recognition, HRM now has a saddled role of aiding organizations various sectors to succeed through a drastic change being caused by pandemic lockdown. Sheppard (2020) stresses that this recognition has made organizations to prepare for turbulent times and future changes through developing technological platforms and novel business models. However, a facilitating and supporting role by HR professionals is required to transform and take responsibility to retain employee while upgrading their abilities and skills. While the workforce is essential, resilience has become a prioritized strategy for sustainable success of organizations.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

HR management as a functional area of managing organization for productivity is hit by Covid-19 pandemic which has led to a significant reduction in socioeconomic activities, and this has made organizational leaders to be responsive and adaptive in managing workforce. In Nigeria, the drastic shift in work culture on how to keep workers engaged has constituted a challenge to HRM practice due to inadequate policies and resources for remote work environment, employee competences in recruitment and selection, employee compensation and benefits scheme. Though the wellbeing of workers has become a major concern to HRM, transition to alternative methods of performing tasks are not seamless and it looks where seamless strategies are pertinent to overcome the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. This study is therefore aimed at assessing the effect of Covid-19 on HR development and management for socioeconomic sustainability of organizations.

## **1.3 Objectives of the study**

The purpose of this study is to assess the effect of Covid-19 on HR development and management for socioeconomic sustainability of organizations. The specific objectives are:

- i. To examine how HR uses remote work environment as response to the effect of Covid-19 for socioeconomic sustainability of organizations in Nigeria.
- ii. To identify the importance of employee competences in HR recruitment and selection to improve the socioeconomic sustainability of organizations in Nigeria
- iii. To examine how HR uses employee compensation and benefits to improve the socioeconomic sustainability of organizations in Nigeria

## **1.4 Concept of Covid-19 and Human Resource Management**

Covid-19 as a pandemic is characterized as virus (SARS-CoV-2) transmitted from animal to person. Wuhan, a town in China which this virus emanates is linked to seafood and live animal consumption. (Ozili, 2020). Covid-19 is referred to as people-based crisis which impose a challenge on strategic human talent. Human resource management on the other hand specializes in management of people in workplace (Obikoya 2002). It requires using resources for effective management of business, individual and society. This affirms the notion of Cole (2004) that human resource manages people at work in line with their relationship with the organization for the achievement of set objectives. Though Covid-19 pandemic has affected HRM practice adversely, experts and professional are faced

with the big issue on how people should work from home in Nigeria. HR policies or guidelines have to promote a climate of calm while engaging in clear, timely, assertive and consistent communication across the organization for sustained productivity. For instance, just as the capabilities of Chief Financial Officers was highlighted in handling the financial crisis of 2007-2009 towards sustaining the finance of corporate organizations; it is the same way that Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the roles of Chief Human Resource Officers in corporate organizations toward creating enabling safety workspace (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann, 2020). Human Resource Heads are saddled with the function of keeping employee healthy, maintaining their morale, overseeing the need for remote working, and workers lay off. These indicate that to manage employee's health and safety constitute a challenge to HR which is imposed by Covid-19. Organization needs a hardheaded HR officer with strategic human talent to align positive policies to address present work dynamics for socioeconomic sustainability of the organization. Report by WHO (2020) indicates that Covid-19 pandemic has created significant novelty which has affected the mental health people across the globe. This is sequel to the fact that with the low possibility of having vaccine coupled with recession in Nigeria, working remotely has been a sustained measure by organizations as a result of uncertainty.

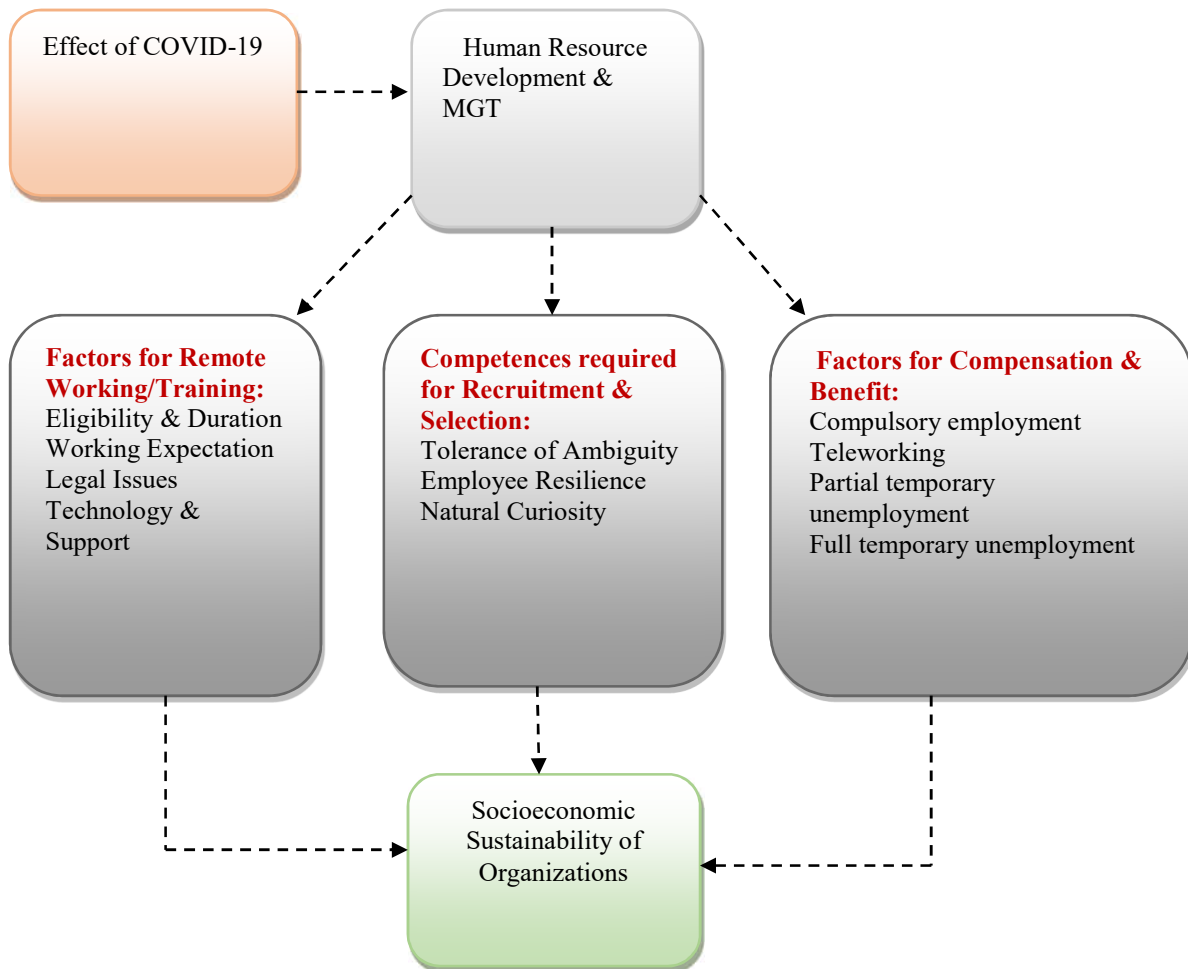
### **1.5 Theoretical framework**

Social psychological theory relates to the impact of Covid-19, and it stresses that the transmission of virus is based on human behaviour (Smith & Gibson, 2020). This pandemic is best tackled with profound behavioural changes and collective solidarity among stakeholders. Though the spread is informed by social behaviour, public policy, individual and collective behavior, there are strategies in minimizing viral transmission consequences of Covid-19 on individual and in workplaces. The justifications of this theory are that it aids employees and HR change agents to know that health risk is affected by health risk behaviour of group membership; that compliance with physical distancing is a factor for addressing shared social identity from Covid-19; and individual decision on positive health behaviour is driven by worldviews, cultural frameworks and values to promote safe environment (Wolf, Haddock, Manstead & Maio, 2020). Though this theory may be criticized of discrimination as a result of intergroup tensions (Van Assche, 2020), it is however helpful in combating the scourge of transmission of the virus in organization which HR practice seeks, to create enabling environment for workforce.

### **1.6 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study covers the experience, analysis and observation of the researcher (Mbogo, et al., 2012). It harnesses three HR functions such as remote work environment, employee competences in recruitment and selection, employee compensation and benefits scheme to address Covid-19 for socioeconomic sustainability of organizations.

**Figure 1:** Covid-19 effects on HR Development and Management



Source: Authors, 2020

### 1.7 Impact of Covid-19 on remote work environment

Remote work has been one way that many organizations have used to respond to the effect of Covid-19. Over the past five years, remote work has grown by 44 percent in line with the 21<sup>st</sup> century advancement in technology and globalization (Jalagat & Jalagat, 2019). Developed countries such as UK, USA and Germany have increasingly focused attention on remote working which is gradually being recognized in developing countries as a result of pandemic crisis (Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, & Scur, 2014). With the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic, HR professionals have developed remote work spanning the globe for socioeconomic sustainability of organizations. It has altered work conditions across sectors of Nigeria's economy as strategic attention has been shifted to remote work environment where contingencies have forced top HR management to formulate sustainable workplace policies and procedures aimed at limiting human contact in workplace. Though the pandemic has fundamentally limited physical interaction which organizations deem fit, adopting remote work conditions have enabled HR to address unprecedented changes arising from Covid-19 to influence employees' performance.

Conceptually, remote working lacks acceptable definition as the concept is used interchangeably and differently with telecommuting. It is a form of work that is performed in a location away from central office. It entails telecommuting, teleworking from home where workers are separated from each other (Baker, Gayle & John, 2007). It requires new technology in facilitating communication (Beno, 2018). Though, this concept is not apparently new, Covid-19 pandemic has given a unique adaptation of the concept in workplace. Uncertainty arising as a result of Covid-19 has made HR managers to consider remote working conditions as strategic measure to cope with challenges imposed by Covid-19. For instance, most public organizations adopted the decision of allowing certain workforce of the organization to work from home. Though this adjustment has created alternative workspace for employees outside the main work environment, it is associated with challenges such as inability to separate work from family sphere or private life (Chawla, MacGowan, Gabriel & Podsakoff, 2020). To tackle the spread of Covid-19, green chip organizations such as Google, Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook and others have established policies that ensure that workers work from home. This indicate that virtual interaction has become a replacement for direct job interview. This approach has been emulated by many competitive organizations in various sectors of economy to remain resilience by adopting remote work condition for survival in contemporary pandemic environment. For instance, most HR practices adopt virtual interview portals against in-person interview for recruitment and documentation. This feasibility of remote work for interviewing job seekers via Skype, Zoom etc are HR practice for scheduling interview for job seekers in areas affected by Covid-19 for their safety. These collaboration and communication platform combine video meetings, chat, and application integration and file storage.

A Report by Beheshti (2020) affirms that Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated flexible work arrangement i.e. remote work. The flexibility of remote option has enhanced cutting of cost and equally open opportunities for balancing family responsibility with work. Niel (2016) notes that high level of productivity is associated with people who work from home. According to Peters (2014), remote working saves money, time and efforts thereby enhance productivity. This support the study by Schermerhorn (2000) which affirms that 91 percent of remote workers are productive as they independently and flexibly accomplished a given task. Obviously, the important of remote working policies is necessary for socioeconomic sustainability of organizations being affected with the pandemic. For instance, the new normal for training employees has taken a new dimension of remote training which experts considers it HR strategy developed to enhance training where learning and development are challenged with the pandemic crisis (Frery, 2020) This has made many organizations to consider virtual learning to support (Maurer, 2020). This would require efforts of HR managers in examining the following factors in organizations in Nigeria:

- i. Defining eligibility and duration: This requires clarifications to know if the policy on remote work is temporary to address the Covid-19 within the period of shutdown. This helps to determine the employees that the policy is applicable to because not all employees are to be at the worksite while other may be incapacitated to engage in remote work.
- ii. Working expectation: The remote workers performance needs to be evaluated in line with their output, achievement of objectives and not majorly on time-based performance. The need for working expectation is aimed at overcoming confusing performance management issue with remote work policy. This must be clearly stated in the policy showing modes of communication that is needed, expectation of availability, and state of responsiveness.
- iii. Legal issues to consider: Some level of legal protection must be accrued to remote workers as they are vulnerable to challenges that need to be resolved as the organization is legally compliant. HR policy must cover legal issues such as the number of hours

employee is expected to work, communication on unanticipated overtime, what to do when working outside schedule work hours. Time keeping system should be utilized by employers to know excess hours worked per day

- iv. Technology and supplies: Organization has to provide the right tools for remote workers to complete their work. The resources and equipments to be provided must subjected to clarification to ensure that what is needed is provided. This entails that the policy of the organization should put every member on the same line of thought and action about what is to be delivered. Hence, policies and tools are necessary for remote team communication and collaboration. The level of technology support to employees need to specify and what they are expected to do in time of technical challenges

These portrays that remote working is successfully achieved with available technology and communication infrastructure, work expectation, eligibility and duration of remote work, etc. Today, what organizations need to do in the face of Covid-19 is to implement remote work arrangements or policies by outlining guidelines and expectations for working from home.

### **1.8 Bases of employee competences in recruitment and selection**

The effectiveness of organization depends on how effective the employees are in performance as a result of quality HR guidelines employment. However, low quality labour force in organization result to poor performance. In a crisis driven environment today, recruitment has taken a new pace using video conferencing in recruiting which is a norm with the current pandemic situation. The merit of this new normal is that it permits more candidates to be reviewed in shorter time by HR expert (Frary, 2020). Based on this, HR becomes a critical function in selection and analysis of quality labour, etc. (Igwe, Onwumere & Egbo, 2014).

With emerging global uncertainty and health stress of Covid-19, HR professionals in Nigeria are engage in employee selection based on the following competences for better and effective decision making.

- i. Tolerance of ambiguity (TOA): the necessity for ambiguity is anchored on the state of uncertainty faced by organizations. This has created room for changes in workplace and the need for flexible work patterns caused by Covid-19 pandemics. Frone (1990) noted that employee selection based on tolerance of ambiguity is most acceptable with the capability of working in an uncertain situation. The important of embracing ambiguity is aimed at identifying individual with high level of tolerance, coupled with the challenges which show the level of increase in tolerance. For instance, individual with high level of TOA is volatile, productive and responsive to complex and uncertain work environment (Fewter & O'Connor, 2020). Hence, individual with this experience has positive job satisfaction and HR expert must adopts individual with TOA as measure to resolve problems because they are comfortable with ambiguity; have strong desire for challenging work; and can cope with uncertainty for achievement of organizational goal
- ii. Employee resilience (ER): In a turbulent socioeconomic moment brought about by Covid-19 pandemic, there is an increasing attention by my HR expert on employee resilience. Bonanno (2006) conceptualizes resilience as an attitude that enables individual in examining, enhancing and utilizing strengths and available resources toward task performance. With employee resilience as basis of competence, Bardoel, Pettit, Cierl and McMillan (2014) suggest the need for enhancing HR practices through a coherent set of resilience to improve organizational performance in a turbulent pandemic situation. In organization, selection needs to be based on employee with resilience to be able to cope with stressful situation (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). For instance, formal resilience

training is expected as measure to enhance HR practice and must be properly explored in organization. Recruitment and selection of employee exist in dynamic business environment and HR managers must draw plans for resilience training to enhance overall performance of the organization which Covid-19 has brought threat to competitive growth of the organization.

- iii. Natural curiosity: As a basis of competence, this is necessary in selection process of employees in organization with the capability of helping to adapt to novel situations (Hagtvedt, Dossinger, Harrison & Huang, 2019). It is a strong characteristic that keeps an individual absolutely engage and sharp at a given task (White, 2015). The recruitment and selection of curious individual is because the performance of organization is assured. This is based on the notion that a curious employee is less to be worried about because with their engagement on task they are inherently driven in moving their career forward. Therefore, organization that has been affective by Covid-19 pandemic has to seek for individuals with curious characteristics to drive innovation in the organization. Hence, intellectual curiosity of employees enhances open-mindedness and creativity in task performance as they are committed to self-improvement as measure for growth in organization.

The above competences are enablers of organizations performance in Nigeria for socioeconomic sustainability in Nigeria and beyond as managers are able to have agile talented employee to enhance productivity in a growing uncertain and novel situation during and after Covid-19. The process of recruitment and selection must within the duration of Covid-19 be virtual form of recruitment and selection (Maurer, 2020). This virtual transition has seamlessly enhances organizational value and culture which has impacted the fabrics of the organization

### **1.9 Effect of Covid-19 on employee compensation and benefit**

In HR management, compensation and benefit (salary, wages, commission and reward) are strategies used in influencing organizational growth and productivity based on exchange relationship. Though they are proffered to individual based on the value of their job and performance, this growing recognition has enables compensation to enhance growth and productivity (Obasan, 2012). However, the outcome of Covid-19 has subjected organizations to review new compensation, evaluate existing compensation, and to determine specific terms and conditions, and modify the existing arrangement on compensation and benefits (Burgmeier, 2020). Hence, with the relationship employer and employees, changes in compensation have become inevitable aimed at enhancing business continuity. Therefore, dynamics in compensation is adopted by Starner (2020) as strategy for surviving Covid-19 crisis. This is to ensure that in the face of economic circumstances and complications, organizational resources and talents are secured.

Today, pandemic has forced a strategic change in compensation thereby relying hardship pay, salary reductions, one-time bonuses, and severance packages. Consequently, the impact of Covid-19 on compensation has made employees benefits and rewards subject to evaluation across organizations (EY, 2020). For instance apparent questions that Covid-19 has raised in present workplace are: (a) is it possible for employee to earn transportation allowance when such employee is temporary unemployed as a result of Covid-19?; (b) can representation allowance be accrued to employee when such employee is engaged in teleworking as a result of Covid-19?; (c) is adequate for employee to use company car etc when Covid-19 has made such employee to be fully temporary unemployed?. These questions have subjected the allowances, benefits and remuneration of employees into serious question which organizations seek answers to them. However, the above question lacks uniform

answers as much as different compensation methods exist in various workplaces. But a determination of different compensation items that need to be in place; the need to adapt in line with new working conditions caused by Covid-19; and the item that need to be temporary annulled. These suggestions require scanning the nature compensation and benefits for organization to have answer to the questions. Hence, some of the variables that relate to analysis of compensation which are given attention in Nigeria include:

- i. Compulsory employment (site): In this type of employment, the nature of labour requires that employees must work at the site every day. Therefore, complete compensation package (both salary and non-salary) must be in place to enhance employee performance
- ii. Telework: This type of employment requires that employees must work from home to prevent contacting Covid-19. Hence, teleworking will not attracts transportation allowance, but other allowances for teleworking such as internet at home allowance, home-office allowance, pc at home etc are pertinent.
- iii. Partial temporary unemployment: Organizations that are faced with economic consequence brought by Covid-19 will witness sudden decrease in customers' response, low turnover and orders. At this point employees will be temporary unemployed. For instance, the employee will be subjected to working half-time, and become half-time unemployed. Hence, their compensation will be pro-rated if they are working on site or working from home. This would however depend on the organization
- iv. Full temporary unemployment: With the impact of Covid-19, employment into organization is tentatively impossible. Where organizations are fully shut down for economic reasons, employees are bound not to receive normal wage but may receive a temporary unemployment benefits from the organization. The above types of employment for compensation still needs full scanning to realign the activities of the organization

Based on the above compensation analysis, employers have to evaluate the reward strategy of employees across organization. Hence, the new normal is that there is need for adjustment in compensation policies based on current realities. Organizations are now focusing on preserving their liquidity in order to cut cost and remain efficient. With this health crisis, many organizations have adopted the part of resilience to achieve set goals in line with new leadership skills in the face of the crisis.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

Covid-19 has significant impact on workplace and the uncertainty emanating has imposed unfavourable environment for HRM practice which requires radical adjustment to ensure that workforce is managed based on safety measures in line with Covid-19 guidelines. In Nigeria, this pandemic has created attention on how HRM need to adopt changes on how work should be done, the type of work, and how to organize and managed work. Approaches for enhancing socioeconomic sustainability of organization involve remote work environment which requires limiting human contact in workplace. HRM now apprehends unprecedented changes arising from Covid-19 which influences employees' performance through formulation of policies and procedures to enhance organizational performance. The bases of employee recruitment and selection aimed at enhancing socioeconomic sustainability of organization affected by Covid-19 pandemic and are driven by competences such as tolerance for ambiguity, employee resilience, and natural curiosity for task implementation Employee compensation and benefits is subject to evaluation across organizations which rely on hardship pay, salary reductions, one-time bonuses, and severance packages to



individuals in different categories of employment such as compulsory employment, telework, partial temporary unemployment, and full temporary unemployment

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