Ramanujan International Journal of Business and Research, 2022, 7(2), 36-45

doi: https://doi.org/10.51245/rijbr.v7i2.2022.724
P-ISSN: 2455-5959
E-ISSN: 2583-0171

ARTICLE

RECRUITMENT DURING COVID-19: CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS IN INDIA

Arvind Kumar [1, *] and Vanshika Jain [2, †]

[1]Atal Bihari Vajpayee School of Management and Entrepreneurship (ABVSME) Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, India and [2]Faculty of Commerce and Business, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

[*]prof.kumar.arvind@gmail.com
[†]vanshu17jain@gmail.com

Abstract

Even before the pandemic hit us, recruitment practices were undergoing drastic changes all over the world. The COVID-19 pandemic then played an important role in amplifying the speed of this change, especially the digital change. The profession which cannot work without connections and personal touch was forced to be restricted to a computer screen. This study investigates how the pandemic and associated restrictions impacted the recruitment practices followed traditionally. A phenomenological study approach was followed where data was collected using semi-structured interviews with HR managers of 11 private companies in the Finance & Consulting and Information Technology (IT) sector in India to give an accurate representation of real-life phenomena. In our discussion, we outline the major challenges faced by recruiters during the pandemic and how these practices adopted to face these challenges are here to stay even after the impact of the pandemic subsides. The discussion is concluded by explaining the future reshaping of the recruitment domain by identifying eight major themes.

Keywords: Recruitment, COVID-19, video interviews, Human Resources, Pandemic, E-recruitment.

1 Introduction

The virus SARS CoV-2 was first detected in Wuhan City, China in late 2019 and eventually spread throughout the world. In the wake of the severity of this extremely communicable coronavirus disease, World Health Organisation (WHO) on March 11, 2020, declared it as a pandemic named COVID-19. In other words, "Covid-19 has started behaving a lot like the once-in-a-century pathogen we've been worried about." With a fatality risk of nearly 1%, it has already claimed more than 68 lakh lives globally (WHO, situation report as on March 21, 2023). To contain the spread, countries imposed complete lockdowns, prohibited social and religious gatherings, shut down schools, colleges, and public offices, and curtailed domestic and international travel (Kraus, 2020). The concept of "social distancing" has proved to mitigate the spread of highly infectious diseases (Glass, 2006) and be the most efficient tool used by governments all over the world nowadays to control this pandemic (Kaim). These adopted measures have disrupted routine life as well as significantly

Copyright ©2022 Ramanujan International Journal of Business and Research. Published by Ramanujan College. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

impacted economies around the world (IMF,2020; Baldwin (2020) - Stock markets crashed (Ashraf, 2020), industries faced global demand as well as supply-side shocks, rampant layoffs, and inevitable bankruptcies (Guan, 2020; Vahdat, 2021). The pandemic turned out to be a "career shock" for many Akkermans (2020). According to the International Labour Organisation, 14% of the global working hours were lost and 400 million people were left unemployed in the second half of 2020. In another report by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE,2020), "27 million young professionals in the age group of 20-30 years lost their jobs in April 2020 month after India announced lockdown on March 23, 2020". Lessons from past crises like the Global financial crisis (2008) have shown that recruitment tends to change in the aftermath of crises. Big companies resorts to extending recruitment schedules, engaging more part-time workers, cutting back on recruitment to save costs, and lowering the intake of university graduates (Firkola, 2011). Globally, business professionals had to accept the new reality and change their working patterns accordingly (Nicola, 2020). A new virtual reality emerged where almost 93% of workers were working from home (ILO,2020). In a short period, managers had to take important decisions regarding working from home, working virtually, creating a proper communication channel with and between employees, and leading teams remotely. Another thing that managers had to focus on was changing their recruitment strategies so that their talent pool was maintained. Choosing the right talent, by virtually completing the whole process of recruitment and selection process, turned out to be a great challenge for HR managers. Also, virtual onboarding of the incoming employee was the new normal that HR managers had to deal with. And this normal is here to stay. After the complete reopening of most of the economies after 2021, work from home model and hybrid model stayed. A recent AT&T study found that the hybrid work model is expected to grow from 42% in 2021 to 81% in 2024. And according to Flex Jobs' Employee Engagement Report, 48% of employers are maintaining some form of remote work for their workforce. Are the HR managers ready to change their pre-COVID recruitment strategies in accordance with the new virtual patterns is the focus area of the present research paper. Even though recruitment is only a small part of HR practice and personnel management, it gives much useful insight into the general health of the company and the soundness of its balance sheet. For more clarity on the problems and their intended solutions, we have interviewed HR professionals from big management consulting firms and IT companies. This crisis has shown the importance of HR professionals (Caligiuri, 2020). As the Economist noted, "Just as the financial crisis in 2007-2009 highlighted the role of talented Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), the COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the role of Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs)". Therefore, interviewing HR professionals and analyzing their transcripts will provide great insights and valuable information regarding how corporates are handling this crisis. By the end, this qualitative study will be able to answer the major questions of change in current and future recruitment trends and strategies in the aftermath of the once-in-a-century COVID crisis and the company's efforts to build a virtual workforce.

Currently, research on the impact of COVID-19 on HR functions is limited and this study tries to fill in this gap. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first qualitative study in India and amongst the first few globally to systematically study the changes in recruitment practices during and after the pandemic. This study will contribute to the literature in significant ways. Firstly, it adds to the body of literature that has examined the change in recruitment and talent management practices in response to different disasters and extraordinary events. Secondly, it fills the gap in the literature that studies E-HRM and its application, specifically in the Indian context. Lastly, it will be a handy guide for HR managers specifying future recruitment trends and how to deal with them effectively.

2 Methodology

The present research is conceptual. According to Gilson and Goldberg, (2015) conceptual papers instead of providing data, present an amalgamation of literature, experiences, ideas, and opinions. The major drawback of non-empirical studies is the lack of conventional samples and therefore suggestions by Jaakkola (2020) were followed. It focuses on eliminating inconsistencies by examining and integrating different experiences and opinions shared by the respondents. A transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach was followed to determine organizations' preparedness in dealing with changes in recruitment procedures because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The phenomenological study helps to determine the essence of phenomena by collating the experiences of individuals who experienced that phenomenon(Creswell, 1997). To appropriately investigate HR managers' preparedness in dealing with COVID-19 in their respective organizations, a semi-structured interview technique was followed to collect data. Open-ended questions were asked and every interview lasted for an average of 30 to 35 minutes. Though the interviews were flexible, the respondents were asked a similar set of questions. To show an accurate picture of the experiences and future of recruitment practices, an informal semi-structured interview is the best technique, but it is a little problematic to code informal conversational interviews. Whilst it is problematic to generalize the findings of a qualitative study, our main goal through this study is to collect subjective opinions and present the in-depth impact of COVID-19 impact.

Q1) What are the challenges faced by your company in the changed recruitment scenario due to the pandemic?
Q2) Are virtual interviews at par with face-to-face interviews in assessing candidates, especially for important profiles involving high compensation?
Q3) How is your company managing newly hired employees' virtual onboarding, orientation, and engagement? Is this new trend here to stay?
Q4) What are the strategies (both short as well as long-term) followed by your company to tackle recruitment-related issues?

Q5) According to you, what is the future of recruitment practices?

Respondents: For this study, private companies were targeted from two sectors namely Finance & Consulting, and Information Technology. These two sectors did not stop their hiring process even during the Pandemic. The IT sector in particular has led the hiring game even during the bitter times of COVID (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) report, 2020). The finance and consulting sector is among the top sectors that were on the hiring spree once the initial impact of COVID-19 was subdued. Also, these two sectors were the first ones to shift to a complete work-from-home model. HR heads of 25 private companies were contacted through email stating the purpose of the study and their consent to participate in it. Out of these 25 companies, twelve did not reply, two refused to participate. Others gave consent to participate but on the guarantee of complete confidentiality. The sectoral distribution of the 11 companies included in the research is there in Table no A. The HR heads were based in different states like Bangalore, Delhi, Mumbai, and Pune. Also, some of them were in their hometown because of the existing Work from home situation. Because of the ongoing pandemic, the possibility of face-to-face interviews was ruled out. The researcher resorted to online mediums like Skype, face time and google meet to interview as per the convenience of the respondent. Two telephonic interviews were also conducted. All the respondents are in senior positions and responsible for taking important decisions regarding the recruitment process to be followed in their respective companies. The questions were asked to fulfill the dual purpose: to understand the challenges faced by companies during their hiring process during pandemic times and to get a deep understanding of their strategies for the future. The answers to the questions are discussed in the following sections. (See appendix for the interview questions). Throughout the paper, I1 to I6 relates to the conversation with HR managers belonging to the IT sector, and I7 to I11 to HR managers belonging to Finance and consulting sector.

Sectors	Number of Companies
IT	6
Finance and Consulting	5

Table A: Sectoral distribution of Companies Used in the study.

3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 Traditional Recruitment Practices in India

Recruitment refers to all those practices followed by an organization from identifying, and attracting potential candidates to short listing and interviewing suitable candidates (Breaugh, 2000). It is an important part of human resource (HR) management as it helps to attract the most useful capital into the organization- human capital (Barber, 1998). Recruitment has become an important strategic aspect of Human Resource Management. "When people were just cogs in the wheel, selecting the best cogs made a marginal difference, but once people became the engines, effective recruiting became mission-critical" (Black, 2020). The main internal recruitment methods used in India are employee referrals and succession planning. Among them, employee referrals are the most dominant method used in India. The employees hired through Internal recruitment methods understand the work culture and values of the organization much better and adapt to it quickly (Agrawal, 2003). Internal recruitment too is a vital source, especially for senior managerial-level positions as it leverages the already owned and groomed talent of the organization effectively (Moser, 2005). In any crisis, internal recruitment methods are the ones that most companies rely on. The trend was also seen after the Asian crises in 1997, and Global Financial Crises,2008 as it is the cheapest as well as the most promising source to hire. Another source of hiring is campus Hiring especially for entry-level positions. It happens in most of the big companies in India in a fixed cycle. Graduates and postgraduates are offered jobs before the completion of their final year of graduation or post-graduation. The recruitment season mostly begins in September (Rana). There are numerous steps that candidates have to clear for final recruitment. Companies look for long-term relationships when they are hiring fresh, young graduates and postgraduates (Sinha, 2013). Apart from that companies also use professional recruitment search engines like Nuakri.com and e-recruitment facilities too which are discussed in detail in the next section. Usually, in a recruitment process written tests and group discussions are conducted followed by the final interview. All the process is usually conducted face to face to better assess the attitude, personality, and behavioral aspects of prospective candidates (Rao, 2010). Lately, companies are resorting to case study-based tests and psychometric tests to better assess the soft skills of the incoming candidate.

3.2 Digitalization of Recruitment

Most organizations have debunked the traditional methods for reaching out to candidates for vacant profiles. Until the late 1990s, the whole process of recruiting was completely human-based. Candidates usually get to know about the vacant post through job boards, newspapers, and sometimes from their friend circles (Judge, 2000). The screening process, selection process was done by HRs manually which would involve biases and incorrect matching of jobs and roles (Schmidt, 1998). But, due to the digitization of information, the number of applicants for each position has increased multiple times. To screen out the best candidates it became inevitable for companies to adopt IT and data analytics. Thus, marking the

beginning of digital recruitment (1.0 & 2.0).

Digital Recruitment 1.0: Early 2000s marked the beginning of digital recruitment 1.0. Job boards took the form of a digital platform like monter.com (launched in India in 2001) where the company can list their vacant profiles with minimal cost and candidates can search for jobs in a minute. Information is available freely and recruiters can attract a diverse set of candidates because of better reach.

Digital Recruitment 2.0: This marked the advent of social media networking sites like Facebook, and LinkedIn which allow individuals to build a professional network where they can share information of common interest, and give and receive endorsements of other people in the network. On the surface, it might look like it does not have any impact on digital recruiting but if we dig deeper, it provided companies with better targeting of job ads to prospective candidates (Bizzi, 2018). Also, now company's brand image is not bounded by what is written on the company's websites but by the various posts shared by the company's employees on these social networking platforms. Another feature of this stage is the introduction of aggregators portals like Indeed that aggregate vacant position openings from multiple individual online job boards.

Digital recruitment 1.0 and 2.0 led to an increase in the application per position by staggering numbers. Candidates now do not have to pay for applying as well as applying to any company is just a matter of a few clicks. It led to difficulty in screening the best candidate out of a large heap of applications. This marked the beginning of Artificial Intelligence in the recruitment process (Kaplan, 2019).

Digital Recruitment 3.0 and the rise of Artificial Intelligence in recruitment: AI helped in better targeting job ads even to passive candidates (Guinan, 2014). AI tools such as Hirescore, and Pandologic helped a company to get the right pool of candidates. What an army of humans can't do in 100 days; AI could do so in just minutes. It increases the pool of candidates just like what happened in Digital Recruitment 1.0 and 2.0 but now the pool consists of a more appropriate and diverse set of candidates that suits the job well. AI now assists the HRs in further recruitment cycles too. By matching keywords in a resume with a job profile, AI helped in reducing the screening time of applications. It reduces the time to hire the candidate (Kaplan, 2019). Some companies have even started using AI in assessing candidates as well. Various online tests helped to assess the cognitive skills of the candidate. E.g., In 2016 Unilever started using a psychometric test consisting of 12 games to assess candidates virtually (Feloni, 2017). AI analytics tools were used to assess the candidates' voice modelling and body language based on pre-recorded interviews sent by the candidate. Thus, AI helped in smoothing out the recruitment process. People Analytics and AI will become indispensable in HRM processes, especially after this pandemic. But the companies need to prepare themselves to adopt it. About 73% of companies realize its importance but 55% need help with basic data analytics.

4 RESULTS

The results are divided into two sections.

4.1 Challenges faced during the pandemic and the way forward

Based on the consolidation of codes and conceptual categories, the following themes were identified and discussed. Challenges Faced During the Pandemic Recruitment has always been an evolving discipline. The key challenges involve finding and attracting the best talent efficiently and speedily. But as coronavirus struck us, talent acquisition teams were challenged with unusual issues. The following identified themes give a detailed analysis of the broader issues faced by HR personnel.

Theme 1: ***Virtual interviews***- The first and foremost problem on hand was to shift from face-to-face interviews to virtual interviews. Traditionally, in India, the final decision of recruitment even for the entry-level job is made by interviewing the candidate face to face. Therefore, the pandemic forced companies all over the world to change this pattern. The change which companies were planning for years is to be brought in just a few days or months. "This is a perfect opportunity for companies that haven't been able to adopt video interviewing to leap-frog technology hurdles." (I4) Past research suggests that video interviews are perceived as less friendly (Sun, 2013), less fair (Chapman, 2002), and may distort communication (Kock, 2009). Many problems can create a communication problem between interviewer and candidate e.g., technical problems like weak connections, image and voice not in synchronization. All the interviewees of the study said that they have faced these kinds of technical issues atleast once in the video interviews process. Though companies at their end have provided free-of-cost high-speed internet connection at all recruiter's homes, they cannot be sure of the same at the candidate's end. If the candidate is using an outdated home computer, with lower bandwidth Wi-Fi then it creates a lot of hassle. "If I just ignore the economic viability of video interviews, they are more stressful for the candidates as well as for us too. There is always a constant tension that will the internet work at both the location, will we be able to see the candidate, will the experience of both the party's glitch-free" (I2) In a face-to-face interview, providing a distraction-free environment is the responsibility of the recruiting team but the same is not applicable for the video interviews in a work-from-home setting. The problems in the background settings of the candidate were experienced by almost all the respondents. Improper lighting is the most common issue which can sometimes lead to an erroneous

assessment of the candidate. "The light behind the candidate keeps reflecting whenever she moves her head. That caused some inconvenience though it was not a criterion on which we judged her" (I7) Distractive noises like that of barking dogs, kids shouting, improper camera angles and unprofessional outfits can create a halo effect and how one perceives the candidate (Parry, 2009). There was a problem in assessing the candidate's non-verbal communication skills which in a face-to-face interview situation can make or break the interview. Most of the HR professionals said there was a lack of effective eye contact from the candidate's side. "Sometimes the panel members are placed at the bottom of the screen, but the camera is usually placed above the screen. The candidate unknowingly stares at the bottom of the screen instead of looking straight at the camera. Some recruiters then perceive the candidate as someone shy and lack self-confidence" (I9) It was hard to judge the candidate's soft skills and personal traits based on hand gestures, eye movement, and sitting posture. All the respondents believe that for filling positions which is the front end, soft skills matter a lot, and is very hard to judge the same based on video interviews. "Initially we just did not hire for any front-end role but when the situation did not improve, we just requested the candidate to record a video at their convenience using our software and upload it. The psychometric software would then assess the candidate's personality traits and social skills. It was a very helpful move."

Theme 2: ***Cancelled recruiting events, campus recruiting drive***-8 out of 11 respondents recruit through campus drive and all of them have to cancel it in the wake of the pandemic. 2 of them have to cancel their HR conference. These drives and conferences help to build an inviting brand image and help to attract the best talent. Though the companies are rescheduling their events through various digital platforms like google meet, zoom and Linked In Live, YouTube Live, etc., there is a lack of engagement. One of the finance companies which heavily recruits from campus has to schedule several follow-ups consisting of only 10 students each to have a proper interaction with their audience. Canceling and rescheduling the events has increased the work of recruiting teams in the short term.

Theme 3: ***Accepting candidates without meeting them***- About half of the companies who were interviewed are making fewer offers than usual. The reason apart from the dampened economy is their apprehensions regarding making an offer without even meeting the candidate. Many recruiters don't want to hire the wrong candidate that may not align with the culture of the organization (Alsaghir, 2020).

Theme 4: ***Remote onboarding of the candidate***- "The concept of virtual onboarding of employees was restricted in our company except for international onboarding. However, with the ongoing lockdown and WFH situations, it is the only solution we are left with" (I11) Onboarding is the last as well as the most crucial step in the recruitment process. It is an exciting event for the candidate and a successful onboarding helps in making an employee feel comfortable, and increases productivity and retention levels too (Klein, 2012). But in virtual onboarding, physical contact and warmth are missing (Sani, 2022). Most of the recruiters have faced delayed delivery of IT assets, goodies, and other work stuff to candidate locations due to delivery restrictions in most of the states. "In times of hiring freeze, the candidates are not much concerned about their experience while onboarding but Yes, it can leave a long-term impact on the company's brand and image."

Theme 5: ***Disturbed Person-Environment (P-E) fit***- P-E fit indicates the level of agreement between characteristics that employees possess and that of the environment in which they are working. The theory of P-E fit postulates that candidates are fascinated by and selected by those organizations where their values, culture, and desires are in congruence with organizational values, culture, and desires (Kristof, 1996). The environment where employees' P-E fit is maximized generally leads to a higher level of satisfaction, well-being, and productivity (Kri). With the altered work environment, because of COVID-19, there is an increasing gap between what the incoming candidate expects from the organization and what the experience is likely to be, leading to the perception of a misfit. One of the most fundamental expectations of the candidate is to build a relationship and striking communication with others which he expects throughout the selection and recruitment process. One tries to understand the culture of the organization by meeting with the people already working there. This fundamental need to have an association with others is curtailed by the limit on physical interaction in present times. "Virtual interviews and virtual onboarding will have serious implications on the future fabric of our organizations. Neither the candidate nor we know whether the incoming candidate is a perfect fit for our organization" (I4) "Incoming employees feel the need for good relationships and fruitful communications so that they don't feel misfit in the organization." (I11) Many organizations have adopted the practice of virtual lunches, virtual coffee time, happy hours, and virtual family dinners to fulfill the fundamental need for socialization and alleviate the feeling of misfit (Fetters, 2020). More research is needed to fully understand what the new generation of workers expects from the organization to better fulfill their perception of a perfect fit.

4.2 Way forward in Recruitment practices

Theme 1: ***More focus on internal mobility***- Recruiters offer alike jobs through two different routes: external hiring and internal mobility. The route of internal mobility is good for the company as it increases engagement levels, and motivation of employees and reduces attrition rate (Bidwell, 2011). COVID-19 made internal hiring from a "nice to have a concept" to "a must to have a concept". Financial strain and uncertainty induced by the pandemic will make internal mobility a quintessential part of any hiring strategy prompting companies to look inside for their human resources need rather than outside. A talent manager in an IT firm (I2), said that "the first hiring channel we started after the brief freezing

was internal recruitment". India though stands much below in the percentage of internal hiring than its other Asian Pacific counterparts but there was an increase in internal mobility in India since COVID-19. During the pandemic, internal mobility helped to fill up temporary roles quickly. Departments that were short of work helped other departments and made flourishing cross-functional teams. "When hiring froze, many hiring managers were moved to different projects for some time. It helped us to deliver opportunities away from our static jobs" (I1) If HR managers want to set their organizations different from others, they need to unleash the full potential of their internal talent. Reskilling and upskilling the existing talent base will be an important aspect of HR.

"The future of acquiring talent lies in reskilling, rather than always finding someone better in the job market." - (I11) It will have an impact on hiring strategies. Recruiters will hire less and will focus on building talent more. It will also alter the way the recruiters assess candidates. The candidate that offers a diverse and transferable skill set rather than a specialized skill set will be preferred more. Candidates that show characteristics like resilience, tolerance to ambiguity, and adaptability will be in demand (Caligiuri, 2020).

Theme 2: ***Virtual recruiting will become a new normal and here to stay***- All the respondents share a common belief that virtual recruiting will become a new standard. It helps to save costs exponentially and increases the targeted pool of candidates. Companies will have to invest heavily to improve the tools used in virtual hiring to make the process as humane as possible. Virtual recruitment is very convenient to recruit for entry-level jobs. For executive-level jobs, one can use a hybrid model of virtual as well as physical recruitment processes. "Now that we've demonstrated we can run our recruitment virtually, what does the new normal look like? We won't go back to a setting where everything is fully in-person again because we don't have to. It is going to be a hybrid of in-person and virtual." (I5). All of the 11 HR employees who were interviewed are positive that a hybrid of virtual and digital recruiting will become the new normal.

Theme 3: ***The door of Talent is open to everyone everywhere***- Since organizations have exhibited that they can shift to remote working, there is an increased surge of remote working job openings. "It does not matter where you sit or what country you are in, as long as you possess the right skills. I think COVID-19 will be around for a while, but that's an opportunity for recruiting to say that the door for talent is now open everywhere." (I3) Many MNCs are coming forward stating that for some roles they will open remote working opportunities. Google has already stated that their company will offer opportunities for employees to apply for completely remote work and almost 20% of their workforce will continue to work remotely even after their offices reopen. There are numerous other companies like Facebook, Twitter which have officially stated that some may be able to work remotely indefinitely. "Most of the employees in our organization want a hybrid model of work. If we don't implement it, they will most likely switch their jobs because someone else in the industry is providing them that" (I5) "We had a survey in our organization, at least 3 days per week from home is the style we are looking at. Being a finance company, which handles back end work I think one can implement it without a doubt" (I8) Organizations should chart out a detailed plan to make a hybrid of virtual work and physical work, work. Employers need to communicate a sound plan that will help to attract candidates, even those who are passive. "Earlier remote working was a perk now it will become a standard for most of the jobs" (I11) Taking a job that is completely dependent on the workplace has lost its charm. Most of the layoffs during the pandemic happened in jobs that are completely dependent on the workstation and cannot be done remotely. Therefore, the vast majority of the population especially the educated ones are looking for jobs that can be done in a hybrid model, if not completely remote. "The virus has broken through cultural and technological barriers that prevented remote work in the past, setting in motion a structural shift in where work takes place, at least for some people".

Theme 4: ***New ways to build brand identity***- To attract talent, recruiters have to focus on new ways to improve their brand identity. How the companies responded to the crises, and their empathy towards the employees will become a huge factor in improving or tarnishing a brand identity. The experience the company is providing at the time of hiring and how smooth the virtual interview process and onboarding are, are some of the factors which HR has to take into account. In this virtual world, a single tweet or a post by a candidate or employee is very powerful. "A single negative post on LinkedIn by a candidate regarding the recruitment process can bring unimaginable harm to the company. We have to make sure especially in these virtual interviews scenario that we provide a candidate an empathetic and accommodative hiring process" (I1)

Theme 5: ***Recruiters need to have training in conducting video interviews***- HR professionals were not adequately trained in conducting video interviews and the benchmarks to assess the candidates. There was disbelief that the recruiter's experience in a face-to-face interview can easily be translated into video interviews (Mccoll & Michelotti, 2019). Video interviews are hard to judge and involve many kinds of biases and distortions. Proper training and methodology to conduct video interviews will be beneficial for the company in welcoming a candidate who is the right fit for the organization.

Theme 6: ***Growing role of artificial intelligence human capital***- A new significant source of competitive advantage and an increase in candidates per roll will make the use of AI indispensable. Companies that do not embrace AI in recruiting can quickly lose their engaged employees to the targeted, customized efforts of their rival firms. A battle of talent kicked off by Digital Recruiting 3.0 needs HR managers to quickly champion AI, data analytics, etc. Companies adopting AI will have a broader and high quality of talent with savings in costs.

Theme 7: ***Investing in recruitment tools that measure soft skills***-Candidates' soft skills like team-building skills, problem-

solving skills, and empathy are becoming more and more important but not many organizations are equipped with assessing them using virtual tools. Out of 11 interviews, only 2 interviewees said that their company is working towards acquiring or developing tools that can measure the cognitive skills of the employee efficiently while they are interviewing them virtually. And only 1 has a tech tool name PYMETRICS already in place to judge the soft skills of the employee. "Yes, we know soft skills are important for a company's success and we do measure it by a variety of activities in the pre-pandemic world. But now everything happens virtually, and one is clueless about how to measure it or let's just say how to measure it accurately."(I8) Soft skills are troublesome to measure virtually and require sophisticated AI-driven tools which assess facial analysis, and vocal recognition to assess the confidence level of the candidate. As most of the respondents said soft skills are critical, therefore there is a need to have an agile tool in place to assess them. "Imagine you have a set of 15 candidates, and you use behavioural analytics to get the top performers. Your hiring game has turned into a top-notch game and it's efficient."

Theme 8: - ***Flexibility and adaptability will be the key***- Considering the uncertainty of the environment; it is no surprise that in a recent survey in the Asia-Pacific region, Adaptability is the No.1 recruiter skill in demand. The constant slowdowns or an abrupt increase in hiring, together with the speedy adoption of new technology have demanded flexibility from the recruiter side (Woodrow, 2020). Adaptive HR will be able to get their organization to sail through this ever-changing landscape. HR needs to be adaptive toward the use of big data analytics, social media marketing, tech automation, etc.

5 Discussion

HR has always been a job that involves an extremely high degree of human touch and now the problem is converting this human touch-centric job into a virtual one. Interviews provided ample information to satisfactorily conclude the research. A few months into the pandemic, all HRs were busy chalking out the plan to conduct hassle-free video interviews, making final offers even without meeting them for once, and finally successfully onboarding them. In the pre-pandemic time, very few organizations would have made a final call even without meeting the client though there was an increasing trend to take the initial interviews online. Based on the results and identified themes, Table B shows changes in the recruitment process from pre-covid times to a new normal. Table B shows the changes in the recruitment process from pre-COVID times.

5.1 Implications

Theoretical Implication: Studying this once-in-a-century event will make major contributions to various works of literature. The contribution will be threefold. Firstly, it will add meaningful points to the growing body of literature based on experiences and the impact of COVID-19 in different areas of human resource management (He & Harris, 2020). Secondly, recruitment is regarded as a highly social process therefore, the current study will add to the existing literature studying the impact of digitalization in the theories of the socialization process. Lastly, it will add to the literature studying e-HRM methods, their effectiveness, and employee outcomes. As Covid-19 made organizations speed up the adoption of E-HRM practices, this paper will add extensively to the effectiveness of E-HRM practices and the way forward. The new reality brought about by Covid-19 is not a singular event and it offers novel opportunities to organizational scholars and practitioners to remain observant and keep the discussion going (Caligiuri, 2020).

Practical Implication: The practical implication of this study captures the immediate reactions and challenges faced by companies amidst pandemic-like emergencies. The changes which would have taken months and years to manifest were done in a matter of days and weeks. This paper is a testament to how companies embraced this change and what challenges were faced by them. It also outlines strategic points indicating what is the future of recruitment which acts as a ready guideline for the companies to reassess the situation. The study dwells on various problems faced by recruiters and thus provides various practical implications for HR practitioners. HR managers should be trained to take virtual interviews properly. Companies should invest in technologies that help to evaluate the soft skills of the candidate, and anxiety levels by assessing eye movement and hand movement. The online recruiting workshops and conferences should be innovatively designed to increase engagement levels. As the attention span of the audience is shorter in a virtual medium, the presentations should be crisp and engaging. Virtual onboarding has a substantial impact on employee outcomes. Numerous empirical studies, as well as the present study, confirm that employees feel socially disconnected from the organization when virtually onboarded (Sani, 2022). HR managers should work closely with line managers to make sure there is a proper communication channel with organizational cultural tactics passed on to the incoming employees. HRs should try to increase human interaction even if it means taking a hybrid channel during the first few days. Small gifts to employees can also increase connectedness. It will significantly improve P-E fit. The hybrid work model and work-from-home models are here to stay. HR managers should accept this digital workspace and be well-versed with new AI models for SMART recruitment. The study represents the point of view of HR managers of big financial and consulting, and Information technology companies of India. The remaining companies can learn from their experiences and make comprehensive action plans. The more updated and smoother the recruitment process of the company is, the more attractive the company appears to the candidate. Hence, this study has huge practical implications for companies navigating their way through new realities introduced by the pandemic. More research is required to add a theoretical lens regarding the implications of video interviews.

Steps in Hiring	Pre-covid "Normal"	New Normal
Preparing a Job Description (JD)	• JD mostly includes roles, tasks to be performed, minimum qualifications, and expectations from the candidate. • Specifies the place where a candidate will be relocating for the job.	• JD includes proposals like flexible work hours, health insurance, and the opportunity for remote working. • Remote or hybrid jobs • Rise in demand for contract workers and gig workers
Talent Search	• Sessions and conferences in colleges, job fair • Sponsoring events to increase visibility and thus attracting new talent. • Use of employee referrals, social media recruitment techniques • Use of online job portals	• Rise in internal mobility • Companies are more active on social media platforms. Using social media to show empathy for employees in these difficult times to attract more candidates. • Use of podcasts, virtual live sessions, and webinars • Location is no longer a hindrance which will lead to an increase in the applicants' pool
Screening and shortlisting	• Use of modern tools and techniques to have a better match between job and candidate. • Initial screening and selection are done by physically calling in the candidate. • Investment in improving the hiring process comparatively less	• Prerecorded answers to interview questions for comparison between candidates • Checking for hardware and software requirements of the candidate • Proctored assignments • Use of AI-based assessment tools to test the knowledge of candidates remotely. • Continuous investment in new hiring technologies to have better engagement with Gen Z
Interviewing	• All stages of the interview, especially the Last stage of interviews are done physically.	• Completely virtual interview process • Organisations investing heavily to make virtual interview experiences as close to reality e.g., the Use of virtual reality
Onboarding	• 40-60% paperless. • Physical onboarding. • Tour of the office and meetings with co-workers to understand the company culture	• 100% paperless • Need to have an efficient channel of communication to make new employees learn about company culture. • Virtual Tour of the Office

Table B. Recruitment process from pre-COVID times.

6 Limitations and Scope of Future Research

Firstly, due to the paucity of time and resources, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR managers of a few companies in the two sectors. Therefore, the analysis drawn cannot be generalized for the whole country. Secondly, the perception and experience of recruiters are analyzed in the present research which brings forward only one side of the coin. The experience of the recruitee in this challenging time of pandemic is not taken into account which is equally important. Future research can bring together the experience of both the recruiter as well as the recruiter. Lastly, in the present research, only private companies are taken into account. In the future, the experience of public sector organizations in managing their recruitment practices through the pandemic can also be taken into account. The recruitment practice in public sector organizations has been very old-style and inflexible and it will be a good learning to know how they coped during COVID-19. Future studies can also systematically study different digital recruitment software used and its relationship with different employee outcomes. One has to ponder on the research questions like ways to increase Person-environment fit in virtual/hybrid setup, the long-term impact of E-HRM practices on employee performance and well-being, and lastly a comparative study based on performance metrics of employees hired before, during, and after the

pandemic will further substantiate the present study. Conclusion COVID-19 impact will not be short-lived. It has altered our reality and this reality is here to stay. Recruiters perceive that their experiences with this pandemic have pushed them to exclusively work digitally. Every radical change brings its own set of challenges. This research offers great insights into the hardships faced by HR managers and what the future looks like in the domain of recruitment. With remote working, and hybrid models at the workplace becoming a new reality, HR managers need to be all the more vigilant while hiring to protect the social fabric of the organization. COVID-19 has opened a window to new opportunities and initiatives and started a new era of recruitment practices (Digital Recruitment 4.0). As India is set to become the country with the world's largest workforce by 2027, it needs to continuously reinvent and automate its hiring process. The HRM researchers not only have an opportunity but a responsibility to do some multidisciplinary and extensive research in e-recruitment highlighting the long-term implication of this change in the style of recruitment with a special focus on candidate's preparedness for complete digitization of the recruitment process.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors declare that no financial interest has been derived from this empirical research.

References

, .

Agrawal, N. M., .T.M., 2003. Human resource issues, challenges, and strategies in the indian software industry. international journal of human resources development and management. International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management 3, 249–264.

Akkermans, J., R.J..K.M., 2020. The covid-19 crisis as a career shock: Implications for careers and vocational behavior. Journal of Vocational Behavior 119, 1–5.

Alsaghir, L., A.N..B.S.B., 2020. Optimizing recruitment online: The critical importance of using the right channels. International Journal of E-Business Research 16, 18–33.

Baldwin, R., .M.B.W.d., 2020. Economics in the Time of COVID-19. CEPR press.

Barber, A.E., 1998. Recruiting employees: Individual and organizational perspectives. Sage publications.

Bidwell, M., 2011. Paying more to get less: The effects of external hiring versus internal mobility. Administrative Science Quarterly 56, 369–407.

Bizzi, L., 2018. The hidden problem of facebook and social media at work: What if employees start searching for other jobs? Business Horizons 61, 23–33.

Black, J. S., .v.E.P., 2020. Ai-enabled recruiting: What is it and how should a manager use it? Business Horizons 63, 215–226.

Breaugh, J. A., .S.M., 2000. Research on employee recruitment: So many studies, so many remaining questions. Journal of Management 26, 405–434.

Caligiuri, P., D.C.H.M.D.V.A..Z.A., 2020. International hrm insights for navigating the covid-19 pandemic: Implications for future research and practice. Journal of International Business Studies 51, 697–713.

Chapman, D. S., .R.P.M., 2002. The influence of videoconference technology and interview structure on the recruiting function of the employment interview: A field experiment. International Journal of Selection and Assessment volume=10, pages=185–197 .

Creswell, J. W., .P.C.N., 1997. Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions. Sage publications.

Feloni, R., 2017. Consumer-good giant unilever has been hiring employees using grain games and artificial intelligence and it's a huge success. Business Insider Australia URL: https://www.businessinsider.com.au/unilever-artificial-intelligence-hiring-process-2017-6.

Fetters, M. D., .M.A.J.F., 2020. Call for papers for a special issue on covid-19 and novel mixed methods methodological approaches during catastrophic social changes. Journal of Mixed Methods Research 14, 281–287.

Firkola, P., 2011. Japanese recruitment practices: Before and after the global financial crisis. Economic Journal of Hokkaido University 40, 59–71.

Glass, R. J., G.L.M.B.W.E..M.H.J., 2006. Targeted social distancing design for pandemic influenza. Emerging Infectious Diseases 12, 1671–1681.

Guan, D., W.D.H.S.D.S.J.H.J.L.S.B.Y.L.T.X.Q.C.D.M.C.D.C.P.L.X.X.B.L.X.W.S.H.K..G.P., 2020. Global supply-chain effects of covid-19 control measures. Nature Human Behaviour 4, 577–587.

Guinan, P. J., P.S..R.K., 2014. Jumpstarting the use of social technologies in your organization. Business Horizons 57, 337–347.

Jaakkola, E., 2020. Designing conceptual articles: Four approaches. AMS Review 10, 18–26.

Judge, T. A., H.C.A..C.D.M., 2000. The employment interview: A review of recent research and recommendations for future research. Human Resource Management Review 10, 383–406.

Kaim, A., G.T.M.A..A.B., .

Kaplan, A., .H.M., 2019. Siri, siri, in my hand: Who's the fairest in the land? on the interpretations, illustrations, and implications of artificial intelligence. Business Horizon 62, 15–25.

Klein, H. J., .P.B., 2012. Are organizations on board with best practices onboarding? Oxford University Press.

Kock, N., 2009. Information systems theorizing based on evolutionary psychology: An interdisciplinary review and theory integration framework. MIS Quarterly 33, 395–418.
Kraus, S., C.T.B.M.G.J.Z.A..T.V., 2020. The economics of covid-19: Initial empirical evidence on how family firms in five european countries cope with the corona crisis. International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research 26, 1067–1092.
Kristof, A.L., 1996. Person-organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. Personnel Psychology 49, 1–49.
Moser, K., 2005. Recruitment sources and post-hire outcomes: The mediating role of unmet expectations. International Journal of Selection and Assessment 13, 188–197.
Nicola, M., A.Z.S.C.K.A.A.J.A.I.C.A.M..A.R., 2020. The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (covid-19): A review. International Journal of Surgery 78, 185–193.
Parry, E. & Wilson, H., 2009. Factors influencing the adoption of online recruitment. Personal Review 38, 655–673.
Rana, S., A.A.P.S..H.M., .
Rao, P., 2010. A resource-based analysis of recruitment and selection practices of indian software companies: A case study approach. Journal of Indian Business Research 2, 32–51.
Sani, K.F., A.T.A.O..O.E., 2022. Digital onboarding and employee outcomes: Empirical evidence from the UK. Management Decision 61, 637–654.
Schmidt, F.L., .H.J., 1998. The validity and utility of selection methods in personnel psychology: Practical and theoretical implications of 85 years of research findings. Bulletin 124, 262–274.
Sinha, V., .T.P., 2013. A review on changing trend of recruitment practice to enhance the quality of hiring in global organizations. Journal of Contemporary Management Issues 18, 141–156.
Sun, Y., .J.A., 2013. Information technology adoption and continuance: A longitudinal study of individuals' behavioural intentions. . Information & Management 50, 457–465.
Vahdat, S., 2021. The role of it-based technologies on the management of human resources in the covid-19 era. Kybernetes 51, 2065–2088.
Woodrow, C., .G.D., 2020. Pathways through organizational socialization: A longitudinal qualitative study based on the psychological contract. Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology 93, 110–133.