

Navigating Human Resource Management in Civil Service During COVID-19 Pandemic: A Multiple Case Study

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Abstract

The Study covers how the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic shaped and changed the role of Human Resource Management Officers in the Davao Region. Participants were represented by the head of the Human Resources of selected government agencies from state Universities, Local Government units, the Department of Interior and Local Government, and the Government Service Insurance System, which are all under the Civil Service Commission. The main objective of the study was to understand how their respective strategic advantages, challenges, responses, and consequences are being handled, given the restrictions and threat of the Virus. The study is a multiple-case study that uses purposive sampling to identify the right participants. The result shows that the common practices of these different agencies reveal challenges in employee management, work arrangement adjustments, communication strategies, and virtual employee engagement are the common practices of these agencies. It also highlights the importance of health and safety protocol, technical support systems, financial and mental health, and employees' well-being are also prevalent. No hiring policy, transitioning to fully online work monitoring, and remote onboarding are being employed to ensure work continuity. However, among the agencies, only the DILG has shifted to online recruitment, while all other agencies halted and deferred all their hiring activities. Also, it is important to note that the DILG management has seen compassion in addressing employees' well-being beyond work as very effective and elaborately employed to maintain employees' commitment. Moreover, as the learning and lessons of all these agencies, it is imperative to acknowledge the importance of information technology, its opportunities, and relevance, which have been highlighted by all these agencies. It is also suggested that it is urgent to establish a good IT infrastructure, provided with the significant attributes of it.

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Strategic Approach, COVID-19 Pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is considered the largest global health concern at present, which has left organizations with instability, uncertainty, and complexity due to its immense transmission and constant mutation. The pandemic has presented organizations with a number of difficulties, including those related to company

continuity, poor employee engagement, remote work, and unemployment (Abbas, 2021; Gómez, Mendoza, Ramírez & Olivas-Luján, 2020; Lebni, Irandoost, Mehedi, Sedighi & Ziapour, 2022). The uncertainty has forced businesses to change a number of their human resource management plans.

Significantly, the COVID-19 outbreak has caused a particularly difficult condition for human resource management (HRM). Managers are prompt to embrace the "unknown unknowns" as they seek to assist their employees in adjusting to and coping with the drastic changes taking place in the work and social environments (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). A more innovative response is encouraged in order to address the existing difficulties (Onwuegbuna, Nchuchuwe & Ibrahim, 2021). These precautions can involve educating staff members about the value of adhering to social distance, conducting medical exams to find staff members who may have been exposed to the virus, and taking steps to ensure that the firm as a whole runs smoothly despite the difficulties.

Consequently, it will be crucial to comprehend how these unexpected developments are affecting employees' experiences and how to address possible misfit as firms continue to adjust their HR policies in light of COVID-19 (Carnevale, & Hatak, 2020). The increasing unemployment due to the recession imposes more pressure on the people. For example, it will become more crucial to comprehend how these practices will affect the future establishment of an organization's values and culture as organizations move toward virtual forms of recruitment, selection, and training in place of face-to-face interactions (Maurer, 2020). This is because these new practices may draw and keep employees differently than conventional face-to-face approaches.

For many employees, the COVID-19 pandemic came as a career shock in many respects (Akkermans Richardson & Kraimer, 2020). Perceived vulnerability of job loss (Singh et al., 2021), lost revenues and increased costs (Abston & Bryan, 2021) are related to the economic aspects. Some organizations, who were have seen a sharp fall in business, were forced to fire staff members. Others, on the other hand, have seen a commercial growth together with a labor shortage (Giupponi & Landais, 2020). This, in turn, posed social challenges. In this regard, human resource are viewed to hold crucial role in helping the workforce handle the challenges brought on by unforeseen changes in both their workplace and the community (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). As such, workplaces have already started revamping their interiors in a way to ensure social distancing, even when physical interaction with the public is part of the job.

Trying to recover from this economic shock, companies have started reopening (Major & Machin, 2020), in the mid of this ongoing pandemic, under extraordinary rules and a new functioning such physical distancing in the workplace (Shaw, Main, Findley, Collie, Kristman & Gross, 2020) and remote work arrangement (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020). For the large majority of employees, COVID-19 has altered the way they experience their employment. It compelled businesses all across the world to change the way work is planned and organized. The possibility of disagreement developing between staff segments has also escalated (Collings, McMackin, Nyberg & Wright, 2021). For instance, there are disparities among those who can work from home (WFH) and people who cannot, employees who were kept on the payroll and those who were furloughed, and even people in various business units who were affected differently by the pandemic.

Workers who were not accustomed to working remotely were suddenly compelled to do so. Employees were ordered to work from home without any preparation and frequently without training, thus they were unaware of the supporting equipment (Von Gaudecker, Holler, Janys, Siflinger & Zimpelmann, 2020). Significantly, while the companies are still struggling to manage operations through a remote environment, the post-pandemic era is expected to create more challenges. For once, employees who worked remotely

in the current period have become accustomed to it, and many have come to appreciate it. However, the professional boundary between legitimate and personal use of the internet is becoming a concern in the present work conditions (Beri & Anand, 2020).

The current processes occurring in the organizations as a response to the pandemic are complex, leading to many negative and positive conditions. Employees and organizations are adapting to the new reality in order to achieve results. Currently, it is uncertain when the pandemic ends and should the consequences on the work patterns in organizations will be temporary or permanent (Bartik, Cullen, Glaeser, Luca & Stanton, 2020), even after the development of various vaccines (Yu et al., 2021). Toward this end, the purpose of this exploration is to examine the challenges and opportunities that COVID-19 presents to HRM practice as well as the associated avenues for future research. Moreover, there are very few studies on the impact of COVID-19 on HRM, its challenges, and its potential opportunities for HRM in organizations, whereas managers and HRM practitioners need relevant information that will help them to go through this crisis effectively and efficiently, to be able to support their employees and to sustain their organization's productivity.

Human resource management (HRM) pertains to the concept of how people are “employed, managed, and developed in organizations” (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020) and the philosophy, policy, system, and practices that are concerned with an employee's behaviour, attitude, and performance (Johar, Rosli, Khairi, Shahrudin & Nor, 2022). The roles and responsibilities of human resource professionals are essential to the smooth operation of the entire organization (Anand, 2022). The HR practices that manage people, performance, data, and work are crucial because they create a healthy workplace culture and climate that affects employees, clients, partners' viability, and an organization's overall presentation.

COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on HRM, posing considerable concerns for management and HRM practitioners. This impact and these challenges are explored in this section, in relation to strategic HRM and working conditions, as well as HRM functions, specifically, staffing, performance management, training and development, compensation management, safety and health management, and employee relations (Hamouche, 2021; Hamouche & Chabani, 2021). HR professionals have long tended to employees' physical and mental health, but now they are being more proactive about it. That entails taking notice of how workers are feeling as well as learning how to recognize problems efficiently and provide assistance.

Emerging HR concerns may be significantly varied in the current setting, where generally discussed challenges have been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic and then followed by a serious economic crisis. For instance, employees who previously worked in the physical constraints of their company's premises must now get used to working remotely as there are no other options (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Zhong, Li, Ding & Liao, 2021). According to studies, this has made it harder for individuals to disconnect from job demands, resulting in increased work hours (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke & Zimmermann, 2020). Yet individual performance factors such as work characteristics, satisfaction, and commitment should also be considered (Van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2021) when HRM coordinates flexible or hybrid work.

Perhaps, retaining employees saves time and money from tedious recruitment processes and trainings and helps the company achieve its goals (Monica & Reddy, 2021). However, employee retention was considered to contribute significantly to the difficulty for firms during this time of the pandemic (Hamouche, 2021). As a simplification, it was cited that the employee relationships may suffer in these challenging times marked by abrupt and drastic changes, which could dramatically lower employee morale

and accelerate attrition. It is further insinuated that it is difficult for businesses to keep skilled employees on board and recruit new ones, largely because these workers frequently search for employment possibilities in industries that were not adversely impacted by the epidemic (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020; Ngoc Su, Luc Tra, Thi Huynh, Nguyen & O'Mahony, 2021).

Employee recruitment and selection has been more difficult since employees voluntarily or involuntarily leave the organization. Report estimates that 195 million full-time workers lose their jobs worldwide during the first year of the pandemic (International Labour Organization, 2020). Consequently, hiring and selecting new employees was discouraged, particularly in private enterprises to reduce unnecessary expenditure (Irshad et al., 2021; Mwita, 2020). Recruiting was also reimaged during the pandemic, with processes transforming from traditional face-to-face, to online procedures.

In terms of performance management, employees are still expected to maintain their high performance in order to keep the business afloat during a crisis like COVID-19 (Sembiring, MFatihudin, Mochklas & Holisin, 2020). However, it appears that the COVID-19 pandemic has also changed how organizations evaluate performance. Some authors claim that relative to the complexity and unpredictability of this epidemic, most firms have curtailed or even terminated performance management as a result of the difficulties spurred by COVID-19, including monitoring employees' performance and the disruption of performance-based pay (Aguinis & Burgi-Tian, 2020). Employees struggled to develop attainable goals and often failed to meet previously established objectives. It was difficult to track performance, and organizing the various tasks appeared cumbersome.

When employees' work is valued and appreciated, they are encouraged to engage with a company. Numerous studies demonstrate the importance of complimenting, rewarding, and recognizing employees for their accomplishments and ongoing productivity at work (*i.e.* Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). However, much while it can be challenging to link compensation to performance, managers may find it even more challenging to decide what incentives and bonuses should be provided to employees in exchange for their input. Additionally, because of several concerns brought by the pandemic, employers lack the ability to recognize employee efforts and personalize supplementary professional development opportunities for them (Sadhna, Gupta & Rastogi, 2020). This has led to confusion and negativity to many employees (Jarosz, 2021) resulting to low employee retention.

Meanwhile, the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 has led organizations to opt out of more flexible employment relationships. Thereby, there was an increase in flexible types of work arrangements in the labor market such as subcontracted work and freelancing (Spurk & Straub, 2020). Because these new forms of job relationships are transitory and non-standard in nature, they present unique issues that cannot be solved by the conventional HRD strategy used for standard employees and intended for long-term employment relationships (Hamouche & Chabani, 2021). Considering the role of flexible types of work arrangement in times of crisis and beyond, these disparities in treatment between them and standard employees represent a significant risk for organizational performance and sustainability.

Indeed, this pandemic has created a complicated and challenging environment for managers and HRM professionals who had to come up with creative solutions to keep their business running and assist their employees in coping with the difficulties of this unprecedented circumstance. Organizations must create inventive procedures that might assist them absorb and address disturbance that threatens their survival despite the uncertainties this pandemic has created.

Another important point is the stress caused by an outbreak can provide HRM practitioners with constructive insights to help them assess opportunities and developments in an environment of threat and

uncertainty (Kumar, Kumar, Aggarwal & Yeap, 2021). It provided the organization and human resource (HR) managers with the chance to reflect on current HRM procedures and establish reformative, novel, and "Out of the Box" responses to the issues that lies ahead. Strategic thinking encourages HR managers to view the pandemic differently and act appropriately as catalysts who stimulate wise realizations and induce an array of challenges and opportunities (KV & Walarine, 2021). The COVID-19 condition necessitates a change of conventional conceptions of high-performance work systems or HR procedures. Organizations can better prepare for and response to COVID-19 crises and lessen the negative effects on stakeholders by implementing appropriate crisis management practices (Dirani et al., 2020). Employees are having difficulties adjusting to the changing work environment during the pandemic. Morale is weak and jobs are jeopardized amid uncertain times as the economy is suffering. In this regard, the management are expected to assist supervisors by means of increasing employee involvement and motivation (Mani & Mishra, 2020). Since employees are likewise ill-prepared and must adapt to the new environment, it is imperative that managers and corporate leaders demonstrate greater flexibility.

During the pandemic, it was highly challenging for HR strategies to assure both the sustainability of the organization and the welfare of its employees (Collins, 2020), which has the potential to result in firm competitive advantage by developing distinctive and valued employee-based resources (Savanevičienė, Salickaitė-Žukauskienė, Šilingienė, & Bilan, 2022). Besides, the pandemic has made technological advances a strategic tool for several organizations. It has contributed in the survival of enterprises while maintaining close proximity of workers to their employers while protecting their safety (Hamouche, 2021). Relatively, HR professionals have a facilitating and supporting role in this transformation, but they also take responsibility to retain the employees by upgrading their skills and abilities (Parry & Battista, 2019). Not only reskilling or upskilling of the workforce is essential, but resilience should be equally prioritized within a company's strategy (Kirby, 2020) An organization should encourage innovation and agility even without a written policy guide and take into account each employee's distinctive requirements in order to develop a culture of flexibility and resiliency. HR has always been important to the organization. However, in this new world of flexible work and with new opportunities and challenges, there is an opening in front of anyone where, professionally, HR has to define and develop new skills and processes to optimize what is expected of them—and that is to make sure the human capital of an organization is seriously engaged and inspired and believing.

For the vast majority of employees, COVID-19 has altered their working experience. It compelled businesses all across the world to change how work is set up and how jobs are created (Collings, McMackin, Nyberg & Wright, 2021). Numerous HRM professionals have put certain initiatives into place to assist their employees, like providing virtual sociability activities, like virtual lunch or coffee breaks (Carnevale, & Hatak, 2020; Maurer, 2020). These measures undoubtedly contribute in providing employees with support throughout this difficult circumstance while they are separated from one another and their place of employment.

The application of modern technology also facilitates data analytics that can assist HRM professionals in enhancing and optimizing HRM activities and functions in businesses, including workforce planning, recruitment, and talent management (AM, Affandi, Udobong & Sarwani, 2020). This shifts the entire scenario to technological processes such as online recruitment selection, training, reward systems, employee involvement in decision-making, and teamwork linked strongly with organizational performance and HR outcomes (Kutieshat & Farmanesh, 2022). For several organizations, remote work is no longer unimaginable, and HR professionals are now confident that organizing trainings and meetings

online as well as recruitment and hiring are all attainable.

In addition, companies adopted the work-from-home (WFH) work arrangement in order to survive (Vyas, L., & Butakhieo, N. (2021). Recent studies suggest that WFH does not only increase employee productivity but also allows more flexibility in work arrangements, improves work-life balance (Dizaho, Salleh & Abdullah, 2017) and promotes autonomous motivation (Chen & Shaffer, 2016). This circumstance promotes a new normal in the work place. Employees are able to work efficiently and remain productive wherever they are.

Several human resource practitioners initiate innovative approaches in order to maintain employee health and welfare. These include creation of employees' telemedicine counselling, webinars and virtual sessions for staff fitness, offer additional benefits (Chanana, 2021; Nangia & Mohsin, 2020), and ensure that policies are equally implemented for both on-site and WFH employees (Agarwal 2021; Butterick & Charlwood, 2021). Physical and mental health is the cornerstone of effective performance, service quality, and employees' motivation which help to achieve the organization's mission and productivity.

To sum up, several improvements are perceived to be hypothetically similar across country contexts, but human resources anticipate more localized variations given organizational differences. Moreover, as remote work from home increases, HRM must deal with the stress that comes with the blurring of the lines between work and family.

COVID-19 allows companies to gain the opportunity to strengthen their digital capacities, increase employee autonomy, and widen the scope of their competency development. It has encouraged managers and HRM professionals to be more creative, and it has facilitated the transition from conventional face-to-face interaction approaches to virtual ones (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). However, organizations were not accustomed to managing the workforce without on-site monitoring. Moreover, several employees lacked the current technology necessary to handle the unexpected change (Baska, 2020; (Onwuegbuna, Nchuchuwe & Ibrahim, 2021). In order to support them, organizations have to provide technical tools like computers and internet access.

It has long been understood in the realm of human resource management that employees experience stress and frustration in perilous or uncertain conditions, such as COVID-19 (Kumar, Kumar, Aggarwal & Yeap, 2021). Specifically, stress and burnout brought on by persistent working stress and shift in working conditions have been shown to have detrimental effects on both people and their businesses, especially in helping professions, like nursing, psychology, teaching, and social work (Hayes, Priestley, Ishmakhametov & Ray, 2020).

Recent studies suggest that WFH can improve employee performance because of its flexibility (Abdullah, Rahmat, Zawawi, Khamsah & Anuarsham, 2020). Employees get the comfort of performing their tasks whenever and wherever they wanted. While WFH is deemed to promote productivity, it raises monitoring and supervising concerns. For instance, it resulted to a more intermittent communication between managers and staff (Schuster et al., 2020), and prohibits close, over-the-shoulder supervision (Risher & Abell, 2022). WFH also demands improvement of employee skills, such as office skills and communication skills, in order to cope with the digitization of human work (Savić, 2020). WFH also promotes more job control by employees, resulting in more efficient work and fewer interruptions. Moreover, elimination of commuting to and from the workplace, and flexibility of work experience enhanced employee performance (Awu, 2021). Working remotely simply means doing responsibilities from home in order to fulfill an organization's goals, vision, and mission. The effectiveness of remote working depends on the trust between the individual and employer.

In order to deal with the pandemic, WFH has emerged as a top policy priority for several organizations. However, WFH has some limitations, such as the fact that workers must cover their own internet and electrical bills (Purwanto, et al., 2020), concerns about productivity reduction (Kazekami, 2020), distraction of the presence of family members and disengagement from work responsibilities. Notwithstanding, the category of employees working from home represents a small fraction of the overall workforce (Gourinchas, 2020), mainly because remote working is not suitable for several organizations. Managers and HRM practitioners should look into practical ways to incorporate new information technology into HRM and adapt it to the environment of their organization in light of its crucial role during the pandemic. The involvement of employees is required to ensure the success of HR initiatives and the implementation of guidelines aimed at addressing current working conditions.

METHODS

Research Participants

In this study, It employs purposive, snowball sampling. Among others, both Davey (1999) and Groenwald (2004) recommend the use of purposive sampling to enhance the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. Typically, as used by Jadraque and Moyon (2024), a multiple-case study has three to four distinct cases for comparison, probably the most common number of cases that research studies typically can handle, which was also suggested by Patton (2002). The sampling strategy mentioned is deemed effective because I can focus on the depth of the phenomenon experienced by HRMOs in exigency of service during COVID-19 pandemic and explore information-rich cases central to the topic currently investigated.

There were four HRMOs coming from different settings: one from a local government unit (LGU), one from a government-owned and controlled corporation (GOCC), one from a national government agency (NGA), and one from a state university/college (SUC). These HRMOs should be designated or appointed for at least two years at the time before COVID-19 pandemic erupted and are serving the civil service for around five years by the time this study is conducted. Selection of the HRMOs will be regardless of gender, marital status, and educational level. Their represented agency was from the public sector and were performing human resource functions as mandated by law. To conceal the identities of these informants, the researcher used pseudonyms and conceal the agency where they are connected to protect their identity and ensure privacy.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this study were established to ensure that respondents are well-qualified to provide in-depth insights into the changing roles of Human Resource Management Officers (HRMOs) during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. To participate, respondents must currently hold or have held an HRMO role during this critical period, with a minimum of two years of professional experience in human resource management, Limited to Human Resource head or assistant head of HRMO. This criterion ensures that they possess sufficient context and expertise in organizational dynamics and have a first-hand jurisdiction to decide and direct initiatives of the office. Additionally, respondents must have been directly involved in COVID-19 response efforts, such as developing or implementing organizational policies related to workforce adaptation, health and safety protocols, or remote work arrangements.

The study seeks a diverse pool of HRMOs from different sectors, including private, public, and non-profit organizations under the civil service commission (CSC) jurisdiction, as well as varying organizational sizes, to capture a broad range of experiences and strategies. Geographic representation was also considered and well-representative of the entire Davao Region, with the aim of exploring variations in HR

responses based on local contexts and challenges. Finally, respondents must voluntarily agree to participate, provide informed consent, and be willing to share their experiences related to their HR roles during the pandemic. This ensures a rich, meaningful exploration of the study topic.

Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria for this study specify the characteristics of individuals who were not qualified to participate. First, individuals who do not currently hold or have never held a Human Resource Management Officer (HRMO) role during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic were excluded, as their experiences would not align with the study's focus. Similarly, those with less than two years of experience in HRM are excluded to ensure that participants possess sufficient professional knowledge and context. Individuals who did not have direct involvement in their organization's COVID-19 response efforts, such as policy development, health and safety measures, or workforce management, were also excluded, as their insights may lack relevance to the study's objectives. Additionally, respondents from sectors or organizations not relevant to the study focus, or those unable to provide informed consent or unwilling to participate openly, were not included. This ensures that only those with the necessary experience, involvement, and willingness to contribute valuable insights to the research are selected.

If a qualified respondent wishes to withdraw from the study at any point, the withdrawal process is straightforward and designed to respect the respondent's autonomy and well-being. The respondent may communicate their decision to withdraw either verbally or in writing to the researcher. Upon receiving such a request, any data already collected from the respondent will either be removed from the study or anonymized, depending on their preference, ensuring no identifiable information remains.

There were no negative consequences or penalties associated with withdrawal. The study emphasizes voluntary participation, meaning that respondents retain the right to disengage from the research at any stage without explanation. Similarly, if a respondent chooses to refuse to answer specific questions, they are free without impacting their participation status or resulting in any adverse repercussions. Also, there was no token in any form to be given to ensure that the responses of the participants were not motivated by something they were looking forward to receiving. This approach underscores the respect for respondents' rights, ensures their comfort and autonomy, and maintains the ethical integrity of the research process.

Materials and Instruments

The source of the data was taken from the five HRMOs, which were interviewed using an in-depth interview (IDI) guide. The in-depth interview guide was formulated to contain sets of main and probing questions that respond to each of the study's main objective/research questions, with the goal of establishing commonality of the cases in the later cross-case analysis.

Since the goal of this research was to gain insights on the unique case of HRMOs as they perform their functions at the very height of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was natural to engage them in in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews provide much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys (Polkinghorne, 2006). They were also provided a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information — people may feel more comfortable having a conversation with you about their program as opposed to filling out a survey.

In this study, the researcher incorporated taking field notes during his data collection. Bogdan et al. (2003) stated that field notes are the written record of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks. It presents data that was analyzed to provide an understanding of the research setting and the behavior of people within that setting. It can be said that the successful outcome of the study relied on detailed,

accurate, and extensive field notes. Field notes include photographs and audio/video recordings. Field notes consist of descriptive word pictures of the setting, actions, and conversations held in the field. They will be written during or immediately following the interview and included the researcher's intuitions and reactions regarding the interview.

Design and Procedure

This qualitative study used the multiple-case design, which refers to case study research in which several instrumental bounded cases were selected to develop a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena than a single case can provide (Creswell, 2006). Multiple case studies allow a wider discovery of theoretical evolution and research questions. When the suggestions was more intensely grounded in different empirical evidence, this type of case study also create a more convincing theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007).

Specifically, the study focused on the unique experiences of HRMOs in the dispensation of their human resource functions at the very height of the COVID-19 pandemic, treating each case as unique as possible. The commonality and tangentiality of the cases, though, was investigated by cross-casing these multiple cases, given that they were coming from different settings: LGU, SUC, NGA, GOCC, and the Civil Service Commission itself. A semi-structured interview was the primary method of data elicitation. The reason for using this method was best described by De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005, p. 297), namely "to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic". Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate when the interviewer has to dig deeper in search of critical comments, design requirements, and other insights (Lazar, Feng & Hochheiser, 2010; Wilson, 2010). The semi-structured approach allowed respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or importance to them, allowing flexibility in the interview process (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). During the sharing of information new concepts and information may emerge relevant to the study. The interviewer is to be then able to ask the interviewee to clarify or expand on these aspects in more detail.

Personal experiences geared the researcher to come up with this study. his role as the qualitative researcher was to find the answers to the research questions proposed in this study through in-depth interviews with HRMOs. The questions were not strictly controlled by the researcher and was often general in nature (Lichtman, 2006). The researcher must be able to build trust and rapport with the participants since the data for the study comes directly from the minds of those individuals who have experienced the issues, concerns, and problems relative to being HRMOs at the height of a problematic situation. In essence, the researcher's ability to relate with the participants, being an HRMO as well, enables me to make them feel at ease to share their honest thoughts and beliefs, which was pivotal to the entire research study. The researcher was aware of possible bias due to his current professional role and similar responsibilities. Lichtman (2006) says that the researcher must place his own thoughts in brackets so as not to influence his thinking about the phenomenon. When words were put in brackets, it means that they were to be set aside and treated as a unit. The researcher committed to putting his preconceived ideas about being HRMO during COVID-19 pandemic despite my personal relatability with the topic. In addition, the researcher accomplished these tasks by carefully listening to each participant without making judgments or jumping to conclusions, by recording each interview, by taking field notes, and through careful review of official documents provided by participants. It will be important to keep my interactions with participants focus on the topic. This will help to keep both the participants and the qualitative researcher to be focused on the importance of the data being collected. I will let the data speak for

itself as it will be analyzed through cross-case analysis and then concepts will emerge.

The first procedure that the researcher have done before conducting his study was to seek the approval of the Dean of the Professional Schools and the UM Ethics Review Committee. After which, he then sends letters to the identified civil service institutions (a GOCC, an LGU, an SUC, an NGA, and the CSC) for him to conduct the research, which involves their HRMOs. It was his sole responsibility to determine from whom to seek permission.

After receipt of the letters of permission from the appropriate officials, the researcher then gives informed consent to the research participants via email or courier to let them know of the intention of the study. If they consent, he scheduled the in-depth interview at a place and time suitable for the informants. The interview begins after he introduced himself and the study to the informant. He read and explained to them the content of the Informed Consent. He also mentioned the presence of audio recording equipment, assured participants of confidentiality, and gave them the opportunity to withdraw if they were uncomfortable with being recorded. My interview and focus group questions will be given in Filipino-Bisaya language. He then informed the participants that they can respond in English, Filipino, or Bisaya, whichever they feel the most comfortable. After all the data has been gathered by the researcher, transcription, interpretation, translation, and categorization of the data will be done next. After the final submission.

All the information gathered during the interviews was transcribed and analyzed using inductive content analysis. Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 161) describe the notion of content analysis as an "objective and neutral way" to secure qualitative descriptive data, where specific words are counted.

As the current study shall progress, the researcher thinks that the inductive content analysis was appropriate for "describing and interpreting the written productions" of the responses (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p. 161). Researchers who choose inductive content analysis were advised to organize the qualitative data through open coding, creating categories for abstraction (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Open coding involves writing notes in text during the process of reading, which is then reread and headings recorded in margins, to clarify content (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

The transcribing of recorded data was an intricate, time-intensive task. The processes of transcribing and coding of data required judgments and interpretation on the part of the researcher and since he do not "speak in paragraphs nor do we signal punctuation" during speech, the process of inserting a comma, a full stop or a semicolon during transcription became a complex process and hence can shape or change the meaning of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 164). Thus, careful consideration was given to the transcribing of the data from the recorded interviews. Inductive coding begins with a close reading of the text and comprehensively considering the multiple meanings that are inherent in the text (Thomas, 2006).

Inductive analysis was used to analyzed the actual raw data. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 251), inductive data analysis leads to themes or theoretical criteria that are "grounded in the data and are not given a priority". In the analysis of raw data, the NVIVO software was used as a qualitative data analysis software program. Though Friese (2012, p. 4) states that "computer- assisted analysis can be thought of as a journey", Greyling (2007) rightly points out that the construction of meaning cannot be left up to a machine, and is the responsibility of the analyst. Hence, during the transcription process the transcriptions was checked for accuracy and the files entered into the qualitative data analysis software program.

Coding helps to reduce the data into themes or categories that emerge from the data to be analyzed (Clark and Creswell, 2010). Saldana (2011) describes coding of data as a complicated and advanced skill that

requires the revisiting of material and recoding of information. In this study, codes were linked into categories after the first round of coding. The purpose of creating categories was to provide a means of describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding and to generate knowledge (Elo and Kyngas, 2008). The coding process “permits data to be segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation” (Saldana 2011, p.8).

The material, revisited and recoded, and created data nodes from which links were made to interpret and analyze concepts and issues relating to the experiences of HRMOs in different settings at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Richard and Morse (2007), the links in the data help develop ideas from the data interpretation and analysis. Through this process, the essence of the terms of the available data was captured in a written word or in short phrases (Saldana, 2011). As categories and themes were developed, integrative interpretations were offered of what was learned. As Marshall and Rossman (2011, p. 219) suggest, a “story could be told” bringing meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, and categories, developing linkages that make sense and was engaging to read. Finally, to establish each case’s tangentiality with each other, cross-case analysis will be performed, presenting the case-to-case integration in a matrix form.

In this research, the researcher was conformed with Lincoln et al.’s (1985) criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility involves establishing that the results of the research were believable from the perspective of the participants. Several measures will be taken to ensure this in the current study. The focus group protocol and survey were gone through a back-translation process that would ensure the items would be understood by the participants themselves. Member checking is another important component of establishing credibility of results (Lincoln et al., 1985).

To establish credibility in this study, the researcher holds informal conversations with the participants. One concern associated with credibility was the potential for participants providing socially desirable responses. In order to account for this possibility, efforts were made to ensure participant anonymity in their interview/focus group discussion responses. Efforts were also made in a focus group and individually to ensure the privacy of each participant.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results were applied to other contexts or settings (Lincoln et al., 1985). In this study, this means that lessons learned from this research may be useful elsewhere in understanding the uniqueness of the case of each HRMOs involved by illuminating key issues and seeking greater understanding of the problem being studied.

Dependability in quantitative research was related to reliability. Reliability is concerned with the replicability of a study, or whether the same results would be observed if the study were repeated. However, the assumptions of qualitative research state that the same thing cannot be measured in the same way more than once. Therefore, dependability emphasizes the need for me as a researcher to account for the changing context in which the research occurs.

Confirmability refers to the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study were shaped by the participants and not by the researcher’s bias, motivation, or interest. Lincoln et al. (1985) suggested that one way of doing this is through the creation of an “audit trail”, so other personnel such as the research panel and adviser could check to see that the interpretations and conclusions can be traced to legitimate sources.

This study was achieved by thoroughly documenting the research process, as well as making all my decisions transparent. All raw data that was collected was retained in hard copy and electronic form,

including audio recordings, paper copies of the interviews, and field notes. Based on this documentation, the data could be reanalyzed by my research adviser to confirm the findings and conclusions of this study. Moreover, this study adhered to any ethical criterion applicable to research manners, especially with regard to participants and the gathering of data. This is evidenced by the Ethics Review Committee certification number "UMERC-2025-088". The purpose of the research, procedures, and outcomes were explained to the participants to ensure the use of ethical procedures. Informants' willingness to be part of this study was highly considered. The more willing the informants are, the more meaningful experiences they may share. No financial payment was associated with this study; participation is entirely voluntary. Informants were informed that the research was being done with future program members in mind, even though they were not paid for their services.

Additionally, informants were made aware that they would be assigned an identifier, either a number or a pseudonym, and the researcher obtained their consent by introducing themselves during the actual interview process, outlining the goal of the study, and assisting the respondents in entering the interview—all crucial steps in the initial stages of the process. Once again, informants were assured that all data gathered for the study would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and that analysis would solely utilize aggregated data. Nonetheless, the participants and the school will have access to the results upon request.

Results and Discussion

Case 1: A Strong Men – A case of a family-oriented lone man with over 500 employees under his cape. (Municipality of Maragusan)

Participant 1 is living in a happy family, stemming from his career as a politician to an HR Head with over five hundred ninety employees under his direct supervision, not to mention other employees whose jobs require direct mandates from his office. He has been in the office for over ten years and has already mastered the in and out of his jurisdiction, managing a diverse workforce. His responsibilities are broad and require a blend of administrative skills, empathy, and a deep understanding of both local government operations and labor laws with a firm decision-making capability to ensure laws are being properly followed, just like a father, a mix of strict yet flexible discipline.

During the onset of the pandemic, his job has a total flipped from what it used to be, from the way the job was performed, its dynamics, and evaluation of outputs. It is challenging on his part as, at the very least, he will ensure that, given the health threat, tasks are still efficiently and effectively performed. One of its most challenging aspects is fostering a positive work environment and its employee relations and welfare. Addressing employee concerns, especially the restriction on physical interaction, led me to provide a more lenient approach in terms of their task and job completion. Evaluation and monitoring pose extreme challenges as HR must devise a new way to ensure that tasks are still being fulfilled.

“The greatest challenge was how tasks could be performed at home. For example, liaising, documents that need to be signed or sent, applications from other barangays, requests, and so on. Due to the lockdown, we couldn’t push or require them to deliver. So, they were unable to do their work or could only do limited tasks, and it wasn’t fair to not pay them for something that was beyond their control”.

Participant 1

Further, the prevalence of how each task will be monitored, from hiring, delegation of responsibilities, and evaluation. Buddy system and taking over one task is also being practiced, never to disrupt processes, and all functions are still being carried out with utmost efficiency and effectiveness.

Case 2: A Sophisticated Woman- A case of an accomplished woman nearing having been served with glorious years in public office. (DILG)

Participant 2 is a woman with integrity, having served near her retirement in government service. Her two children are already equally successful: a law student, and a career professional. Her expertise in handling people is insurmountable, providing her keen mastery in all processes and functions as DILG human resource head. It is then safe to say that this sophisticated woman embodied her kingdom's strong and established character and disposition.

Her office was manned by not more than 20 regular employees. Still, her jurisdiction covers the entire local government unit (LGU), from ensuring that all LGU employees adhere to the local government code, including hiring, training, development, employee relations, and even taking part in ensuring local good governance. Her role plays a pivotal part in characterizing good employees in providing welfare to its constituents, thus, intensive personality intervention is her priority to ensure effective and efficient implementation of these activities.

However, the onset of the pandemic has changed her kingdom upside down, from its established practices down to new ways of providing services have tremendously shifted. From hiring, maintaining the welfare of her people, all LGU's concerns for manpower, and task delegation and monitoring have been greatly changed from what it was; the leniency and personality consideration for their mental and health welfare are being prioritized.

"The COVID-19 pandemic truly changed how we managed and engaged with our employees. First, we shifted from a traditional office setup to a work-from-home arrangement. This transition was challenging because we had to ensure that operations didn't stop, even though most of our employees were working remotely." Participant 2

Further, this phenomenon has shaped the participant to what she believes she has mastered already through the years; her ability to listen, appreciating it even further, has changed tremendously as she is not just considering the tasks that need to be performed but also the overall welfare of her kingdom. Devising new ways to effectively listen, participate, and communicate efficiently and effectively to all her people poses a most challenging task for her, as all are new to everyone, a woman growing up deprived of the technological geez of what the current generation has made her reluctant to most challenging as the effectiveness is still unknown. Nonetheless, the sophisticated woman realizes that new things are still dormant, waiting for it to happen, and it is always imperative to acknowledge these instances, which could prepare the new generation for future possibilities.

Case 3: A man with perseverance- A case of HR head of a government agency who's handling the benefits of all government employees (GSIS)

A man who has seen perseverance despite all that has happened, a family-oriented man whose family is living far from his workplace, his jurisdiction is the entire Davao Del Norte, Davao De Oro, and Davao Oriental. Given the geographical constraint, his dedication to his job as HR head never faltered, and his office managed not more than 50 employees, both permanent and job orders, who serve the entire Davao region government employees for all their retirement benefits reasons.

However, the onset of the pandemic has tested his dedication, balancing his role as a father who is living far from his family, and a father at his workplace serving the entire Government employees' benefits in his jurisdiction. This poses an ever-greater challenge to test his unwavering perseverance. The pandemic has made him even more of a father figure to resolve his immediate employees while balancing providing

greater service to all other clients.

“We also focused on mental health support since the pandemic caused stress and anxiety for many. We provided counseling services, mental health webinars, and wellness programs to help employees cope with the emotional toll of the situation. At the same time, we made sure that employees had access to government programs, such as financial assistance, to help them with the financial impact of the pandemic. Communication regarding policies, benefits, and guidelines became crucial during this time.”

Participant 3

This problem made him anxious about how to implement guidelines effectively, the expected output and delivery of service must be maintained, and to effectively balance the welfare of his people.

Case 4: A Sunshine Ray of Hope- A case study of an HR head of Municipal College and acting President. (HEI)

Education has always been perceived as a key to success, the world is created and shaped by education, a hope for every Filipino for a better life ahead, a tool for future growth, and a weapon to combat ignorance. These qualities must be upheld regardless of whatever challenges may occur along the way; his job as HR head and acting president of City College faced a threat to the values of an educational institution. He has been managing fifty full-time employees, ninety-five part-time, and forty-five non-teaching Plantilla workers, for over a hundred employees on his shoulders who bear the torch of light to guide thousands of learners on the darkest road ahead of them. The pandemic has shifted and made even darker the then-travelled road. His role in upholding not just his employees but the entire purpose of the institution made his ray falter at some point. But the courage to uphold the promise remains steadfast, keeping the spark to light the darkest road to take.

In fact, the pandemic has tested the ability that has been honed and mastered through the years, the expertise of his people, his management style, and the promise has been their fuel to maintain and continue the quality of service and imparting knowledge to all its learners. The pandemic may have changed the way they do things normally, but it has opened new opportunities, strengthening the importance of technology, and how these technologies that have been dormant in usage become the catalyst for a new way of learning. Further, unlike other government agencies, the main threat is when the faculty will be caught a positive case, as their job is essential by expertise. As an HR, it is the hardest thing to accommodate, as we have limited experts to whom will be under treatment because of the virus. The mental aptitude of these employees is also his concern, which is why several interventions for mental health programs were initiated because he believes that when the faculty, as the main source of hope, is mentally equipped, then all else is in good hands.

“For employee engagement, it was important to maintain morale. We organized virtual activities, training, and workshops to keep employees engaged and motivated. We also emphasized mental health support by offering counseling and wellness programs to help employees cope with the added stress during the pandemic.” Participant 4

Moreover, the experiences during the darkest moments of our life have taught him to be more resilient, to be more proactive, and to prioritize employees' well-being, as all these are essential in keeping their promise in guiding their learners to a well-lit path, a destination of sunshine and hope.

Thematic Analysis

As shown in Table 1, the themes and core ideas about the impact of the pandemic in terms of employee management and engagement outline the common practices of all these government agencies on their respective employees. Where it was noted that challenges in employee management due to its limited

movement and restrictions, devising a new matrix for task completion and balancing work-life responsibilities while working remotely had its fair share of common grounds for all these agencies. Another one is the work arrangement adjustment, where most of the employees find it hard to transform from the conventional to a new way of providing services. This sudden shift in the nature of work poses a notion of culture shock, which somehow limits their ability to perform their job effectively, as they need to adjust. Among others are the communication strategies, since some areas where employees were situated doesn't have a good internet connection, and the virtual employee engagement, where social interaction has been limited, resulting in house arrest anxiety

Table 1: Themes and Core Ideas on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on HR Functions in terms of Employee Management and Engagement

Emerging Themes		Core Ideas
Challenges in Employee Management		Managing employees with limited movement and restrictions
		Ensuring fair performance evaluation in remote work
		Difficulty in adapting to new working environments, especially for those unfamiliar with technology
		Balancing work-life responsibilities while working remotely
Work Arrangement Adjustments		Implementation of skeletal workforce to ensure continuity of services
		Shift from traditional office setup to work-from-home arrangements
		Compliance with government protocols by implementing flexible work setups
		Use of online tools for assignments, meetings, and productivity tracking
Communication Strategies		Use of online platforms like Zoom, email and messenger for clear communication
		Transition from face-to-face to virtual meetings using Zoom/MS Teams
		Regular check-ins to ensure employee engagement and productivity
		Ensuring employees stay in the loop regarding policy updates and work assignments
Virtual Employee Engagement		Virtual team-building and online recognition programs
		Provision of counseling services, mental health webinars, and wellness programs
		Regular virtual activities, training, and workshops to maintain morale

It is also important to point out that these challenges occur, resulting in some unfavorable circumstances for these heads of offices. These results is consistent in the study conducted by Chavez, Tamayo, Moyon, and Cruz (2021), which was highlighted by Bellermans, and Devos (2023) that administrators reveal that there is a higher degree of burnout and a high level of self-awareness during the on set of work-from home setting due to the pandemic. This narrative strengthens the claim that despite its focus on maintaining ease in doing their job, unavoidable negative attributes still bring something to the plate.

Presented in Table 2 are the themes and core ideas of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HR functions in terms of employee safety and well-being during lockdown. It was noted that the Implementation of health and safety protocols yielded as the top priority of all HR personnel. Technical support, financial support, and mental health wellness are equally important, as observed by HR. Providing relevant programs to ensure mental aptitude, proper sanitation, and technological support is important in effectively managing and engaging all employees.

Further, ensuring the well-being of all employees is the top priority as expected since the health crisis becomes deadly and poses a grave threat to anyone's life. This has been elaborately discussed and highlighted in the study of Calva, Molina, Moyon, Murcia, Pillado, and Yee, (2023), that government response to covid-19 quality of service are being measured by its effectiveness in implementing safety and risk management, apart from its quality of how quick the agencies responsiveness and support. This further highlights that all government agencies must ensure their efficiency and effectively implement programs, prioritizing the safety and well-being of all its personnel.

Table 2: Themes and Core Ideas on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on HR Functions in terms of Employee Safety and Well-Being During Lockdown

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Implementation of Health and Safety Protocols	<p>Enforced social distancing, face masks, and face shields</p> <p>Restricted civilian entry, and sanitized documents and areas</p> <p>Ensured strict office sanitization and temperature checks for essential personnel</p>
Technical Support Systems for Remote Work	<p>Provided clear guidelines and structured support for remote work implementation</p> <p>Supplied employees with necessary digital tools and technical support for work-from-home efficiency</p> <p>Facilitated internet access and connectivity solutions for employees in remote areas</p>
Financial Support for Employees	<p>Ensured employees retained leave credits and received allowances while in quarantine</p> <p>Provided financial assistance for employees affected by the pandemic, including those with sick family members</p> <p>Assisted employees without devices by providing loaned equipment</p> <p>Kept employees informed about available government aid programs to support financial stability</p>
Mental Health and Well-being Support	<p>Ensured emotional well-being by addressing stress and anxiety through mental wellness webinars and regular check-ins</p> <p>Conducted coping strategy sessions for employees</p>

Table 3 depicts the themes of the HR functions' approach in Recruitment, Training, and onboarding during

the pandemic. Where, shifting to virtual and online for their recruitment, training, and remote onboarding was commonly practiced. This move is being administered due to the movement restrictions and the threat of health hazards. However, although there are limited hiring activities during the pandemic, some have still administered it via online, training programs, interventions, and development seminars have been conducted online.

Table 3: Themes and Core Ideas on the Approaches in Recruitment, Training, and Onboarding during the Pandemic

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Suspension of Recruitment	No hiring or recruitment was conducted during the pandemic
Shift to Virtual Recruitment	Recruitment shifted to online platforms and interviews conducted via video conferencing Online assessment tests were developed to evaluate applicants' competencies remotely
Transition to Online Training	All training transitioned to virtual platforms via Zoom, Messenger, and email Training, seminars, and workshops were converted to recorded webinars Employees were provided access to electronic self-paced learning modules
Remote Onboarding and Employee Integration	Onboarding shifted to virtual, with virtual welcome and online orientation sessions HR assigned mentors, and provided virtual tours of systems and tools Regular online check-ins and feedback sessions were scheduled to support new hires

This practice is not alien as to what Al-Zagheer, and Barakat, (2021) finding on their study, where several tasks and processes of the HR has been administer through electronic manner, specifically from training and development, ensuring their aptitude and new technological development to support the workers adjust the new way of delivering the service. And this provides an excellent opportunity to minimize cost, ensure diverse approaches, and an easier way to give and administer.

Table 4 shows the emerging themes from the participant's responses about their experiences on the ways the HR seeks feedback or inputs from employees. It has been noted that for several occurrences, the use of online surveys and digital feedback tools has been implemented tremendously, as it is the best way at that time and the only lucrative way to facilitate. Aside from facilitating virtual meetings, open discussions, one-on-one check-ins, and personalized support, the dedicated communication channels for employees' concerns were also established. All these were observed and have been the practice to have seen the only resort to ensure continued proper communications and delegation of information.

Table 4: Themes and Core Ideas on the Ways the HR seek Feedback or Input from Employees regarding the Changes or Challenges posed by the Pandemic

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Use of Online Surveys and Digital Feedback Tools	<p>Converted all existing feedback tools to digital platforms for efficiency</p> <p>Conducted regular online surveys to gather insights on work setup satisfaction or challenges, issues and concerns</p>
Facilitation of Virtual Meetings and Open Discussions	<p>Meetings and training sessions became more effective via Zoom, allowing for easier participation and feedback</p> <p>Held virtual town hall meetings with live polling for instant employee input</p> <p>Organized small group discussions where employees could voice concerns directly and honestly to HR</p>
One-on-One Check-ins and Personalized Support	<p>Team leaders and managers conducted weekly virtual check-ins to address workload and mental health challenges of employees</p> <p>Encouraged personalized one-on-one feedback sessions for employee support</p>
Dedicated Communication Channels for Employee Concerns	<p>HR set up a dedicated email and hotline for employees to share urgent concerns</p> <p>HR created informal feedback spaces for open discussions</p>

These practices have also been seen as an effective way of communication when there is a threat of geographic or physical constraints (Chavez, Et Al.2021). It is also consistent with how the tourism industry keeps afloat in their business despite the challenges and threats of the pandemic, where online transactions have seen the most effective way to deliver their inquiries, concerns, and even ease of doing business as being explored by Manos and Moyon (2024). Nonetheless, as we have observed, almost all industries have adopted a blended approach and even acknowledge the importance of distance technology.

As presented in Table 5 are the experiences of the participants as to what learning or insight they have learned during the pandemic, and how they realize the things that need to be prioritized. It was found out that adaptation and being flexible plays a very important role, provided that their job efficiency and effectiveness are still maintained. Prioritization of employee well-being and mental health also significantly impacts how we should take care of our manpower and prioritize their well-being. Embracing digitalization on the hand suggests no reason not to acknowledge and utilize its full potential, with this, we can even strengthen communication and employee engagement, and that no matter what happens, the role of being a human-centered leadership in HR is what makes a big difference.

Table 5: Themes and Core Ideas on the Key Learnings or Insights from the Experiences in managing HR during the Pandemic

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Flexibility and Adaptability in HR Practices	<p>HR must be proactive and prepared for future crises to ensure smooth workforce management.</p> <p>Flexibility in HR practices, such as remote work and digital adoption, was crucial in maintaining operations.</p> <p>Agility in decision-making and quick policy adjustments helped stabilize the workforce.</p> <p>HR must adopt a proactive mindset and be ready for sudden changes in the workplace.</p>
Prioritization of Employee Well-being and Mental Health	<p>Mental health support is essential to maintaining employee motivation and engagement.</p> <p>Mental health programs should be valued as highly as traditional employee benefits.</p> <p>Regular wellness programs and check-ins help mitigate stress, anxiety, and workplace isolation.</p> <p>Creating an open and supportive culture around mental health improves workplace well-being.</p>
Embracing Transformation	<p>Digital Technology became essential for recruitment, training, and performance management, ensuring business continuity.</p> <p>Investing in the right digital tools and platforms is critical for HR efficiency and adaptability.</p> <p>Technology integration enhances employees' effectiveness at work during a pandemic</p>
Strengthening Communication and Employee Engagement	<p>Transparent and consistent communication fosters trust and reduces uncertainty in the workforce.</p> <p>Effective communication strengthens employee engagement and morale during crisis situations.</p> <p>Regular updates through multiple communication channels are essential to keeping employees informed.</p>
Role of Human-Centered Leadership in HR	<p>Compassionate leadership is essential in addressing employee well-being beyond just work-related concerns.</p> <p>Holistic employee support fosters a resilient and engaged workforce.</p>

It is very important to note that in the findings of Serilla, Suarez, Naquilla, and Moyon (2022) highlighted that employees even went the extra mile of certain degree of tolerance in doing unpaid overtime for the

love and dedication to their work, where commitment and loyalty are being imposed because the its manager or leader who's effort are seen to be a pro-employee's welfare. This phenomenon must be present because employees become loyal when their immediate supervisor treats them fairly and with deep interpersonal relationships.

Cross-Case Analysis

Table 6 shows the similarities and differences between the four cases, which are equally important government agencies in managing their employees. As presented, in terms of employee management and engagement, it is clear that case 4, or the case of the Local city college, shows a difference among all others in terms of communication strategies, this is due to the fact that the area in Municipality of Monkayo and its nearby localities has a feeble internet connection and some even are dead spots, this perhaps limits them to perform even it has been seem the most effective way of communication during those darkest times. Further, virtual employee engagement has also seen a differential in application in the case of LGU of Maragusan, where he highlighted that it is very hard for him to have also let everyone engaged in virtual activities due to its geographical constraints and internet problem, given that he is managing more than 500 employees.

Table 6: Similarities and Differences between Cases

Emerging Themes	Case Unit		Remarks
	Similar	Different	
Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on HR Functions in terms of Employee Management and Engagement:			
Challenges in Employee Management	1, 2, 3, 4		All Cases mentioned that the pandemic challenged HR in managing employees under restrictions.
Work Arrangement Adjustments	1, 2, 3, 4		All Cases mentioned that organizations ensured service continuity through flexible work arrangements
Communication Strategies	1, 2, 3	4	Cases 1, 2 and 3 mentioned that organizations maintained clear communication by transitioning to virtual platforms
Virtual Employee Engagement	2, 3, 4	1	Cases 2, 3 and 4 mentioned that organizations fostered employee engagement through virtual activities
Measures taken to ensure Employee Safety and Well-Being During Lockdown Periods:			
Implementation of Health and Safety Protocols	1, 2, 3, 4		All Cases mentioned that organizations enforced health protocols
Technical Support Systems for Remote Work	2, 3, 4	1	Case 2, 3 and 4 mentioned that organizations ensured remote work efficiency by providing strong technical support

Financial Support for Employees	1, 2, 3, 4		All Cases mentioned that organizations supported employees during the pandemic by providing financial assistance
Mental Health and Well-being Support	2, 3, 4	1	Cases 2, 3 and 4 mentioned that organizations prioritized emotional well-being by addressing stress and anxiety through mental wellness program
Approaches in Recruitment, Training, and Onboarding during the Pandemic:			
Suspension of Recruitment	1, 3, 4	2	Cases 1, 3 and 4 mentioned that organizations suspended hiring and recruitment during the pandemic
Shift to Virtual Recruitment	2	1, 3, 4	Case 2 mentioned that their organization adapted recruitment by shifting to online platforms
Transition to Online Training	1, 2, 3	4	Cases 1, 2 and 3 mentioned that organizations transitioned training to virtual platforms
Remote Onboarding and Employee Integration	2, 3	1, 4	Cases 2 and 3 mentioned that organizations adapted onboarding by conducting virtual sessions
Ways the HR seek Feedback or Input from Employees regarding the Changes or Challenges posed by the Pandemic:			
Use of Online Surveys and Digital Feedback Tools	1, 2, 3, 4		All Cases mentioned that organizations enhanced feedback mechanisms by transitioning existing tools to digital/online platforms
Facilitation of Virtual Meetings and Open Discussions	1, 2, 3, 4		All Cases mentioned organizations improved engagement and feedback by utilizing virtual meetings
One-on-One Check-ins and Personalized Support	2, 3, 4	1	Cases 2, 3 and 4 mentioned that organizations supported employees by conducting weekly virtual check-ins with team leaders
Dedicated Communication Channels for Employee Concerns	2, 4	1, 3	Cases 2 and 4 mentioned that organizations enhanced communication by establishing a dedicated HR communication line
Key Learnings or Insights from the Experiences in managing HR during the Pandemic			

Flexibility and Adaptability in HR Practices	1, 2, 3, 4		All Cases mentioned that HR must be proactive, agile, and adaptable, ensuring workforce stability
Prioritization of Employee Well-being and Mental Health	2, 3, 4	1	Cases 2, 3 and 4 mentioned that mental health support is crucial for employee motivation and engagement
Embracing Digital Transformation	2, 3, 4	1	Cases 2, 3 and 4 mentioned that technology became essential for recruitment, training, and performance management
Strengthening Communication and Employee Engagement	2, 3, 4	1	Cases 2, 3 and 4 mentioned the importance of transparent and consistent communication
Role of Human-Centered Leadership in HR	2	1, 3, 4	Case 2 mentioned that compassionate leadership is key to addressing employee well-being beyond work, while holistic support fosters a resilient and engaged workforce

Further, among all the challenges and experiences of all these four government agencies, one of the important things to note is that when it comes to hiring, only the DILG has halted and frozen hiring, as for them, it has seen no relevance given the nature of their service. Also, in the case of LGU Maragusan, given the veracity of his employees, he was unable to prioritize the one-on-one check ins and personalized support to all of his employees, which somehow needs to be alarmed since HR function must ensure that its employees are being treated well, this may be isolated to areas who are managing plenty employees under their shoulder, where it was seen as well that given this ideology, the case 1 also have been lacking its prioritizing its employees well-being, difficulty in digitalization, and ensuring strengthened communication channels, these differences perhaps due to the fact that the LGU of Maragusan finds their feet in difficulties to the abrupt shift of the things that had happened and the lack of contingencies and delegations of tasks as maybe the office were caught is balancing personal and professional vendetta due to health threat and fear for life.

Implications

The study uncovered the challenges and the lived experiences of the different government human resource heads of their respective agencies. Their importance in managing their employees, their strategies, and approaches, who then mold and hone the organization's resilience during and even after the pandemic. As has been discovered, each of the agencies employs different approaches to employee management and engagement, where challenges, work arrangement adjustments, and communication strategies and virtual engagement were seen as a common practice for all agencies.

With this theme's identification, it's important to introduce that agencies must ensure that internet connection plays its important role to rollout effective communication strategies, these agencies could seek help to the Department of Information and Communication Technology's (DICT) help to provide infrastructure to those identified areas where these services are far from reach. Specifically, to remote areas of Maragusan, Monkayo, and some parts of Davao Del Norte where there is an absence or limited

internet infrastructure. This will ensure continued usage and practice for the blended tasks approach, since it was seen during the pandemic that the importance and opportunities brought by online or distance learning approaches.

Furthermore, the study found out that three out of the four agencies continued their hiring and recruitment services, and their onboarding activities are still being observed, except in the case of the LGU of Maragusan. This is perhaps because of the nature of the services the LGU of Maragusan has over the other agencies. It also finds that only in this case did it not implement the one-on-one check-ins and personalized support to its employees.

Having this at hand, it is very important for any agency to carefully establish the delegation of tasks, and succession planning may also play an important role in ensuring smooth and proper delegation of jobs, where it is important to integrate buddy system and rotation of work designations, this will ensure work continuity in cases where some employees are absent and or on leave, in order not to disrupt the work flow. It was identified that the nature of services the LGU of Maragusan has is different from other agencies, and the number of employees as well is a limiting factor. Therefore, it is imperative that the HR head must devise proper structure of delegation of command to all its employees, so each department can implement micro management in employing what other government agencies has been doing, from one-on-one check its, mental health intervention programs, and prioritizing the well-being of its employees then be administer and broken them down into a more localized approach.

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