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**«Impact of COVID-19 on Human Resources practices»  
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**Impact of COVID-19 on Human Resources Management**

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## **Abstract**

This research is devoted to the study of the topic “Impact of Covid 19 on the practice of personnel management in Kazakhstan.

The emergency changes caused by the coronavirus infection forced companies around the world, as well as in Kazakhstan, to switch to digital performance. Human resource management is at the center of this change, helping companies stay afloat and steer the company forward. The main task of human resource management is to manage employees by providing them with convenience and maintain a balance between work and personal life. The purpose of my research is to show how Human Resource Management changed during the pandemic and what effect it had on the employees themselves. Our task is to conduct interviews for analysis and data collection to determine whether the changes were in a positive or negative direction.

**Key words:** Human Resource Management , Digital Performance , Remote work, Kazakhstan.

## Content

<b>INTRODUCTION.</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>2</b>
METHODOLOGY	8
HRM in Kazakhstan prior pandemics.	9
The COVID Pandemic and its impact.	14
Findings	19
Discussions	24
Conclusion	25

## Introduction.

Global pandemics has impact around the world not only on health of people, but also on other aspects of our live such as labor market. Pandemics showed humanity`s lack of preparation both in technical equipment and professional abilities. Strict limitations, shortage of productions, suspension of operation among enterprises affected whole world, including Kazakhstan. According to statistics by Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, more than 4.2 million people became “temporarily unemployed” by March 2020. Most of the unemployed people are representatives in commerce and service. Major part of enterprises fully suspended their operations while the other part moved their employees to remote form of work. While moving to remote form of work solves some issues related to enterprise operations, it does not solve types of work where the special equipment is involved. This and other type of limitations forced domestic HR managers to create new tools and techniques suitable for current situation.

Culture of human resources management was built on recruitment, direct communication, strategic planning, and further support for promotion at the workplace. In other words, Human Resources Management (HRM) is the practice of recruiting right people and optimization for achieving better performance in the company. Main function of HRM is to hire right employee into business so he can work productive, be happy and stay longer in company. By creating good environment in company, HRM specialists make workers more engaged into work creating positive contribution in company workflow. The better management of human resources is, the better performance company will show. How exactly does pandemics affected human resources practice, and what corners has been cut in order to achieve optimization, is the one of the questions we will discuss in this paper.

In March 2020, there was a major lockdown in Kazakhstan that forced people to stay at home in order to maintain social isolation. Mainly it was due to high transmission rate of virus called COVID-19. In order to stop further spread of coronavirus, government in cooperation with Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Kazakhstan announced state of emergency, in which people should stay isolated at their homes. Only few group of people related to regulation of quarantine were allowed to be

outside. Most of the enterprises, from small to big, challenged their HR departments to create new strategy in order to maintain required minimum types of operations necessary to hold companies “afloat”. What kind of decisions were made, and what optimizations needs to be proceeded in order to continue operational minimum is the main questions faced by the HR managers. In this kind of situation, major balance between legal allowances and forecast for the future improvement should be maintained. Nobody knew exactly when the vaccine will be created, and nobody knew how long will lockdown continue.

Lack of preparation in this kind of situation might kill any kind of business, from small to big. If the company has a worldwide spread, it might operate quite a while with the help of its resources, suffering from loss. It all depends on deep analysis of company`s operation, determining key sectors that has to obtain main focus, and cutting ineffective spends. Depending on sphere of operation, and size of enterprise, HR managers in Kazakhstan created different solutions in order to sustain performance, which has variety of outcomes we discuss and analyze in our work. Some of them has multiple scenarios in case chosen direction will fail. Our work will investigate how exactly different HR departments from different companies has overcome this challenge, which will be helpful for future HR specialists. Also, we will collect information from different seminars and online briefings that made discussions about pandemics and its impact on the labor market of Kazakhstan.

## Literature review

According to General Manager of “KazTech Group”, K.V.Kim, - “World is not going to be the same anymore.”(Kim, 2020). He noted that in post-pandemic world there is going to be reorganization of resources, and alteration of accents. Resources that were spend somewhere else, now has to be referred to healthcare sphere since it has the most feedback in terms of social significance. He also underlines, that most of the companies reoriented their operations to produce medical supplies, such as medicals masks and sanitizing equipment. Also, the article by Kim(Kim, 2020) is useful for our paper in terms of discussions on influence of interregional restriction on hiring people from other cities.

The main reason why pandemics has affected enterprises in Kazakhstan is the high transmission rate of COVID-19 (CoronaTracker, 2020). In order to secure and reduce transmission rate people were advised to stay at home during pandemics (hls.kz, 2020). Most of the employees moved to the new form of workflow. According to data given by HR analytical-expert of Social-Laboral Relation Sandugash Iskenderova, 20% adapted quickly, 68% are still in need for assistance, and 12% of respondents did faced panic on the new workplace. As it comes to personnel retrenchment as a reaction to crisis, Iskenderova notes that it is mainly used by private enterprises, consulting, and logistic companies, as a major type of businesses that suffered from pandemics (Iskenderova, 2020).

To compare the situation happening at other countries we picked several academic papres provided by the authors from other countries. Professor at University of Economics and Management Lucie Vnouckiva, noted that situation with pandemics and lockdowns due to COVID-19 and transition of teams and workers to remote operation has not only the negative sides but positive as well. (Vnouckova, 2020) It is reported that integration of IT soultions among the companies during the pandemics has dramatic increase. Presence of companies at the web and quality of online services provided by them have reached new levels. Not only the companies have learned that the conventional way of making business through physical retail stores are only source of income, but there are also many other potential costumers abroad or out of focus of marketing strategy of the company. Paper also reports necessary changes in Human Resources Management practices for successful operation in such a situations as a pandemics.

Here are some of them:

- Different work conditions – social separation and communication technologies;
- Distance management and new competencies of managers;
- Crisis management;
- Different approach towards generations;
- Lowering of salaries, need for requalification, risks of job loss;

Another paper taken for review shows us situation build up in HRM practices in Georgia. The article by Iza Gigauri, shows that Georgian situation shows similar results as it is occurred around the world.(Gigauri, 2020) The author notes that similar tendencies around the world shows us that common HRM practices adapted by western giants have deep integration on world market. This shows us that measures taken by giant companies can be easily adapted for the local companies as well. Iza however notes that pandemics has both positive and negative sides for change in HRM practices, especially with the integration of crisis management practices. It is reported that the main downside during the pandemics for HRM practices is adaptation for crisis management which leads to expenses cut, job loss, and decrease in job qualification improvement programs. That is why author concluded necessity of right balance between cuts in costs and personnel training, otherwise it will be hard to achieve effectiveness and efficiency in company.

Since The General Labor Code has different understandings for Remote Work, usually, in order to avoid confusions employers has to make a special agreement with employee. The Code defines that Home Work and Remote Work have different meanings and approaches, and should be treated by HR managers differently. Importance of that for HR specialists and usefulness of such a details in general explained by V.V.Kulinkova, lawyer of “Triton” LLP. She also makes a discussion on situations where remote work is not an option, and the ways of operation in this case.

Researches on that field showed, that many companies are cutting expenses, including the salary level. Companies are looking for the different ways of keeping personnel by cutting expenses on its supply, fixing salary on current amount, non-paid holidays, and early retirement. According to Korn Ferry regional office chief Tamerlan Larionov, before changing organizational style, organizations should consider the demand on the market and duration of crisis (Larionov, 2020).

Many HR experts noted that models of running business after pandemics will experience changes in order to adapt for the new market. If in pre-pandemic world HR specialists had to only compare aims of business with wishes of executives, now they have to work in advance for conditions of uncertainty, including HRM strategy for the year of 2021. This requires creation of new techniques

that will have focus on clients and market demands. In order to understand exactly what has to be done in order to achieve this main goals we will analyze and highlight main points in article created by HR directory of Kazakhstan(Titkova, 2021).

On the other hand, development of online corporate culture, during non-crisis times, could have taken months. By now, it took couple weeks for the most of the enterprises to adapt for pandemic circumstances . HR took big responsibility in configuring processes for remote operation. According to Head HR of NAK “Kazatomprom” Lyazzat Kozhakhmetova, current situation will be good experience for every CEO in terms of new approach in operations planning. Besides, it improves personal responsibility of every employee and helps to create new benchmarks of personnel effectiveness (Kozhakhmetova, 2020).

Some of the companies were already adapted for remote workplace prior the pandemics in 2020. Launched in 2011 egov.kz Electronic Government system`s transparency is supported by the feature of platform called Electronic-Digital Signature (EDS), which is personal digital signature that allows to receive governmental services remotely from virtually anywhere (egov.kz, 2020). According to Head HR of Air Astana Evgenia Ni, since 100% of their employees were reporting their papers through EDS since 2014, transition to remote workstyle went painlessly (Ni, 2020).

Academic article by Promila Agarwal shows that hotel business, that suffered the most during pandemics, have developed their own set of managerial decisions in order to overcome pandemics. It is reported that the main focus of the human resources managers at most of the hotels around the world have taken same actions regarding enforcement of the medical aspect and social distancing.

Retail sector in Kazakhstan have also experienced influence of pandemics on their own during the lockdown. According to FusionLab`s research funded by Visa, 82 percent of entrepreneurs reported negative effect of COVID-19 on retail sector: 69 percent of respondents reported lowered income while 23 percent said their business is fully stopped. Research also reported that at early stage of lockdown, major part of businesses were forced for fast online transition: 37 percent of responders said their operation is still offline, and 63 percent reported active presence and marketing online (Khan, 2020).

Despite the small population of our country, and complicated suitability of some foreign models of businesses, there are similar types of businesses during pandemics that showed effectiveness of methods used abroad. For example, Head HR of METRO Cash&Carry Dinara Dadabayeva, adapted model used in Singapore(Ni, 2020). The concept of model is based on separation of personnel into two groups that does not contact with each other during or outside of work hours. This model allows you to have two separate group of workers that will be ready to continue business despite of positive COVID-19 cases among workers in the company. Even if there are cases of infection in one group, this group will be moved to quarantine, and the other group will continue working. Since two groups never contact with each other, it guarantees that employees in other group will remain healthy. The method can be improved by having additional group in case of infection among two previous groups.

As we can see many companies been able to stay afloat with the help of digital technologies. Most of the companies are using remote access to the main workplace, or online conferences. At the same time there are increased load in telecommunication sector. How exactly does those companies will manage their resources in order to provide stable connection to the mentioned above companies? Besides from the help and support provided from the government, HR managers at tele-communicational companies also have some strategic changes in workplace. As Head HR of Beeline Kazakhstan Takhmina Kodiri mentioned, most of the employees except engineers and technical workers, were moved to remote workplace. When it comes to technical support, their responsibilities can be done remotely as well.(Kodiri, 2020).

Besides corporate changes among of some companies, there are also changes on labor market in Kazakhstan. President of Co-ordinational Council Association of HR-managers Gulmira Raisova says, that “There is going to be personal “segmentation”, and the part of less-effective employees might lose their job”. According to survey held by the association, 30 percent of respondents working in private sector, which is consulting, education, and transportation, were discussing about possible personnel retrenchments. Only the companies with high solidity and massively accumulated resources can resist to retrenchment in Kazakhstan (Raisova, 2020). She also mentioned, that many companies that found

benefits in remote workstyle, might move to that concept in the future to help cut expenses on office spaces.

Many government organization in Kazakhstan moved to remote workplace as well. The Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service Affairs presented practices and solution for Civil Service Human Resources Management During COVID-19 (ACSA RK, 2020). In order to provide stable functioning of the state, ACSA RK suggested following steps:

1. Flexible, shortened, or remote process of work:
  - 70 – 80 percent of workers should be moved to online form of employment;
  - Public transportation relief;
  - Providing security for children;
  - Current salary rate;
2. Counseling and meeting should be held in online form.
  - Usage of IT technologies;
  - Counseling and meetings;
  - Online interview with potential employees;
3. Revision of deadlines for existing commissions.
  - For the commissions that does not include: state security, defense, social supply;
  - Cloud document exchange;
  - Integrated informational system “E-Kyzmet”;
  - Narrow-focused informational systems;

As we can see many of the resources we researched have a preference for remote workplace concept in common. There is no one common model of business for every type of enterprise. But as we can see HR practice in Kazakhstan taking major steps in solving problems related to pandemics. Some

are developing their own methods while others are adapting existing foreign methods like one that is used in Singapore. The year of 2020 brought big challenge to the HR sector around the world, and in order to accept this challenge companies main focus should be directed to qualitative human resources management. Besides using literature that are available on the web, our research will involve foreign experience of HRM. Especially, we will try to discuss in this paper whether it is possible to adapt foreign models in Kazakhstan or no. And if it is no, we will try to research why.

## Methodology

The qualitative research methodology was used to learn about the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis on Human Resource Management. The respondents were asked to provide both qualitative and quantitative information for this analysis. A semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative data, and a standard questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. Since this analysis was conducted during the COVID-19 epidemic, the researcher used a telephone interview and an online survey to protect himself and the respondents from the virus.

For data collection, a sample size of 15 human resource professionals employed in Kazakhstan from different companies, as such as public companies and private sectors. Since human resource practitioners are involved in day-to-day human resource management operations in organizations, they are presumably educated about human resource management procedures in their respective organizations.

For each of these topics we will try to determine issues of the geography that make impact on the development and change throughout the time. In the next chapters we will talk about the situation in Kazakhstan and the global trends that make impact on different other countries. Also it will cover the situation in the USA for the last decades and its changes in society on interstate level.

HRM in Kazakhstan prior pandemics.

In order to understand how does HRM works in Kazakhstan first we need to know how does it work in general. Every company has a personnel, which is employees in state that has to be managed like in any other kind of organized structure. Every employee working good, but more importantly effectively, is the main criteria that every company interested in. Often even if employees finish their responsibilities in time they do it the wrong way, the way is not optimal from the perspective of resources, including the time management. HRM is necessary in terms of creating maximum performance with minimum effort(van Vulpen, 2020). It is obvious that in order to manage personnel you have to have various instruments and techniques. You simply cannot achieve effective management by using only administrative and motivational tools. Management should be provided throughout whole stages of employment. It means that support should be made from the stage of hiring, employment period, and until the stage of dissolution of hiring contract. It underlines the difficulty and complexity of HRM. Which means, that in order to organize management process in organization we have to have systematic approach. That is why HRM requires Personnel Management System, which is set of techniques, methods, and personal organizing technology. The system consist of:

- Planning
- Selection
- Evaluation
- Motivation
- Development

It is common assumption that personnel is managed only by HR specialists within company, which is false assumption. Since the motivation and common environment in company is created by, not only

HR managers, but also by the other departments it has influence on employees status in workplace.

Depending on aims of organization, the involvement of every department will be evaluated.

How exactly the planning is processed in company by the HR managers? Is the question that can be answered depending on what kind of personnel every department is interested in. That is why planning involves different departments in the company. Planning is discussed by General Manager, Managers of Structural Units, Financial Director, and HR Director. After the discussion on what kind of workers the company is interested in, the stage of Selection comes in. At this stage HR Director in assistance with personnel selection specialists and Managers of Structural Units starts Selection of candidates for suitable positions. After employment of workers, in order to have an understanding of how well are the new employees complete their responsibilities, the stage of Evaluation comes in. This stage is necessary in terms of optimization of work process at company. By benchmarking employees at the workplace company will have an idea of the pros and cons of each worker. Collected data can be further processed for future improvement of work process at the company. In order to make right evaluation, different departments and independent factors has to be involved in the process. For example, it is hard to evaluate how good the company is operating without feedback from the outside factors, such as clients and independent experts. Internal survey is also one of the tools than can be helpful in the process of evaluation. Once you have an idea that the employees are doing good and overall optimization by the HR department is done right, there raises the question of keeping that well optimized and balanced mechanism in work. One of the key factors that makes employees be productive at the workplace is motivation. Incentives created for the workers of the company discussed not only by the HR department. Usually, the main motivation for the workers are career promotion, which leads to increase in salary. That is why involvement of Financial Department is necessary at this stage of HRM. Final stage of Development is necessary in any HRM system, since it is important to keep your employee competitive in regional market. If your employees work in the same manner ignoring the changes in the market, it may lead to decrease in performance of the company. It is

important to follow tendencies on the market and stay in time with new techniques and tool that are used by competitors.

Above, we discussed importance of HRM in competitiveness of company on the market. Before the pandemics, models of HRM in Kazakhstan have been transforming due to the changes in labor market. The main focus of HRM was improved use of employees, optimal distribution of them on workplaces, and increased responsibilities of each workers(van Vulpen, 2020). That means that HR practices in Kazakhstan experienced increased responsibility in choosing right direction for development in qualification of workers, improvements in effectiveness of forms of education, and stimulation of jobs. Most of the techniques were adapted from HRM systems that are used in The USA and Japan. Bellow we will discuss some of the techniques used abroad that are adapted on Kazakhstan market.

Added responsibilities for personnel specialists. Restructuration of personnel policy can expand functional responsibilities of HR specialists, which makes them more independent in decision-making. Mostly, responsibilities of HR managers in Kazakhstan are only limited by the hiring and firing questions of personnel, including provided papers for those operations. Enterprises does not have common system for personnel management. Lack of the system leads to stagnation in development of possibilities and promotion of workers, despite of their competence and personal qualities. Most of the companies in Kazakhstan understand that situation, that is why there are improvements towards business career planning, individually planned preparation of candidates for promotion, rotational assignments for directors and specialists, special trainings and internships on provided positions. For the last few years, companies in Kazakhstan started to hire professionally trained HR specialists in order to increase effectiveness and performance of company. In order to achieve the effectiveness, it is important to have not only the education and competency in HR management but also information on requirements and needs of lower tier directory in the company.

At the same time, it is important to understand the situation of labor market in Kazakhstan. Some of the companies tend to use tools and techniques for recruitment that current level of

development is not ready for (Nemirovskaya, 2016). It is dictated by the difference in production between western companies and ours. Main difference in this aspect is dictated by the technological development. HR manager on western companies have to improve their HRM systems because of the technological advancement in production. As an example, Japan have replaced manual labor with automatization that required operators. Therefore, new form of production in Japan forced HRM system to be reorganized.

Historical aspect. There is also historical aspect that affected development of human resources management practices in Kazakhstan. In the times of Soviet Union, the functions of HRM was performed by Personnel Department. Personnel Department was responsible for personnel chancellery, personnel reserve management, attestation and education of personnel. When Soviet Union disintegrated in the beginning of 90`s, all the party, professional unions, and Komsomol organizations have stopped operating. With that, all the ideological values about labor and human protection has gone. Due to restructuring, and lack of resources, considered by the head management unnecessary, the functioning of the traditional Personnel Department was limited by few operations. Today, companies in Kazakhstan learned certain lessons from that period. In particular, if head management does not appreciate personnel, then all the technologies directed towards motivation, and steps taken into planning career of employees will be unsuccessful. In western model of HRM this tasks are considered important and solved by the powerful instrument for control called – ideology. For efficient use of this instrument it should be, ideally, integrated at the level of production. Unfortunately, many managers in Kazakhstan underestimate the power of effective HRM, it is the main key for fast and productive integration of foreign technologies in HR services.

Education and Skills Development. The question of foreign techniques integration in Kazakhstan HRM cannot be discussed if there were no aspect of education for employees. This is main issue in terms of effective management for directors. As we discussed above, it is important that all the department in company should be involved in discussion on candidates selection. And without good managerial skills it is hard to pick right candidates. In soviet times there was no practical application of

the information gained in universities at that time. Most of the managers of that time relied on the experience rather than real competence in technological principals of production. That was the main reason why foreign technologies in HRM were not applicable in Kazakhstan practice. According to Almaty Personnel Manager E.A.Nemirovskaya (Nemirovskaya, 2016), specialists in Kazakhstan are lacking of qualification in HRM and organizational consulting. Another aspect that affected use of foreign experience in Kazakhstan was linguistical. It is mainly due to the fact that Russian and Kazakh dictionary did not have most of the terms that describes processes of management. Most of the terms were added in the last few years therefore, most of people, including directors, didn't knew their exact meaning. As we all now, language is main tool in achieving communication between people, and if the same terms are explained differently it becomes hard to achieve understanding. For example, western companies operating in Kazakhstan successfully use their own management techniques. Making sure that the process of education is efficient, western companies educate highly qualified people hired domestically and restructure the management system in production. They spend on that big resources that will have positive feedback in regard. Such western companies experience high pressure from the environment that is not ready for this kind of restructuration. Despite the large spends on education for employees, such companies operate much more efficiently rather than domestic companies.

All of the mentioned above issues related to managing style of domestic corporations is on the way to be fixed. As we all know, Kazakhstan is on the way to go for world market, and if the managerial system of domestic companies will be unclear for foreign companies they will not be able to cooperate with it. Most of the domestic corporations are implementing different techniques adapted for our market. For now, it is organization of new workplaces considering integration of new technologies; creation of educational programs for personnel, that will provide solutions for present and future tasks of organization by improved educational system and career promotion of employees; formation of motivational mechanisms designed for employees satisfaction; creation of modern system for recruitment; personnel marketing systems; employment and social aid programs; Despite all the improvements made for the last few years there are still some aspects in modern Kazakhstan HRM

practice that needs to be improved. In particular: Market that still operates on previous practical and theoretical form; Practical managing strategies that does not fits in modern corporal aims; Deficiency of technologies for researching and integration of scientific inventions in HRM; Low quality of professional and qualification education and requalification of managing personnel.

As a result we can see that Kazakhstan HR practices is on the way to be improved in scope of western models of managing personnel. However, pandemics happened in the year of 2020 resulted by the spread of virus called COVID-19 had a huge impact on the labor market of Kazakhstan. In order to overcome this challenge, considering all the flaws of HRM practices in Kazakhstan, many HR managers in Kazakhstan built new strategies involving future planning that will help to keep business operational. There are different spheres of businesses in Kazakhstan that have different aims and tasks on the market, and each of them require different approach in managing personnel during pandemics. As we know, HRM involves not only needs off operation within the company, but also should keep the legal side of its actions. In the chapter bellow, we will discuss what steps were taken during the pandemics in Kazakhstan by the HR managers from different companies, and what were the outcomes of those actions.

The COVID Pandemic and its impact.

**Coronaviruses** are a large family of viruses that include viruses that can cause a variety of diseases in humans. (WHO, 2021) The coronavirus (COVID-19) infection continues to create a critical health environment, furthering unprecedented economic and labor market disruption. so that in order to suppress the distribution of the virus, in the countries of the circle, multiple measures were started consonant with the recommendations of the World Health Company (WHO) - through physiological distancing, limiting the will to move and closing enterprises and organizations that have nothing to do with vital, before the isolation of whole megacities in various areas In accordance with the changes in

the dynamics of the epidemiological rework, the measures taken by national authorities to counter the pandemic have also been modified.

Companies focus on workplace safety as a result of the coronavirus pandemic:

- Employers stated that the first priority should be to offer employees flexible hours and remote work for employees.
- Industrial organizations were offered the opportunity to enhance employee protection by focusing on employee hygiene including personal protective equipment
- Also, government agencies have taken measures to reduce employee stress.

At the very beginning of pandemics, there was no clear warning that the lockdown might have occur in Kazakhstan. There were some precautions from government and few information on cases of disease within the country. Some bigger companies had prediction on possible lockdown, but there were no serious actions towards quarantine measures. In the middle of the march 2020 government rang an alert on dramatic increases on COVID cases for the last few days and gave an official information on possible temporary lockdown. As a result of even more growing rate of spread of coronavirus, government-initiated state emergency and lockdown requirement for the whole country. Most of the companies immediately stopped their operation and suspended all the activities, except vital operations. According to the situation, it was clear that there must be strategical decisions to be made in order to save the business. Most of the people were moved to remote work since it was considered as one of the obvious decisions to be made. During the pandemics, one of the main issues were to provide adequate working conditions for the people working at home. Main problem companies faced during this period is lack of communication, and missing standard tools that will simplify connection between workers. Although, there were a lot of freeware tools on the web, the question of ethics and legality of using them were the main concern most of the human resources departments discussed among each other. Besides communication issues, most of the human resources managers faced the problem of unnecessary personnel in the company. In other words, many of the human resources managers faced

the phase when everything within the company had to be optimized at its best in order to survive during hard times. As mentioned above, good resource manager`s task is not only to hire people and pay their salaries, but also to be aware of current state of the workers. By state of the workers in this case we mean how well the worker is doing his task, what influence, negative or positive, the environment is making on worker, whether worker is motivated and has a potential for the future growth. In case of the worker is being motivated to work and has a large contribution in company`s lifespan, he or she is considered to be valuable worker, and thus, has to be incentivized so he becomes important unit in company`s mechanism. And as we know, if some part of giant machine is being broken or malfunction, it may impact other parts of it as well, or even worse, can be the reason machine stops working. The process of determining those valuable units, making them motivated and improve themselves by competition within the company, is very important job that has to be done by human resources managers in the company. If the company is aware of what is happening in the working environment, it is easier to make strategic decisions and choices for further direction.

Mentioned above information gives us perspective on how the communication is being made and how the process being monitored by the supervisors from the top layers of the company. It is important for the managers, especially for human resources , to have total control of what is going on inside working environment. The relevance of this information to our topic is important due to lack of such tools being integrated deeply in Kazakhstan companies. During the pandemics, it is highlighted as a critical since the total control is important in order for business to be optimized. If the problem of communication can be fulfilled by third party cross-platform applications, such as Zoom, Skype, TeamViewer, or Microsoft Meetings, there are still lack of tools for collecting information of the work flow.

In order for business to be successful, it is important for the company to be aware of external factors that might affect operation process. If the company is primarily operating with sensitive data, it is important to think about the security of the company. Since the most of the applications are third-party based, there is high risk of data leak. As practice shows us, data leakage might strike company`s

reputation if it is operating with personal data of the clients. The market is very sensitive field were even small breach in system can affect the work of other companies. National companies in Kazakhstan that have a deep presence in the web, and had it prior pandemics, tend to have higher security standards, which is forward thinking steps taken in the past. But this security level is obtained during pre - pandemic period, in the environment where all the computers are physically located within the building of the company and thus have a higher security level. When the computers in the company are connected to the private network, and have proper annual maintenance, it is easier to secure protection from data leakage. But it is completely different during pandemics, when employees are operated remotely, on their own computers, on public networks. The core of the problem here is weak security level in such a scenario. And the culture of the ethics of web presence is highly important in this kind of environment. As we know the ethics and culture of the company is introduced to the worker by the human resources management in the company. It is usually very difficult to create such a secure conditions for the workers, it is even harder when total lockdown strikes the republic suddenly. Partially the problem can be solved by the virtual private network set by the informational technology department within the company. But usually, those virtual private networks are not enough for stable security of the sensitive information. When the competitors have an information on company`s operation it is impossible to provide valid competition on the market. Since the market of Kazakhstan is not highly competitive, strict security of information is not as important as it might look. This excludes sectors with financial operations such as banks, stock companies, and any other financially obligated institutions. The problem of security is not only dictated by the sensitive information, it also important since during pandemics, and during the times when almost everyone at their homes have a presence at web, it is important to be aware of internet threats.

In order to solve mentioned above issues, human resources culture has to do a massive amount of work on restructuration. It is important to determine weakest sides of the company, and eliminate all the flaws. Most important things to do at this stage is to provide stable sources of communication at any level of the company. If the main source of communication for the employees and employers are video

conference applications, there also should be tools for monitoring the workflow, and tools for collecting data. Data has a big role in any company. In order to operate with resources within the company, it is important to know what amount of resources each department has and who is responsible for it. In the beginning of the 90`s, when the computerization took place on enterprise market, it was clear that it is not only tool for sending emails, writing documents and filling spreadsheets. People had an idea that it will act as an terminal for every worker in the company. By the end of the 90`s most of the companies had a big amount of digital data that has to be analyzed in order for it to be useful in the future. Every company had its own method for document circulation in the company. There were no unified tool that can be used for everything. This is the times when ERP systems took place in the market. ERP stands for Enterprise Resources Planning. It is the system were all the data collected within the company can be presented at a particular form for further report for the top managers of the company. It is usually configured by the different vendors for the particular needs of every company. The main advantage of the system is that it eliminates manual collection of the data, since it is able to collect all of the reports from very department in the company in form of one ready report. This system also helpful in terms of resources optimization, since it collects all the information on spends and savings of each department involved in the company. Most of the big companies in Kazakhstan, such as ERG, KazTransCom, CCC, Samruk-Kazyna use SAP ERP systems in their operation.

The whole coronavirus situation made Kazakhstan companies to make annual check of the company for crisis situations. Most of the human resources managers reported that they provide auditions within the employees for actuality of contact information and personal data in order to be in touch 24/7. Also most of the companies provide preparations for the cases when some workers are unable to do their tasks. They provide simulation on whether the company is able to continue operation if some of the employees are missing or unable to come to work. Accessibility of the data for the workers is one of the key factors when it comes to the remote work. Most of the big companies were prepared for that prior pandemics. Some of the companies created strategy for such a situation during the pandemics. Since the increase of the workload on the internet, there were a threats that some of the

systems might not be ready for such a high loads. Data backup is one of the key features that might be helpful in such a situations. As we know, it is important for workers to have an instant access to the documents of the company. Many companies already had a specially developed portals for their workers where they can check and submit their works manually. Such a systems are the key factors for the companies to be ready for the crisis.

As we can see, in order to successfully operate business in Kazakhstan we have to have set of tool and skills that might be helpful during the crisis, and as a human resources manager in any Kazakhstan company you have to understand the situation within the company and what it takes to be afloat at particular moment. The moment is, that in the beginning of the 2020 there was a total lockdown in the Kazakhstan that limited the operation of businesses in Kazakhstan. And many of the companies went to stagnation in order not to spend extra resources, Some of the human resources managers decided to move their workers to paid vacations if the position of the worker does not let him to work remotely. Other types of workers who had an ability to work remotely were provided with the all necessary tools. It was a big challenge for most of them. Many corners were cut in order to have minimal presence on the market. Companies that provided service in the sector of entertainment on physical basis were stopped operations. It is the malls, stores. Other companies that were considered to be important during lockdown such as drugstores, food stores, gas stations and other type of businesses important for basic needs were allowed to continue operation. Those operation required extra spending on rebuild for to be able to accept visitors.

## Findings

In order to understand the whole Kazakhstan market situation we provided survey among some of the companies. The main scope of these surveys were to collect data on actions taken in order to provide stable operation of business. Besides, we also will find the answers on whether those actions were right or wrong, and what are the standing of the company for now as a result of those actions. The questions asked during the survey is related to impact of pandemics on business of respondent.

Table 1. Main Interview Questions

Part	Questions
1	Question about the experience in HR practices
2	Questions about Coronavirus infections effect on organizations and challenges HRM
3	Questions about changes caused by the crisis pandemics
4	Questions about the HR's response to the pandemic crisis
5	Opinions about the future of HRM, and their recommendations

The human resources manager of the KazAvtoZhol, Madina Sailaubayeva notes that since the roads were closed due to the pandemics, and the main operations of the company related to logistics, it was a hard times for their company. Since the traffic was fully closed, the incomes of the company were dropped to the close to zero marks. Company made decision to suspend 30 percent of the personnel in order to cut expenses. And when it comes to the balance between the work and personal life, besides the firing of personnel, workers also faced the stress since the new remote work style. Employees used Zimbra and Btrix for the document circulation within the company. When it comes to the salary of the workers, it remained the same since the government was the employer. Also the Workers Union supplied employees with all the necessary equipment and transportation required for the workers. In the case of this company we can see that the profile of operation were related to the sector that has suffered more due to the lock of the public roads. There is no wonder why the company decided to shorten some positions and workplaces. Since the main aspect of the coronavirus regarding high spread is related on physical contact, some of the workers duties could have been automated on the roads. It is related to the manual work such as telling and transport inspection. It is a common practice during the crisis when company reconsiders some of the positions to be automated, since the machines are able to operate without the danger to be the chain in the spread of disease.

The next respondent in our survey is Begaiym Nurpeisova, who is human resources manager at media company Nur-Media. She notes that COVID had a both positive and negative impact on their company. Positive side of the impact is due to raised demand in media services among people since the main source of entertainment during the lockdown is preliminary is media typed. Negative side, on the

other hand, is the shortage of monetization in form of advertisements, which primary source is businesses and trading companies. One of the obvious obstacles in monetization is lack of events during pandemics which is the main source of financial media sphere. One of the solutions in this case, Begaiym notes, is the online broadcasts and spotlights on them, which reduces the amount of work for employees. When it comes to balance between personal life and work, same as respondent above, many workers stopped recognize the difference between work and personal life. As a result she highlights the increased level of stress among workers. The primary focus of the company is directed to digitalization of the work process. She says that workers are performing their tasks online and have no problems with this. The main problem is broadcast of the television programs that are meant to work with audience. Also, she notes the problem with access to sound recording equipment. On the positive side she note, that the company provides all the necessary equipment regarding safety of the employees such as hand sanitizers, medical masks, rubber gloves. Besides, company provides workers with transportation, and all the necessary technical equipment. The media orientation of the company in this case shows that the pandemics can have both pros and cons, depending on the type of operation. Even though the company had a higher demand on services, monetization side of business depends on other companies. This is a case we have discussed above, when operation of one business can be interrupted by the other company.

Next respondent business sphere is related with the retail. Daulet Kunanbayev is human resources manager at Magnum. As he noted, all of the personnel moved to a remote workspace. All the discussion and conferences are provided by Zoom. Despite that, during the interview, presence of department manager is required. He noted that their company were affected not too bad by the lockdown. He also noted increased level of stress among workers. Since the shortages in workplace among other companies have increased, there are a lot of people willing to get employed at their company. The traffic have been increased, and as a result many workers are afraid of fire and shortages in salary. Company uses Click, and Sproud applications for documentation circulation. Regarding the company reaction for pandemics, Daulet notes that they were ready for such case. Main reason for that is related to high expansion rate of the company. It is opening new retails in every city of the

Kazakhstan, and it leads to high demand for the new workers every day. Despite the crisis, company reported no decrease or suspension in employees salaries. It provides all the necessary tools for medical protection such as sanitizers, masks, and gloves. Stability of the company also can be explained by the charity programs ran by the Magnum. It is in top 10 donating companies in Kazakhstan. When it comes to the whole human resources management culture in Kazakhstan, Daulet emphasizes lack of HR empathy among human resources managers in our country. In his opinion, connection between the personnel and management in company is very important for wellbeing. Magnum runs HR Bot in Telegramm to monitor the satisfaction of its employees. As we can see, in this case HR management gives a big role for monitoring considering the constant expansion of the company. As we mentioned above in the introduction, it is important for HR manager to have a feedback from the workers to understand the situation in work environment. When you have massive amount of workers in your company, it is hard to monitor whether the workers are motivated for work and satisfied by the current situation. In case of decrease in motivation the quality of the service may fall down, which may lead to the poor performance of the company. In this case human resources manager should implement the incentive systems and motivational programs. It will improve the working environment in the company and will motivate employees for better performance and promotion at workplace.

Banking sector as mentioned above is the hardest one to optimize. We surveyed human resources manager at Forte Bank, Aliya Zhanseitova in order to find out if it is true or not. As she said, they were not ready for such changes in short period of time. As a result, 80 percent of workers were transferred to the remote work, and the 20 percent of the employees were reduced. During the pandemics, Forte Bank provided survey among their workers on the question of work quality where most of the respondents reported increased level of stress because of the new working environment. Company provided employees with all the necessary technical equipment and platform for document circulation. Besides, there was monitoring of workers presence at the workplace at the beginning of the work day. In terms of response of the company for the pandemics, Aliya noted that the company implemented support for the effectiveness and focus of the workers at the remote workplace; all the

necessary tools for managing personnel and communication with each other; digitalization of all human resources processes, including remote qualification improvement program, remote hiring/firing, contracts signing program. As we discussed above, in the banking sector, it is important to have organized working structure among employees. As Aliya mentioned, they have proprietary document circulation program that provides security for the employees. On top of that, there is control over workers on presence at the workplace for better security.

Government institutions are different subject when it comes to crisis period. Our next respondent is from Ministry of Education. He reported that the main obstacle in this case was technical preparation for the pandemics. He says that the most of the employees had no access to the online resources. In the beginning if pandemics there were no dedicated programs and most of the online programs were not applicable for the tasks performed by the ministry. Most of the conference were provided through Microsoft Teams. And it is also reported that the increase in stress took place at the workplace among elders. Regarding company`s response on pandemics, it is reported that the ministry provided all the necessary medical equipment for the safety such as masks, gloves, and sanitizers. It is also reported that the rooms were disinfected at the end of workday. Considering that the most of the workers at Ministry of Education are experienced people at age, it is clear that most of the elder people are not in good relations with the technical novelties. It may took some time to provide the briefing on how to use some equipment and online-portals in order to perform at full potential.

Beside the respondents from Kazakhstan companies, we also managed to survey human resources managers at social networks. The scope of the survey was to provide key changes occurred during the pandemics. There was no open letter form for the respondents, thus many of the respondents remained anonymous. As a result of survey, we have a similar situation happened at the CIS region as it was in Kazakhstan during the pandemics. We found that, there was a large amount of business shutdown throughout the whole CIS region due to lack of preparation during the pandemics. Most of them were occurred due to unexpected changes happened at business environment. Most of the companies, as it became common practice, moved to remote workplace or work at home. Some of the

companies noted that they had foreseen such a situation and prior lockdown managed to have separate workplace in form of room with all the equipment necessary for safe operations and separate room pit for lowered disease transmission.

Another finding of this survey is similarities between Kazakhstan and foreign HRM practices during pandemics. It is noted that level of stress among workers have dramatically increased during the change of working environment. Similar to Kazakhstan human resources practice, changes were notable among elder workers since the level of integration for the previous work style was deep and since the pressure from the risk of being fired is mostly common for their age group. Besides, most of the actions taken for sustaining business at the market is quite similar. It is management of the special software for documentation cycling, reorganizing of working shifts, and support and supplies of medical equipment for the personnel necessary for safe workflow.

#### Discussions

As we found out, number one problem at the most of the companies we surveyed is increase of stress level among their workers. It is no wonder, considering ability of person to adapt to the new work place after long term work on another. It is always hard to get used to the new environment considering most of the employees operated remotely at their homes. If before, the difference between the work and home was distinct, now the place where employees do work is the same place where they rest after hard working day. And as we mentioned above, stress is the main factor which leads to the poor performance of the company. Besides the new working conditions, respondents reported on the increased rate of cut in personnel which is another factor that may lead to stress. As on how human resources managers overcome this problem, it is mainly implementation of the incentives, empathy, and, as in case of Forte Bank manager, supporting programs. Prior the pandemics, it is reported that the connection between employees and advisors were distant, now it the distance even more broader. It all leads to the necessity of the new tools and programs that will erase the obstacles between employer and employee.

Another mention regarding the tools used by human resources managers in companies is applications for remote communication. Unification of tools used by employees and the briefing

provided by the human resources managers meant to eliminate communication problems. It is reported by respondents that some of the companies provide proprietary document cycling platforms that are simplify communication and reports between layers of management. Main role in sustaining the same performance company had prior pandemics was the readiness of the company for such crisis. Some companies had such platforms prior the pandemics, which in some levels, but helped employees to reduce the stress obtained during lockdown.

For some of the companies that have not transitioned to the fully remote work operation, it was important to provide safe work zone at the offices. In order to eliminate the transition of COVID at the work place many companies took precautions necessary for such occasions. In case of COVID four main components were necessary. Main item that reduces possibility of COVID contamination was a simple medical mask. Company had to provide every employee with one of them. It basically reduces possibility of infection by COVID to 80 percent. Next step in prevention of spread at the work place is regular disinfection of the workplace with a special solutions. Since the COVID is mostly transmitted through air and contact surfaces it is important to disinfect them. For the same reason, rubber gloves are mandatory in order to prevent skin to skin contact. Temperature control at the entrance is also important in this situation, since there cannot be any cases of infection if there are no carrier. Last but not least, hand sanitizers. For the last year, hand sanitizers are present in every institutions and room.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Kazakhstan human resources management culture was on its way of development for the last 30 years. Acquiring many human resources management models used abroad we are on the way to develop our own, adapted model suitable for our market. It is glad to know that there are many unions interested in development of human resources culture. COVID-19 had a great impact on every aspect of our country. Human resources management is no exception. If prior pandemics there were a lot of conventional tools, techniques, methods, systems, and conceptions regarding hiring and making employee`s work process in the company as smooth as possible, now all of this aspects of human resources management has to be revised. Not only human resources managers have to learn how to hire

people again, but also find the way to cut the personnel in the effective way. Above, we discussed a lot of new information regarding human resources manager`s role and responsibilities in company. In order to create well balanced environment in the company, good human resources manager has to be able to determine the potential of the worker, develop this potential more by giving the right incentives and qualification improvement program. In order to develop the right strategy in the company, human resources manager should be able to understand and take actions regarding its employees. In Kazakhstan, since the collapse of USSR, there were a hard times for establishing businesses and enterprises. Many of conceptions were inherited from the old understandings were not suitable for the modern way of business operation. While the market was growing fast in terms of the sizes, there was a lack of qualitative human resources management system. Things have been changed since then, and many of the companies started hiring foreign specialists in order to improve the situation. As a result, transnational companies started running businesses on our territory. Presence of foreign companies motivated middle and small companies to improve human resources management side of their companies in order to have good performance enough to be competitive on domestic market. And for now we have a developing market that seeds interest for more players to join. In the beginning of the 2020, the COVID crisis stroke the market. Many companies stopped their operations and some of them even fell into bankruptcy. Since the main gears in any company mechanism are the employees, and the right control over them allowed companies to stay operated, human resources management took a new challenge. They had to come up with new techniques in human resources management so the employees stay effective in the company. Many of the domestic companies, in order to optimize expenses, provided cuttings in personnel and implemented tools for remote work. As seen from the surveys we made among human resources managers from domestic companies they had different impact to the performance of the company. Many of the employees had to adapt for the new working environment which in most cases leded to the increase of stress among them. Since the lockdown is softened as for today, there are still companies that are operate remotely. Many of the government services are operated online through egov.com portal. And the mass meetings are prohibited due to new cases of infection.

There is a broad field for study since we have more companies human resources managers to interview. Especially, we are still interested on how the problem of stress management will be solved by the human resources managers. Also, some of the companies are returning to the prior pandemic operation, and it is interesting for us how it affects performance, since employees have to readapt again. And information we obtained from this paper can be the basis for the more thorough studies in the field of human resources management. Primarily, it will be helpful for the students who are studying the impact of unforeseen crisis and its effect in human resources management.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Main Questions.

Part	Questions
1	Question about the experience in HR practices
2	Questions about Coronavirus infections effect on organizations and challenges HRM
3	Questions about changes caused by the crisis pandemics
4	Questions about the HR's response to the pandemic crisis
5	Opinions about the future of HRM, and their recommendations

## Appendix B

### Research Ethics Approval Form

Higher School of Economics M.Narikbayev KAZGUU University is concerned about ethical issues related to research. A student should review “Ethics in Research” section in Master’s Dissertation Guidelines and have a discussion with a supervisor regarding ethical consideration in research. Research Ethics Approval form should be filled prior to the start of data collection. A supervisor should sign a form as a sign of confirmation. A supervisor might contact Disciplinary and Ethics committee in case if there are some doubts on research and expert’s opinion is required.

<b>Name of a Student</b>	Kuandykova Arailym
<b>Degree Programme</b>	Master’s Degree
<b>E-mail</b>	<a href="mailto:arailymard@gmail.com">arailymard@gmail.com</a>
<b>Supervisor’s Name</b>	Savina Yaraslava

1. Does your research involve vulnerable groups? (Yes/No) **No**
2. Does your research involve sensitive topics? (Yes/No) **No**
3. Does your research may potentially harm (psychologically/physically/financially, etc) participants? (Yes/No) **No**

The objectives of this research is to collect information on HR practices used nowadays in Kazakhstan, problems faced during development of solutions for stable operation during pandemics, and current state of surveyed companies.

4. Describe outline and objectives of your research.
5. Describe your research design and how human participants will be involved

Research methods that I am going to use based on structural interviews with HR specialist of company and also provide survey among employee on social network for full picture and opinion for confirming my assumption. I used social survey mixed with ethnography because I mostly interested in Kazakhstani people. I will provide interview with 10 HR managers of company

6. Describe potential risks of your research to your human participants and how you are going to avoid these risks.

The main Risk for me is confidential information of company if it is can be, I will ask the interviewer about taboo topic. For example some apps that they use at work.

7. Describe how anonymity of respondents will be ensured.

The names of the respondents will be hidden or replaced with a fictitious name

8. Describe how informed consent will be provided.

There will be a document where the consent of the respondent for data analysis, if necessary, will be written

9. Describe how you will ensure privacy of data collection.

10. Describe how data will be stored

throughout and in the end of the project.

The data will be stored in a personal computer in secret access at the end of the study will be deleted for data security

Student's Name

Kuandykova Arailym

Student's Signature

Date

10.03.2021

Supervisor's Name

Savina Yaraslava

Supervisor's

Signature

**For Supervisor's:** Contact Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, if there are any ethical issues that seems controversial and unclear. Send this form and provide your explanation.