

## **A special issue on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on work, worker, and workplace!? Implications for HRD research and practices in time of crisis**

On 20 March 2020, grasping with the seriousness of the pandemic, we, the editorial team of HRDI, decided to write a joint editorial. Joint editorial only happens for special occasions; the last time was for the twenty's anniversary issue of the journal in 2017. While this time, it was not to celebrate a milestone of the Journal, but to respond to a pandemic that shocked the world. We felt strongly it was our responsibility to start a conversation with our readers, authors, reviewers, and peers so we could process and navigate a path forward together as a community. We were optimistic or tried to carry on an optimistic tone at the time (Li, Ghosh, and Nachmias 2020) by focusing on how to stay healthy and connected while be productive and keep learning at the same time. When we finished the editorial on April 1, the situation had become gloomier especially in the western world of most developed economies, Italy, US, and UK for examples. We had to continue this discussion as to how HRD could address some of the issues emerged by the pandemic. We decided to call for a special issue on Human Resource Development (HRD) and COVID 19 and publish it as the very next issue. This decision was ambitious and risky: the two issues are only two months apart and it is in the middle of the biggest pandemic of our lifetime, in addition to other normal humanly obstacles, such as conflicting priorities, time commitment and work and life balance.

We decided to go for it. The decision was made on April 9. We drafted the call and strategized in the following two days. Of course, we worried if we would get sufficient responses, so we strategized our approaches by sending it to the past HRDI editors, current board members, current AHRD and UFHRD leadership team first, and then the people whom we known to have worked on relevant topics. The call was sent out at late night on April 12, we got three confirmed responses the very next day, then other confirmed responses started to come in until we reached 10 confirmed contributions. The rest is history. All of them had to overcome the warp of the lockdown due to the pandemic, and some had to take their family and friends to safety when peaceful protests turned violent in the US just as we were approaching the deadline for the submission. All of them submitted and we included all ten

contributions in this special issue. In addition to thanking our contributors for their impressive quality of work under such a short time constraint, we want to acknowledge them for their commitment to the HRD community. More than ever, the HRD community can have a positive impact upon future thinking through sharing common goals, attitudes and aspirations. Below we offer a brief glimpse of the articles in this special issue.

The paper by Monica Lee, the founding editor of HRDI, uses the concept of agnotology to examine the UK government's actions throughout the Pandemic. With an auto- ethnographic approach, Monica provides a detailed account and walks us through a timeline of actions taken by the UK government, the underlining reasons for such a decision and the impact/consequences of the decision. In doing so, she points out how agnotology has affected the decision-making process. Her paper lays the groundwork for us to think critically as human beings and a society, not just as an academic exercise, but as a reflection of our lived experiences, that if we cannot protect our vulnerable population, how we can claim to be a civilized society.

Laura Bierema's work provides a critical assessment on how HRD scholars could offer a bold and critical research in times of uncertainty. It highlights the need to start this important conversation on HRD research and practices post COVID-19. The questions raised in this paper are pertinent and critical to stimulate the thinking of HRD researchers in the wake of this global pandemic. It is essential to pause and assess 'normal' life and work and utilize research to create a new 'normal' for individuals, organizations, communities and nations. Most interestingly, Laura, offers a critical assessment on how we can use critical research inquiry with emphasis on social justice, sustainability, effective leadership and community values. It is a great paper for the HRD community to help them undertake research with real impact.

The McGurie, Cunningham, Reynolds, and Matthews-Smith's paper examines the crisis communication approach of Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand Prime Minister during the pandemic. 'The values-centered approach by the New Zealand government saw the rejection of a herd immunity approach favored by other countries.' 'The combination of empathetic statements and actions with informal appeals for the community to "look after each other",

generates a strong image of social solidarity, where each member of society has a role to play and sacrifice to make.' It is such a stark contrast of what we have experienced in the US, the self-centred mentality promoted by the leadership, what about me: my freedom, my hair, my vacation. This paper underscores the importance of value-driven leadership, consistent and coherent communication in crisis management.

Khali Dirani and colleagues in the paper titled 'Leadership Competencies and the Essential Role of Human Resource Development in Times of Crisis: A Response to Covid-19 Pandemic' offer an assessment on what leadership competencies are critical to respond under pressure and during times of uncertainty. Further, the paper under-scores the different roles (Sensemaking, Technology Enabler, ensuring Emotional Stability and Employee Well-being, develop Innovative Communication techniques, maintain Financial Health of the Organization) that HRD professionals can play to support leaders and organizations during and post times of crisis. The authors share cases of best practices of leadership in different contexts to substantiate their discussion about the role of leaders and HRD researchers and practitioners post a global crisis.

In the paper by Julie Gedro and others, titled 'Flattening the Learning Curve of Leadership Development: Reflections of Five Women Higher Education Leaders During the Coronavirus Pandemic of 2020', five women academic leaders of a public institution in the US share narratives of their lived experiences, challenges, and unique leadership practices to respond to the sudden changes brought by the pandemic. One of the leaders said 'cultivating a sense of togetherness is an essential responsibility of those in a leadership role'. Creating a culture of self-care in a collegial and supportive virtual work environment is crucial for guarding against change fatigue and burnout.' What an eloquent way to express what is truly needed in times of crisis and prepare for the upcoming recovery.

By presenting a strategic flexibility framework in the paper titled 'Strategic Flexibility Analysis of HRD Research and Practice Post-COVID-19 Pandemic', Robert Yawson challenged us to be proactive. He used four scenarios, changes in the meaning of work, leadership, contactless commerce & education, and volunteerism to explain how

the strategic flexibility framework can guide us in thinking through the steps of anticipate, formulate, accumulate, and operate as we plan our post-COVID-19 strategies and actions.

In the paper titled 'The Role of National HRD in the Era of Covid-19', Gary McLean and Kate articulate the application of the different dimensions of NHRD very well to the current crisis. Through noting the key ways through which NHRD could have enabled countries to fight the pandemic, such as planning, leadership, responsibility charting, work re-design, systems thinking and network theory, the authors highlight the relevance of NHRD to the global pandemic crisis at multiple levels. In doing so, they provide examples of countries with most highly developed NHRD capacity and discuss the intersection of NHRD with Critical HRD.

In the paper entitled 'careers after COVID-19: Challenges and Changes', Linda Hite and Kimberly McDonald assess the impact of the pandemic upon careers. This is a timely paper as it raises some pertinent and critical questions as to how the Covid-19 experience will affect the future of careers. For many, change in career is inevitable as they experience shifts in the new virtual working environment. This critical paper addresses some of the immediate needs of the post-pandemic workforce through the critical lenses of career shock, resilience, and sustainable careers literature. It offers an evaluation on how workplaces will be configured, and how the future of some careers and the possibilities for new opportunities will weigh heavily on individuals as they navigate these challenges. This includes an assessment of the individual and contextual factors affecting employees and their occupations moving forward.

Leadership competencies, HRD practice and India's response to Covid-19 pandemic are key elements of the critical review paper titled 'Redefining, Relooking, Redesigning, and Reincorporating HRD in the Post Covid-19 Context and Thereafter'. Pallv Arora and Divij Suri evaluate how various industries responded to the virus and explain how a number of leadership competencies might have a positive impact upon future actions. The work goes further and engages in a critical discussion on how organizations should respond to changes in the workplace across India and how leaders should address issues related to HRD. Given the size and importance of the Indian economy, this paper provides advice on various aspects of international HRD and reinforces the need to

recognize that developing a more agile and flexible workforce can be derived from effective HRD strategies.

In the paper titled 'A Digital Pedagogy Pivot: Re-thinking Higher Education Practice from an HRD perspective', Valerie Anderson comments on the need to re-envision HE through the lens of HRD. The article has three objectives: first, to highlight how pedagogy in HE is aligned with HRD knowledge base; second, identifying the pedagogic opportunities arising from the digital pivot; and third, recommending which HRD practices can facilitate this fast adoption of digital pedagogy/learning in HE. In addressing these objectives, this paper serves the provocative purpose of advancing debate about the relationship between HRD and HE in the context of the global pandemic.

In sum, this assortment of articles is meant to position our thinking as HRD researchers and practitioners to not only survive, but also thrive in the crisis induced by the pandemic. As we conclude this Special Issue, we want to let you know that we always welcome ideas and discussions that help us cope, respond, prepare for the recovery, and plan for the future.