



Making sense of a mess: 'doing' resilience in the vortex of a crisis – the role of HRM

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Abstract

Design/methodology/approach: The study is based on 136 questionnaire responses, 32 interviews and 25 managerial narratives. The mixed qualitative methodology was designed to enable an investigation of the impact of COVID 19 and, the response of HR professionals.

Purpose: The purpose of the paper is to investigate how HR professionals, in a variety of organizations, responded to the crisis brought about by the event of COVID 19. In particular, it aims to show how organizations, across all sectors, in Western Australia responded with urgency and flexibility to the crisis and showed 'resilience in practice'.

Findings: HR professionals have responded with agility and flexibility to the impact of COVID-19. They have done so through extensive trial and error, sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing. They have not simply activated a preconceived continuity plan.

Research limitations/implications: The research indicates that resilience is an ongoing accomplishment of organizations and the people in them. The objective was description rather than prescription, the research does not offer solutions to future pandemic like situations.

Practical implications: The research suggests that, given the impact of COVID-19 on organizations, HR practices, processes and policies will need to be thoroughly reconsidered for relevance in the post-COVID world. Possible future directions are highlighted.

Originality/value: The research considers the actions of HR professionals as they responded to a global crisis as the crisis unfolded.

Making sense of a mess: 'doing' resilience in the vortex of a crisis

Introduction

Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998, p. 233) defined organizational crises as, "specific, unexpected, and non-routine events or series of events that [create] high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization's high priority goals." Crises of this kind will make previously ordered organizational worlds suddenly very disorderly. In such situations it will become a critical task of organizational leaders and managers to make sense of and re-order organizational activities and operations, to maintain organizational continuity and sometimes, to ensure survival. It is likely, then, that if we really want to understand how a severe and unexpected external crisis affects organizations and work, we need to explore the experience and actions of those involved in dealing with it.

In much of the literature on crisis management, business continuity and organizational resilience, the key focus is on how to prepare an organization for a crisis and to develop the capabilities required to do so (Branicki *et al.*, 2019; Comfort *et al.*, 2010; Conz and Magnani, 2020; Groenendaal and Helsloot, 2019; Macrae and Wiig, 2019). These research activities are important, because if we can identify the capabilities of 'resilient' organizations in times of crisis, they might then be used as the basis for developing resilience in other organizations. This approach to crisis management, business continuity and organizational resilience has been studied extensively. However, it is limited by (1) focusing mostly on retrospective analysis of crisis events and their impact and, (2) an approach to research that is predominantly positivist in its ontology. This dominant approach assumes, ontologically, that resilience is a 'construct' to be measured and, therefore can in practice, be a collection of capabilities that are identifiable and developable as coping mechanisms in crisis situations (Duchek, 2020; Kantur and Iseri-Say, 2012).

In this paper, we offer a different ontological approach to coping with a crisis. We promote resilience, not as a construct to be measured or, a capability for development as coping mechanisms in advance of a crisis, but as organizational practices performed in specific ways, as a crisis is happening, to ensure organizational continuity. The collection of capabilities that may end-up constituting 'resilience', we suggest, are initially the practices and actions taken in specific organizational contexts as a crisis occurs. When an unexpected and severe crisis happens, organizations need to respond *in the vortex* of the crisis situation in often very ad hoc and tactical ways. Ontologically, it seems to us, the issue is one of how

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3 people within organizations, and particularly HR managers and professionals, experience,
4 interpret and act in a crisis, as it is happening. The nature and essence of their response is not
5 necessarily the implementation of a prepared business continuity plan or the application of
6 predetermined capabilities. Rather, the response is undertaken through trial and error, sense-
7 making and wayfinding, and responding to a situation as it unfolds (Beyes and Steyeart,
8 2012; Weick *et al*, 2005).
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14 Drawing on 136 questionnaire responses, 32 interviews and 25 managerial narratives,
15 we address the question – how did organizations, and specifically, HR professionals,
16 managers and leaders, make sense of the COVID-19 crisis and, decide and develop
17 appropriate organizational and HR responses as the pandemic took hold? In doing so, we
18 make the following contributions to the literature on dealing with a crisis. First, while most
19 research into organizational responses to crisis is retrospective and seeks to identify
20 capabilities associated with organizational resilience, we track how sense was made and
21 actions taken as a crisis unfolded. Our contribution here is to show how resilience, (as the
22 capacity to ‘bounce back’), is a *process*, not a state, and is manifested in the everyday
23 responses to a crisis as it evolved. Furthermore, we suggest, that the capacity to bounce back
24 is not something built into an organization, but is an ongoing accomplishment, always a
25 work-in-progress. In crisis situations, organizations, and specifically decisions made by
26 organizational management and leadership, are characterized by *bouncing around*, rather than
27 bouncing back, trying different ways to find solutions to crisis induced issues. We offer an
28 approach to resilience that is ontologically distinct from the majority of research on this topic.
29 Second, we focus specifically on the role of human resource leaders, managers, professionals,
30 and others with people management responsibility, in responding to COVID-19. The role of
31 human resource professionals within crisis situations is an under-researched topic and our
32 article answers calls for more consideration and exploration of their role (Cooke *et al*, 2021;
33 Elgamal, 2018; Raetze *et al*, 2021; Stokes *et al*, 2019).
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49 In this paper our primary concern is to describe and assess the actions of HR
50 professionals, managers and leaders, as they made sense of, responded to and, made decisions
51 about, the organizational impact of the COVID-19 crisis. We do this through interrogating
52 data collected as the pandemic unfolded. The frameworks used to illuminate the data are
53 those associated with Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and, particularly, the ideas related to
54 ‘ordering’ (Law, 1992, 1993, 2009). We are also influenced by the model of loss and
55 recovery developed by Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014).
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3 We justify the value of our research in that it highlights the importance of exploring
4 how, in real time, HR professionals were dealing with the organizational impact of
5 COVID-19 and searching frantically for ways of coping with its impact. In the following
6 section we outline the frameworks used to support our approach.
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10 11 12 13 **Actor Network Theory and The Model of Loss and Recovery** 14

15 Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014) argued that, when a critical event occurs, individuals often
16 enter a liminal interval or space. In this interval, a previous situation of equilibrium and
17 order, becomes disordered. The challenge for the individual is to recover equilibrium, to
18 ‘bounce back’ and to move forward. The extent to which an individual recovers from the
19 setback is an indication of their specific response to the event or shock which has caused the
20 problem, and the extent to which they have developed and shown resilience through the
21 period of disequilibrium. This idea is also of considerable relevance to organizations,
22 specifically, in crisis situations, such as the current pandemic, where a previously ordered
23 world becomes disorderly, and where, preparing for such a specific event was largely
24 impossible. The response of an organization to an unexpected event, as with individuals,
25 concerns the enactment of resilience in practice and, its success is not guaranteed.
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35 At the most basic level, leaders and managers in organizations in crisis will need to
36 make some sense of what is going on and to respond to it as quickly as possible. In such a
37 situation we suggest that organizations will enter a transitional space, where the fluid and
38 dynamic responses of organizational management, leadership and staff will be crucial to
39 organizational continuity and building resilience. The extent to which this occurs we
40 conceptualize as *resilience in action*, the ‘doing’ or, ‘performing’ of resilience which, as a
41 crisis unfolds will hopefully, ensure the survival and continuity of the organization in
42 question. Conceptualizing resilience in this way offers an alternative to fixed, reified ideas of
43 resilience and draws attention to how resilience is performed in everyday practice in a crisis
44 situation. The specific value of this approach is that it shifts attention from the idea of
45 implementing a plan, to the idea that dealing with a crisis is an ongoing accomplishment. The
46 advantage of this conceptual turn to *performing resilience* is that it enables a consideration of
47 how resilience is enacted. Responding to crisis incorporates the way organizations and, the
48 people in them, actually live in the world and interact with each other. Our focus, then, is on
49 ‘doing’ resilience, rather than ‘being’ resilient.
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3 “Organizations need order” (Mintzberg, 2013, p. 126). For organizations, in any
4 sector, disorder and chaos are not conducive to the stable and secure delivery of services and
5 products. When there is a crisis for organizational management the priority is to maintain
6 and/or re-establish order of some kind for business continuity and survival. How they do this
7 has been of some concern to a number of scholars (Boin and van Eeten, 2013; Hallgren *et al*,
8 2018; Jo *et al*, 2021; Newswander, 2012). We argue, though, that order is never fixed, it is
9 never complete. Organizations are always in a state of perpetual ordering, usually through
10 the activities of their managers, and this becomes much more significant in conditions of
11 crisis. For Law (1993, p.2), this is a “concern with the plural processes of socio-technical
12 ordering”. Ordering is an ongoing accomplishment, subject to the way actors (managers and
13 leaders) make decisions and take actions within the context in which they exist. Because
14 those contexts are different, the outcomes and consequences of these decisions and actions
15 are also very different.
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26 For HR and business professionals dealing with the impact of the pandemic, how they
27 made sense of the situation and engaged in organizational restructuring, will be related to the
28 specific circumstances in which they found themselves. For example, the industry, sector, as
29 well as availability of technology, type of employees, nature of the work undertaken, among
30 many other things, will impact how managers make sense of, define and (re)order work and
31 working practices in a crisis. In investigating our empirical data, therefore, we are interested
32 in analyzing the responses of HR managers and professionals to COVID-19.
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39 One final point, it is not our concern to generate principles as to how best an
40 organization and its management can prepare for, cope with and recover from, a crisis.
41 Rather, it is to describe, explore and understand how attempts at ensuring organizational
42 continuity are made in the midst of a pandemic, particularly as reflected in the role of HR
43 professionals, in a rich variety of organizations. We highlight what the central issues appear
44 to have been and, in doing so, we contribute to the literature on how organizations respond to
45 severe crisis as it is happening.
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52 In the next section we outline the general themes of research into organizational
53 resilience and, how our approach moves beyond resilience, as a set of capabilities to be
54 embedded within organizations, and towards resilience in action.
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Organizational resilience

The study of ‘resilience’ has increased considerably in the last 20 years (Kantur and Iseri-Say, 2012; Lengnick-Hall *et al*, 2011; Raetze *et al*, 2021; Vanhove *et al*, 2016; Vogus and Sutcliffe, 2007; Witmer, 2019). Its focus has been on identifying how individuals can become more resilient or, how organizations can develop the capabilities to be resilient and what those capabilities are. This preparedness, it is argued, enables individuals and organizations to ‘bounce back’ from adversity. Events, such as COVID-19, act as a shock and will “expose organizations, and the individuals within them, to abrupt disruptions in the flow of individual and organizational activities and routineswhich call for new patterns of action” (Branichi *et al*, 2019, p. 1264).

At the individual level, authors have noted ways in which resilience can be developed. For example, it has been argued that resilience is connected to flexibility and adaptability (Bourbeau, 2018); to the quality of relationships and positive attitudes (Barton and Kahn, 2019; Kahn, *et al*, 2018). It has also been noted that leadership and managerial style can influence resilience (Giustiniano *et al*, 2020; Sarkar and Clegg, 2021). From an organizational perspective, the capabilities of employees are believed to contribute to an organization’s capability to be resilient (Duchek, 2020), as are the nature of an organization’s structural arrangements (VanderPlaat, 2016), the capacity to learn (Orth and Schuldis, 2020) and, relationships and connections with other organizations (Hartmann *et al*, 2021).

Despite the growing research into resilience, however, there is still an academic debate as to its definition (Williams *et al*, 2017; Hartmann *et al*, 2020; Hillman and Guenther, 2021). More specifically, resilience is often abstracted and reified from the actual situations and contexts in which people and organizations have to show ‘resilience’. For example, research might identify ‘flexibility’ and a ‘positive attitude’ as important to resilience, but it is unclear what these concepts actually mean in specific organizational contexts and in specific sets of circumstances. Similarly, it remains unclear what it means for an organization to have a ‘resilient structure’ or a ‘capacity to learn’ that aids ‘bouncing back’. There is little consideration given in the current business and management literature to the idea that resilience is an ongoing accomplishment. And, related to this, that under circumstances of crisis and adversity *all* individuals and organizations have the potential to be resilient. In this sense, resilience is something that manifests itself when an individual or organization is confronted by a crisis situation. A response to a crisis is not always (or ever)

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3 about following a plan, therefore, but is contingent on the situation as it arises and evolves.
4 We argue that further exploration is required of shocks and crises that have disrupted
5 organizational routines and order and, that the COVID-19 pandemic, has presented such an
6 opportunity. More specifically, we feel that investigation is needed into how HR
7 professionals, in particular, but also other organizational managers and leaders, make sense of
8 these events and disruptions as they develop and, make decisions and take action in relation
9 to them.
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18 **Human resource management, crisis and recovery**

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21 Employees in all organizations will be crucial in any response to a crisis. A key role,
22 therefore, will often fall to human resource professionals (HRPs) and those who have people
23 management responsibility. There has been increasing amounts of research during the
24 COVID-19 pandemic on the role of HRM. Carnevale and Hatak (2020, p. 183), for example,
25 argued that human resource professionals are “having to quickly venture into the “unknown
26 unknowns” as they strive to help their workforce adapt to and cope with radical changes
27 occurring in the work and social environment”. Kniffin et al (2021) considered the impact of
28 COVID-19 on work, working and workplaces. In fields related to, but outside of HRM, there
29 have been contributions concerning the impact of COVID-19 on mental health, which is an
30 increasing organizational problem (Polizzi *et al*, 2020), and careers (Akkermans *et al*, 2020).
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39 Research on the role of HRM in crisis and recovery before COVID-19 is dispersed
40 (Farndale *et al*, 2019; Hutchins and Wang, 2008; Kim, 2020; Premeaux and Breaux, 2007;
41 Wang *et al*, 2009; Wooten and James, 2008). Hutchins and Wang (2008) and Wang,
42 Hutchins and Garavan (2009) considered the role of human resource development in crisis
43 management through strategic interventions. Kim (2020) investigated employee work-role
44 performance after a crisis situation in relation to organizational resilience. Lengnick-Hall,
45 Beck and Lengnick-Hall (2011) considered the role for HRM in developing organizational
46 capabilities for resilience. However, despite these contributions, the role of HRPs in crisis
47 situations has not been extensively explored. We know virtually nothing, for example, about
48 how they and organizations as a whole, actually respond to a crisis in ‘real’ time, as a crisis
49 unfolds, and the dynamic issues they face as they react. In the following section we describe
50 our research process and method.
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Research context and method

This paper draws on a study conducted in the first year of the COVID-19 crisis in Western Australia. Over this period, three separate sets of data were collected. Australia generally, and Western Australia in particular, has suffered comparatively fewer COVID-19 cases and fewer deaths, per head of population, than most other countries. However, at the onset of the pandemic, it was clear that it would be a crisis of significant proportions that would impact society as a whole and organizations specifically. The opportunity to study how sense was made of the crisis as it evolved, how it was defined and characterized by human resource professionals and, what actions and decisions they would take, clearly presented itself.

Research design

There were three elements to the research design and collection of data.

1. A Qualtrics survey.
2. Interviews.
3. Written narratives.

The first part of the study involved convenience sampling to gather responses to a short Qualtrics questionnaire. The objective was to acquire as many responses as possible from HR manager-leaders and other organizational leaders with people management responsibility. The purpose of the survey was to get answers to closed and open-ended questions at the very early stages of the COVID crisis, approximately one month into the pandemic. This enabled us to get data about what organizations were dealing with and, how HR professionals and organizational management and leadership more generally, were making sense of and responding to the situation. We received 136 responses to the survey from a wide variety of organizations in all sectors (private, NFP, government/public) (see charts 1, 2 and 3), completed in many cases with extensive additional comments about the situation as it was unfolding.

Second, as part of the survey, respondents were asked if they would be prepared to be interviewed. Thirty-two participants were ultimately interviewed from all sectors of the WA economy (see Appendix 1). We were especially interested in gaining more granular and specific insights into how organizations were dealing with the crisis. In particular, what aspects of their specific industry and sectoral contexts were impacting on how sense was

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3 made and actions taken. In addition, we considered it important to understand how the
4 internal operations of organizations were being restructured and with what positive and
5 negative implications. The interviews built on the initial survey by enabling a closer
6 understanding of how participants and their organizations were dealing with the people and
7 operational issues. Once again, given that we were, at the time, in the midst of the pandemic,
8 participants could speak to the way sense-making and wayfinding (Beyes and Stayaert, 2011;
9 Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005) was being performed in the evolving crisis.

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16 Third, we were able to access 25 written narratives from business managers and
17 professionals describing how their organizations were dealing with and making decisions
18 about, the impact of the pandemic as it unfolded (see Appendix 2). The narratives were
19 acquired 10-12 months into the pandemic situation. By this time managers and organizations
20 had more experience of the impact of COVID-19, but were still continuously impacted by the
21 need to adjust to external factors and government decisions. The three data collection points
22 of the research design allowed for methodological and source triangulation (Liamputtong,
23 2020), and considerable variation in the type and nature of participants and organizations.
24 This was an important and desired feature of the research programme. In addition, the
25 methodological triangulation enabled us to enhance the depth of our data at every level and
26 move from the general to the more specific and, from the individual to more organizational.
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38 *Data collection and analysis*

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40 The survey consisted of 18 questions, five of which were to collect background data on the
41 participant and their organization. The purpose of the thirteen other questions was to explore
42 key issues and problems participants faced early in the pandemic (May 2020). Where
43 participants were allowed to make more substantive qualitative comments regarding issues
44 arising from the crisis, most took the opportunity to do so. This gave us some very valuable
45 and extensive insights into the early responses of organizations to the crisis and the role of
46 HR within this.
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53 The purpose of the *semi-structured interviews* was to delve deeper into the impact of,
54 and response to, the COVID crisis. Five themes were covered. First, to understand how HR
55 leaders, managers and professionals dealt with the impact of COVID-19 on work, working
56 practices and specific elements of the HR system in their organization. The second theme
57 focused specifically on the issue of remote working. Third, the interviews considered
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3 employee relations issues relating to the impact of COVID on pay and conditions, stand-
4 downs, redundancies, re-deployments and, issues relating to leave entitlements and the role of
5 HR in these matters. Fourth, we were interested in the impact of COVID-19 on employee
6 mental health and well-being and the role of HR in dealing with such issues. Finally, the
7 interviews sought to explore what HR professionals thought the long-term implications of the
8 pandemic were likely to be for HR, employee relations, work and working practices. In
9 particular, how the role of HR would change in the future as a consequence of COVID-19.

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16 The third stage of the research was to gather data from business managers, which
17 enabled us to get an additional perspective on how organizations were responding to the
18 crisis. In particular, and extending some of the first stage survey data, we wanted to explore
19 how the role of HR was perceived by other organizational managers and also discover how
20 important the role of HR was seen by other managers and leaders. This data was acquired
21 through the *written narratives* of executives, managers and other professional colleagues of
22 HR teams and managers in various organizations. Participants were asked to write a review,
23 of any length, about the organizational response to COVID-19, with particular attention to be
24 given to the role of HRM.
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32 Figure 1 summarizes the main dimensions and themes derived from the analysis of
33 the data. It indicates what were the foci of attention for organizations and specifically HR
34 professionals, in responding to the crisis. It is important to note that our approach was to
35 acquire as much variation as possible in relation to organizational and sectoral contexts and
36 responses to COVID-19 and, therefore our approach was one of non-probability sampling
37 and voluntary response sampling.
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46Figure 1 about here.....
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50 In analyzing the data, our concern was to integrate what participants said and wrote
51 from the three stages of data collection. Using the Gioia methodology (Gioia *et al*, 2013), the
52 analysis moved from first order concepts, as reflected in the illustrative examples (tables 3-
53 10), to second order themes and aggregate dimensions, as represented in figure 1. Overall, we
54 conducted a three-dimensional exploration of the role and actions of HR leaders, managers
55 and professionals as the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded over a 12-month period in Western
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3 Australia, in a wide variety of sectors and industries. We have aggregated the responses, but
4 it is important to note that responses to COVID were often, organizationally, industry and
5 sectorally specific, a topic that will be explored in future articles. As we are still in the
6 COVID-19 era, this situation is ongoing, it continues to evolve. In the following section we
7 review our findings, structured according to the key areas of concern as indicated by the
8 participants. We reveal that responding to a crisis is fluid and dynamic, built on sensemaking
9 and wayfinding, trial and error in specific contexts. All sectors were not impacted equally by
10 the pandemic, and the contexts are centrally important in understanding responses to it.
11 Illustrative examples of themes identified in our analysis are represented in tables 3-10.
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22 **Findings**

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24 Figure 1 represents a consolidation of our data within a framework derived from Conroy and
25 O’Leary-Kelly (2014). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic forced most organizations
26 into a transitional space. It highlights the significant dimensions of concern for HR
27 professionals, and other leaders and managers, arising from our analysis. In particular, it
28 identifies entry into a volatile, uncertain situation as organizations were forced into a state of
29 disequilibrium and disorder as a consequence of the COVID-19 situation. Second, as noted,
30 it identifies the specific aggregate dimensions where issues and problems were most evident.
31 Third, it highlights themes more specifically, that were associated with the aggregate
32 dimensions. Fourth, we also note, in figure 1, the views of participants with respect to the
33 future of HRM in a post-COVID-19 environment.
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45 ***Pre-COVID equilibrium, order and stability***

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47 Given that what emerged from our data were eight key areas that were the focus of activity
48 after COVID19 struck, we assume that prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, these areas
49 were adjudged to be ‘stable’ or ‘ordered’. That is, they were considered fit-for-purpose by
50 organizations under prevailing pre-COVID conditions. The eight key areas are: staffing
51 issues; mental, physical health and well-being; working practices; communication;
52 performance management; technology; staff uncertainty; business continuity; and leadership
53 capability. As we will describe, these areas overlap. The role, insights, and actions of HR
54 professionals were central to how organizations acted in the midst of the crisis and to build
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3 resilience in practice. In the following sections we describe the key issues HR professionals
4 dealt with, as the impact of the pandemic unfolded.
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9 ***The liminal interval – the need for change***

10 *Staffing issues*

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12 Our data highlighted a number of important staffing issues with which HR has had to contend
13 through the pandemic. First, *motivation and morale*. An event, such as the pandemic, has
14 never been experienced for over 100 years. Its impact in the context of life generally has
15 been enormous. In this situation, working becomes a secondary consideration to living or
16 even, staying alive. An important early issue for HR professionals in relation to the
17 pandemic, was to maintain employee motivation and morale in the face of the impact of a
18 deadly virus.
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27 Second, our data suggested that an important challenge for organizations was to
28 maintain *social distancing* in the workplace. As an understanding of the transmission of the
29 virus became clearer, social distancing became a critical issue. From the point of view of
30 working arrangements, the need to social distance required the re-ordering of contact,
31 communication and connection. This ultimately led to the great remote working movement
32 of staff, (considered below, in more detail). Third, in terms of staffing issues, there were
33 substantial reviews of existing HR and organizational policies. In particular, issues of *pay*
34 *and leave*. Crucial to this were decisions about how the pandemic might impact
35 remuneration under circumstances of reduced workload and, how leave could be a lever for
36 cost-savings. Fourth, *recruitment* had to be moved on-line. Some organizations continued to
37 recruit through the pandemic, but there was a necessary shift to on-line recruitment and much
38 greater focus on the use of technology in the process.
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48 While recruitment was ongoing, it was done in parallel with *reviews of workloads*,
49 *reviews of roles and positions* and, as a consequence, *redundancies and terminations*. HR
50 professionals were engaged in processes of reordering work and working practices and,
51 creating new efficiencies in what and how work was done and, who was to do it and where.
52 Simultaneously, there was an increasing concern for ensuring key employees were *retained*
53 and, if necessary *redeployed*. In addition, HR practices often had to be transformed, for
54 example, as mentioned previously, on-line recruitment. *Training and development and*
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3 *performance management*, in particular, had to be re-thought and reviewed. Large swathes
4 of training and development were moved on-line, and new thinking had to be adopted in
5 relation to managing remote workers and working. Frequently changing government
6 regulations and guidelines meant that there was constant flux in how organizations needed to
7 operate. There was a requirement for agility in response, based on rapid sense-making and
8 decision-making about what was immediately required to maintain business continuity under
9 extreme circumstances. Responses were often also organizationally specific. The
10 consequences for employees were not always positive. Decisions were being made or had to
11 be made, with a speed that most organizations had never before experienced. Furthermore, as
12 decisions were being made about retention, redeployment, redundancies, there were crucial
13 issues concerning staff being *physically and psychologically disengaged*. Most organizations
14 were operating on a trial and error basis, introducing new practices, monitoring them
15 constantly and, making changes quickly, if necessary. In very different sectoral and industry
16 contexts, organizations and HR professionals in particular, had to make decisions that were
17 pragmatic. Organizations had to become more flexible and agile in response to the pandemic,
18 but this resilient response was based on doing what was perceived as necessary under very
19 specific circumstances. Table 1 offers illustrative examples of the above themes in relation to
20 the aggregate dimension of staffing issues.
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42 *Mental health and well-being*

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44 Our data indicated that HR professionals had to contend with increasing mental health and
45 physical well-being issues related to COVID-19. Mental health in the workplace was already
46 an issue of some considerable importance before COVID. What COVID did was exacerbate
47 these concerns. Not only were people concerned about their health, but they were also
48 concerned about their *job security and the considerable uncertainty induced by workplace*
49 *changes*. Furthermore, the almost immediate introduction of remote working (considered
50 below) forced many employees into *social isolation* and turned domestic spaces into work-
51 spaces. *Workplace relationships* were almost overnight disrupted and, our data indicated that
52 there was a substantial increase in *tension, stress and mental health issues* overall.
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Participants reported that they, as HR professionals, were central to the effort to deal with these issues, but they were also caught in a contradiction. At the same time as they were reviewing staffing, workloads and advising on changes in staffing levels, lay-offs and redeployments, they were having to ameliorate the impact of these decisions in the context of a pandemic. For HR professionals, in particular, reordering work and working practices can be a contradictory activity, whereby they are making decisions that are both cause and effect of the issues they are dealing with. We found that there was an enhancement of existing employee assistance programmes (EAPs) and a proliferation of new ones. Initiatives were developed to maintain social connectedness through technology, which in some cases organizations had to upgrade to achieve this objective. Table 2 offers illustrative examples of the themes associated with this dimension.

.....INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE.....

Remote working

A major, if not the major, focus of HR activity in response to the crisis caused by the pandemic, was the immediate and urgent need to move staff to remote working. Remote working was obviously critical for business and organizational continuity and as such, was the focus of HR activity from the very beginning of the pandemic. Our data shows that some of the initial decisions with respect to remote working concerned who *should and could work remotely; whether appropriate technology was in-place; how to deal with health and safety issues in the home; how to deal with issues of confidentiality and; how to manage performance.*

These reordering needs required, as mentioned above, comprehensive reviews of current policies and practices and, in some instances, consultation with trade unions. There were, furthermore, many more questions to answer such as how *workloads would be managed, staff supervisory issues, meeting arrangements, the overall relevance of workplace policies, the technology capability of staff, how to manage staff performance and productivity.* These were not issues for which there could be predetermined solutions. HR professionals had to make sense of the remote working situation and negotiate and implement new arrangements quickly. They were, in practice, confronting the questions – what should we do, what can we do and will it work? As our data indicated, decisions had to be made speedily and were usually made with a high degree of risk attached in a context of

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3 considerable uncertainty. This was particularly the case for organizations that had no
4 experience of remote working. They needed to “provide people in the unit with definition,
5 predictability, a sense of what is and what can be” (Mintzberg, 2013, p.127). This was not an
6 easy task. At the same time as they were finding solutions to issues that threatened
7 organizational continuity, they were building a resilient organization.
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12 In addition, there was the added complication of working from home. Specifically,
13 the integration of work life and domestic life spaces. The office, for those who work in them,
14 is generally constant and ordered. Domestic spaces are inevitably different, not only the
15 space itself, but the nature of relationships and interactions that take place within them. The
16 reordering of work and domestic spaces has been well-researched (Beauregard, 2011;
17 Richardson and McKenna, 2014; Tietze and Musson, 2005), however, the full implications of
18 the effects of this spatial reordering require further investigation. We might anticipate that
19 the issue of the return to workplaces will become an important topic of discussion as we
20 move out of the COVID pandemic. Table 3 offers illustrative examples of the above themes
21 in relation to the aggregate dimension of remote working.
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38 *Communications*

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40 In conditions of change the importance of communication is often emphasized. In the
41 context of a global pandemic, where insecurity and uncertainty dominate, effective and
42 consistent communication and information exchange becomes even more critical, but is very
43 difficult to achieve. Practice is much messier than theory. In the era of social media, where
44 individuals are exposed to a variety of ‘communications’, much of it may exacerbate
45 uncertainty rather than allay it. Our data indicated that HR professionals, at least at the
46 beginning of the pandemic, were generally not in a good position to assess the veracity of
47 COVID-19 related information. This was mainly because there was so much of it and
48 uncertainty existed even within ‘official’ channels. Our participants noted that there were
49 competing channels of communication/information that made its management difficult within
50 an organizational context. Moreover, our data indicated that HR professionals were often
51 overwhelmed by the variety of information available and had difficulty distinguishing ‘truth’
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3 from 'fiction'. This made organizational communication enormously complex. The rapidly
4 changing context, government decisions and, the global nature of the pandemic, created a
5 situation whereby communications needed to be fast, regular and relevant, which in itself
6 created further issues in an uncertain environment. Table 4 offers illustrative examples of the
7 above themes in relation to the aggregate dimension of communication.
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15 16 17 *Performance management* 18

19 The pandemic has impacted the entire HR system in many organizations. Perhaps the biggest
20 impact has been on *performance management*, where the move to remote working has raised
21 a number of issues regarding performance and productivity. Our data indicated that *trust* was
22 an important theme in relation to the issue of managing employee performance. Our
23 participants noted that line managers and organizational leaders were often worried about the
24 implications of remote working on performance. A major sentiment, as reported by our
25 participants, was that many managers and leaders held the view that employees could not be
26 trusted to perform unless they were in the workplace and subject to monitoring. It was
27 interesting that the *need* for employees to work remotely brought this issue to the surface and
28 reflects, we think, a more fundamental problem with manager-employee relationships in
29 some workplaces.
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32 Our data also highlighted the requirement to reorder and review performance
33 management approaches in light of remote working. More specifically, many participants
34 noted that *greater clarity was required in establishing goals and objectives*. In addition,
35 participants emphasized that new ways had to be developed to deal with *disciplinary*
36 *processes with respect to performance*. Issues were also identified with respect to *job and*
37 *work design*, as very little was known about how people worked in remote environments.
38 This included not only the 'workspace' in the remote location, but also how employees
39 managed their working time in the context of having to work in a domestic space. Table 5
40 offers illustrative examples of the above themes in relation to the aggregate dimension of
41 performance management.
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Technology

Moving to remote work required appropriate and functioning technology. For almost 50% of the organizations that participated in the survey segment of this study, remote working was a completely new endeavour. Organizing suitable technology under these conditions and, with urgency, was a difficult challenge for HR professionals. Not only was there the technology itself, but also access to the required internet bandwidth. Furthermore, not everyone had technological capability and, consequently, there was a need to develop suitable *training and development*. Table 6 offers illustrative examples of the above themes in relation to the aggregate dimension of technology.

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Business continuity

All of the issues that participants identified as needing change, and which are highlighted in the previous sections, were crucial to maintaining organizational continuity across all sectors of the WA economy. HR professionals, therefore, were critical actors in the reordering of practices, policies and programs and their implementation. The reordering of work was undertaken urgently as the pandemic unfolded, with the objective of ensuring continuity for organizations. HR professionals needed to be aware of the connections between changes that were being made in policies, practices and processes, and organizational operations in relation to external stakeholders and, most particularly, customers. They were, however, never certain that anything they did would eventuate in success, given the uncertainties of the situation. Our data shows that HR professionals in particular, worked hard to restore order, stability and continuity. However, in doing so, there were often unintended consequences and system effects of decisions that were made, which then had to be 'corrected'. There were also unintended consequences that arose because of the interconnectedness of elements of the HR system. For example, on-line recruitment inevitably led to the need for on-line onboarding, that was often ignored. In short, organizations are systems of flux and transformation, of mutual causality (Morgan, 2006, pp, 241-272). Table 7 offers illustrative examples of the above themes in relation to the aggregate dimension of business continuity.

.....INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE.....

Leadership capability

Our data also indicated concerns among HR professionals about the quality of organizational leadership when COVID struck and beyond. We have mentioned above the *trust issues* that were identified; where leaders seemed to lack trust in their employees' willingness to work productively in remote locations. This was manifested in examples of *resistance* to remote working, among organizational leadership, even at the risk to employees' health. Our data also highlighted the *lack of understanding* leaders and managers had of employment law and HR issues more generally. This is concerning, but also gave HR professionals an opportunity to show their considerable worth to leadership in relation to the importance of employment law.

A further important theme raised in the dimension of leadership capability was the *poor quality of communication and messaging* by leaders. Some of our participants noted that leaders seemed unable to craft communications and messaging that would facilitate less anxiety among the workforce. In relation to the importance of *order and control* this is significant. If managers and leaders cannot create the perception of order and control, it is likely to create further uncertainty and insecurity. There is little doubt, as we have mentioned above, that crafting clear, unambiguous communications in the early stages of the pandemic proved very difficult. An important finding from this study is that constructing communications and messaging in the face of extreme uncertainty is a complex, but crucial task for leaders. Table 8 offers illustrative examples of the above themes in relation to the aggregate dimension of leadership capability.

.....INSERT TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE.....

Discussion

Drawing on a large body of quantitative and qualitative data, collected through three distinctive approaches, our objective has been to describe how HR professionals operated to

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3 reorder work, working practices and working relationships in response to the impact of
4 COVID-19. In this endeavour we were informed by Law (1992, 1993, 2009) and also,
5 Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly’s (2014) concept of the ‘liminal interval’. Of central importance
6 to our analysis of the data was “to be relatively modest in our claims” (Richardson and
7 McKenna, 2014, p. 734) and, to allow the challenges of reordering work, working practices
8 and HRM systems undertaken by HR professionals, in association with others, “to present
9 itself in its messy incomplete practice” (Richardson and McKenna, 2014, p. 734).

16 We began with the assumption (figure 1) that *order*, of a sort, existed in the
17 organizational world before COVID 19. When the pandemic struck, organizations were
18 subject to disorder and disequilibrium. In this context, the question for many organizations
19 was: how could some semblance of order be restored? In the context of our research, this
20 gave rise to three questions: what did organizations do? How did HR professionals deal with
21 the impact? How did the necessary reordering and reassembling of work, working practices
22 and working relationships take place to maintain organizational continuity?

29 In the discourse of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), when an event, such as COVID-19
30 occurs, new ways of ordering and reassembling the social world become necessary (Latour,
31 2005). The pandemic has obviously disrupted organizational and work processes. Much of
32 the task of reordering these processes fell to those in the human resource management
33 function. And so, in this paper we have simply and modestly, inspected events as reported by
34 our participants. We have attended to the actions, decisions and activities described by HR
35 professionals in particular, as they attempted to reorder work, working practices and working
36 relationships, to maintain organizational continuity as best they could. In addition, we have
37 taken the position that the organizational disorder created by COVID-19 required responses
38 that were specific to contexts and situations. We also argue that, through the actions and
39 decisions taken, organizations were developing and ‘doing’ resilience. Different types of
40 crises require different and often unique situational and contextual responses, not generic
41 ones.

51 Organizations, and the work undertaken within them, as well as policies, practices
52 and processes are never fixed. They are always in a state of flux. Even if a ‘rigid’ policy
53 exists, its interpretation is always subject to circumstances. Organizations are spaces in
54 which things are practiced, interactions are had, and decisions are constantly made (Beyes
55 and Stayeart, 2011). In responding to the impact of COVID-19, HR professionals have been
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3 central in re-ordering organizations and workplaces and the practices and processes within
4 them. This was not simply the implementation of a 'new' order in place of an old one. It was
5 ongoing ordering and reordering. As our data shows, there was a great deal of trial and error
6 in reacting to the impact of the pandemic. HR professionals and managers tried new and
7 different practices, policies and processes, some seemed to work, some did not. Some
8 seemed to work better than others. When some failed, old practices and processes returned or,
9 something new was tried.
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18 *Managerial and organizational implications*

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21 What will eventuate in the future as far as 'orderly' working practices and HR processes are
22 concerned, no-one really knows. In any case, we have taken the position, that whatever
23 practices appear they will be ephemeral and be subject to the natural flows of ordering,
24 and/or, the bigger changes that may be necessary because of the impact of a very significant
25 event. Our participants indicated, however, that there is likely to be a new focus and
26 direction in some key areas of HRM with respect to the reordering of work, working practices
27 and working relationships in a post COVID-19 organizational world. If HR professionals
28 and organizational leaders follow through on these ideas there will be significant implications
29 for work, working practices and HR processes and systems. We outline these ideas below.
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37 First, in relation to *flexible working practices*. There is now a growing debate on the
38 balance between working remotely and/or in the workplace. It is likely that many employees
39 who have worked and can work remotely, would prefer the opportunity to continue to do so
40 in a post COVID-19 environment. This will inevitably require a much more strategic
41 approach to how this is managed and administered, particularly from a HR and legal point of
42 view. Our data suggests that this will be a key concern of HR professionals in many
43 organizations. Second, our data indicated there will be a much greater concern with *cost*
44 *reduction, staffing efficiencies* and *workforce shaping* in the post COVID-19 environment.
45 Implicit in these issues is a substantial reconsideration of how work is done and why, and a
46 greater focus on building more agility and flexibility into the workforce. A greater emphasis
47 is also likely to be given to how work is *performed*. There will be a greater interest in
48 ensuring that performance objectives have more clarity and that what work is done is directly
49 relevant to goal achievement. In addition, there appears to be a move from workforce
50 planning to workforce shaping. A crucial lever here will be the relationship between what
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3 work is done, who needs to do it and how it is done. In short, a much more granular
4 understanding of matching staffing requirements to the work and ways of working will
5 become prominent. Specifically, more consideration will be given to the 'gig' workforce,
6 using more casual/gig workers and structuring work for more short-term contract positions,
7 and more project-based.
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12 Third, our data has indicated organizational issues of *trust*, specifically in the context
13 of remote working. This is an important and problematic finding from our data. Our HR
14 participants indicated that leaders and managers in some organizations have concerns about
15 whether employees can work remotely productively. However, our data also suggested that
16 more remote working needs to be accompanied by a more focused, goal driven view of
17 performance. Evaluation of performance is not about 'presenteeism' but more about the
18 achievement of clearly defined objectives in relation to greater flexibility and autonomy as to
19 where work is done and when. The role of HR professionals in reordering these
20 arrangements will be crucial in the future.
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25 Fourth, our data suggested that HR professionals believe they will be influenced much
26 more by technology and analytics in HR activity decision-making in the future. HR
27 technology is already having an important impact on many aspects of HR, for example,
28 recruitment, talent management, performance management. The use of chatbots and artificial
29 intelligence to undertake routine HR tasks, will likely become much more widespread as the
30 issues of efficiency and cost become more prominent.
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35 Fifth, our participants feel there will also be more focus on continuous job and work
36 (re)design. There will be a greater use of technology, more flexibility in work and working
37 practices, increased focus on job specific work requirements, efficiencies and workforce
38 shaping. All of these will involve processes of reordering and redesigning work in the post-
39 COVID-19 era. Sixth, our data indicated that the continuous redesign of work, working
40 practices and working relationships will need to be accompanied by the development of new
41 and more dynamic and fluid HR policies, processes, practices and systems. It appears, from
42 our research, that HR professionals are aware of the need to be more innovative and creative
43 in the development of HR practices and processes, as well as policy frameworks, in a post-
44 COVID-19 environment. Moving from an industrial approach to HR, to one that is more
45 relevant to the post-industrial, digital age, is an important agenda that requires re-imagining
46 across HRM and which our participants generally recognized as important.
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Seventh, the data revealed that participants expect that they will give more focus to the *employee journey and employee experience* in the future. The requirement to retain high performers will necessitate much greater attention to their needs. This, in turn, will require innovative and creative HR initiatives that will require restructuring of many HR practices and processes. In addition, it is likely to entail the increasing use of AI and HR tech to gather a much more fluid, nuanced and, dynamic picture of how the employee experience can be improved through the employee life-cycle.

Finally, our data indicated that there will be a greater focus and concern for mental health and well-being beyond COVID-19. The pandemic has clearly highlighted these issues, however, even before the pandemic the issues of workload stress, bullying and harassment in workplaces, was having a significant impact on mental health. While these concerns can be related to problematic management and leadership, they also relate to poor work design and pressurized, unreasonable deadline-driven workplace systems, processes and objectives.

Workplaces and organizations are constantly in a state of reordering, tinkering and incremental change. With COVID-19, however, we argue that organizations were confronted with an event of such magnitude that they entered a period of disequilibrium. Within this space, organizations and, specifically HR professionals, through sensemaking, wayfinding and trial and error sought to restore semblances of order, with varying degrees of success. The sustainability and resilience of organizations requires constant change in the way things are done. In the event of a severe crisis, such as COVID, this compounds the urgency and intensity of a response. It is the response itself that creates sustainability and resilience, not the implementation of a predetermined plan.

Conclusion

To reiterate, our purpose in this paper is simply to show how HR managers and professionals, went about reordering elements of work in response to COVID-19. Following ANT, we are not concerned to “translate the many expressions of...informants into...a vocabulary of social forces” (Latour, 2005, p. 57); or, to theorize about how they responded as they did. Rather, our concern has been, modestly, to highlight in the very real context of the impact of a global pandemic, what issues HR professionals had to deal with, and what they tried to do in order to alleviate the impact of COVID and ensure organizational continuity in their own specific contexts. In this sense, we hope to have contributed to an understanding of how,

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mainly through the work of HR professionals, organizations developed resilience in practice as a crisis unfolded.

Personnel Review

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Personnel Review

Number	Gender	Age	Industry	Position
1	M	50-54	Agriculture	General Manager Human Resources
2	M	50-54	Union	State Secretary
3	M	60-64	Numerous: Finance, Energy, Insurance and Agriculture	Board Chair
4	F	50-54	Aged care	Chief Operating Officer
5	M	50-54	Mining	Project Manager
6	M	60-64	Community Support	Corporate Services Manager
7	F	30-34	State Government	HR Business Partner
8	M	45-49	Local Government	Manager People and Culture
9	F	50-54	Disability Services	CEO
10	M	55-59	State Government	Manager Organisational Development
11	F	40-44	Aged Care	General Manager Human Resources
12	M	45-49	Union	Senior Policy Officer
13	F	45-49	Union	State Assistant Secretary
14	M	N/A	Union	Public Sector Co-Ordinator
15	F	N/A	Mining	Human Resources Manager
16	M	N/A	State Government	Human Resources Manager
17	F	45-49	Private Small Business – HR Consultancy	Human Resources Manager
18	F	50-54	Private Education	IR Advisor

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19	F	40-44	NFP	HR Business Partner
20	F	25-29	NFP	HR Business Partner
21	F	35-39	Federal Public Sector	IR Advisor
22	F	45-49	State Public Sector	Operations Manager
23	F	40-44	Private Multi-National	HR Executive Director
24	F	25-29	NFP	HR Advisor
25	F	35-39	State Public Sector	HR Advisor
26	F	35-39	Private Sector Multi-National	Senior HR Advisor
27	M	50-54	Manufacturing	HR manager
28	M	40-44	Consulting	HR Lead
29	F	45-49	Consulting	HR Advisor
30	M	45-49	Tourism	HR manager
31	F	45-49	Hospitality	HR Regional Director
32	F	40-44	Mining	Director, Capability Development

Appendix 1: Interviewees

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Industry	Position
A	F	30-34	Property	Manager, Policy
B	M	30-34	Mining	Project Manager
C	F	30-34	Transportation	General Manager
D	M	40-44	Facilities	Lead
E	M	45-49	Construction	Director
F	M	40-44	Government	Procurement Manager
G	F	40-44	Finance	Financial Advisor
H	F	40-44	Health	Operations
I	M	40-44	Consulting	Operations Manager
J	M	40-44	Mining	Superintendent
K	F	45-49	Government	Manager
L	F	45-49	NFP	General Manager
M	M	40-44	Mining	Superintendent
N	M	40-44	Oil and Gas	Lead
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O	M	30-34	Mining	Lead
P	M	35-39	Mining	Specialist
Q	M	45-49	Mining	Manager
R	F	40-44	Services	Manager
S	M	35-39	IT	Manager
T	M	45-49	Hospitality	CEO
U	M	50-54	Oil and Energy	Manager
V	M	40-44	Trading	Manager
W	M	50-54	Transportation	Manager

Appendix 2: Narrative contributions

Table 1: Illustrative examples of staffing issues

Theme	Illustrative examples
Motivation and morale	<i>“The seriousness of the pandemic really impacted morale and the motivation of employees, as well as management. It has been difficult to deal with that”.</i>
Social distancing	<i>“Some staff were not taking social distancing seriously”.</i> <i>“Changes had to be made in the office for social distancing”.</i> <i>“In response to this, like many organisations we undertake major efforts and measures aligned with restrictions and procedures. There were discussion and implementation of restructuring, in response to social distancing measures and guidelines, which in some departments resulted in splitting up teams into smaller units, varying shifts to reduce contacts and holding virtual meetings to reduce physical proximity”.</i>
Changing government guidelines	<i>“This was also a channel that engaged in a timed response to these issues, such as when it was appropriate for the customer service desk to close and mandatory office closure. A lot of these measures were mandated by Federal and State Government notification and dictated to staff through communication channels”.</i> <i>“Issues concerning how government advice translated into practice, as everything was constantly changing”.</i>
Recruitment	<i>“We are facilitating a more streamlined recruitment, induction and on-boarding process for staff, as previously this has been heavily focused on face-to-face engagement”.</i> <i>“Recruitment policies were modified to reflect the limitations placed on inter and intrastate travel within WA. The recruitment process normally involves the candidate to come to site for a day to see the operation, as well as meet the team they would be working with”.</i>
Review of HR policies	<i>“Policies are taken into account a more transient workforce, working from home will become a norm for organisations that have not previously embraced it”.</i> <i>“HR is developing processes in place to be more flexible than ever”.</i>

Retention and redeployment	<p><i>“There were people we didn’t want to lose, even though, their work had disappeared, so we needed to redeploy these people of lose them”.</i></p> <p><i>“Businesses within our group forming partnerships to assist each other in redeployment efforts should one or all be affected to retain key staff”.</i></p>
Changing workloads, redundancies and terminations	<p><i>“Need staff working in new teams to address huge covid workload”.</i></p> <p><i>“Dealing with many claims against redundancies”.</i></p> <p><i>“Problems with managers inconsistently applying a work from home policy and distributing workloads unfairly”.</i></p>
Staff engagement	<p><i>“Prior to the transition to working from home, we introduced Microsoft Teams as a method of facilitating better face-to-face engagement (albeit online) and as a platform for social connecting”.</i></p> <p><i>“Staff are feeling highly anxious which impacts their engagement and motivation”.</i></p>

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Table 2: Illustrative examples of mental health and well-being

Theme	Illustrative examples
Job uncertainty and insecurity	<p><i>“Introducing counselling to deal with uncertainty”.</i></p> <p><i>“Rapidly dealing with general uncertainty around staff’s future with the company”.</i></p>
Social isolation	<p><i>“Some of our staff are having problems because of social isolation”.</i></p> <p><i>“Staff working in isolation were also encouraged to take regular breaks and to also ensure they “shut off” once the working day was over. This was to help with some potential negative effects of working in isolation and the extended roster of 2 weeks on and 2 weeks off”.</i></p>
Increased tension and stress	<p><i>“Recognising that staff were experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety was one of the first challenges the organisation faced”.</i></p> <p><i>“Having children at home makes it challenging for people to focus on work and adds to stress”.</i></p>
Relationships	<p><i>“Relationships have suffered, and the virtual world is a difficult substitute”.</i></p> <p><i>“Connections, or a lack of them, have affected people’s lives”.</i></p>

Table 3: Illustrative examples of remote working

Theme	Illustrative examples
Management of staff	<p><i>‘There are a few pockets of the organisation that have tried to ‘rort the system’ when it comes to working from home, with an expectation that they should be allowed to reverse their annual leave and use the government initiated Covid-19 leave’.</i></p> <p><i>“Staff who felt their home environment was not conducive to working from home refused to work and thought they should be able to still be paid whilst sitting at home doing nothing”.</i></p>
Workloads, managing performance and productivity	<p><i>“Dealing with productivity levels of some staff working from home”.</i></p> <p><i>“Staff often thinking that it was ok to be less productive when working from home”.</i></p> <p><i>“We have been putting in new measures to maintain and enhance productivity in remote working”.</i></p>
Health and safety	<p><i>“We are finding it hard to get leadership to commit to support mental well-being through EAP system”.</i></p> <p><i>“Developing a focus on the mental well-being of remote employees”.</i></p>
Issues of confidentiality	<p><i>“We needed ways of dealing with confidential materials”.</i></p> <p><i>“Confidentiality was an issue for some of our leaders in moving to remote working”.</i></p>
Work and domestic life	<p><i>“Supporting staff to juggle work and take care of family”.</i></p> <p><i>“Issues relating to who should pay for using home wi-fi”.</i></p> <p><i>“Space! Different homeworking situations”.</i></p>
Who should be working from home?	<p><i>“Dealing with Directors resistance to people working from home, even though there was no alternative”.</i></p> <p><i>“Almost forcing people to work from home, for all sorts of health and business reasons”.</i></p>
Technology	<p><i>“More working from home, this has shown us that our investment in digital is warranted. We feel that our investments in digital technology is a sound investment. This has shown us how going digital will help us have an advantage in our line of business”.</i></p> <p><i>“This requires completely new ways of communicating and working; different uses of technology and different expectations on output and performance”.</i></p>

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Relevance of policies and practices	<p><i>“Performance management processes/policies will be reviewed as they are currently not equipped to deal with performance management of remote teams”.</i></p> <p><i>“Policies will need to take into account a more transient workforce, working from home will become a norm for organisations that have not previously embraced</i></p>
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Personnel Review

Table 4: Illustrative examples of communications

Themes	Illustrative examples
Technology and communication	<i>“We had to introduce communication software very fast”.</i> <i>“We had to make sure people could and were communicating through technology”.</i>
Miscommunication	<i>“There were many issues communicating changes to employment conditions to employees”.</i> <i>“Employees communicating differently meant we had to be aware of miscommunication”.</i>
Inconsistent communication	<i>“Dealing with inconsistent messages about working from home and, establishing a policy easy to communicate”.</i> <i>“HR were not giving consistent communication about what was happening. We were struggling to get the message right”.</i>

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Table 5: Illustrative examples of performance management

Themes	Illustrative examples
Need to review existing system	<p><i>“People working at home, required a re-visitation of our performance management tools and strategies”.</i></p> <p><i>“We are developing a more focused approach to performance management in a remote working situation, which will likely be important in the future”.</i></p>
Trust	<p><i>“Employees unwilling to provide management with daily updates of work activities undertaken, and communicating dislike about attending daily toolbox talks at the beginning or end of each work day. This has seen an increase in micromanaging from managers and, employees feeling a sense of lack of trust from their superiors”.</i></p> <p><i>“Dealing with upper management who lacked trust in people performing in remote work”.</i></p>
Disciplinary issues	<p><i>“Moving disciplinary issues on-line was a difficult issue”.</i></p> <p><i>“Consideration around numerous issues including productivity, employee training, development, and how disciplinary actions are imposed seemed absent”.</i></p>
Ways of working and performance	<p><i>“If what was to be done at home was the same as what was done in the office performance could be maintained, but there were issues with that”.</i></p> <p><i>“We knew nothing about how remote working would have an impact on performance”.</i></p>

Table 6: Illustrative examples of technology issues

Themes	Illustrative examples
Training	<p><i>“We quickly needed to adopt and adapt to the use of technology as a way of working”.</i></p> <p><i>“Those who struggled with using technology were pushing to be back in the office, but we had to force them to be trained”.</i></p>
Availability	<p><i>“We had to fast track the implementation of 360 degree camera technology and smart glasses to enable more people working from home”.</i></p> <p><i>We had to rotate staff in the call centre as we can't ramp up on the technology to have full remote workforce”.</i></p> <p><i>“The most demanding issue quickly became logistical capability as the immediate challenge of remote office working became enabling access to technology”.</i></p>
Suitability	<p><i>“We have had to think about how suitable it is to use technology for recruitment and employee conduct issues”.</i></p>

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Table 7: Illustrative examples of business continuity issues

Themes	Illustrative examples
Implementation of change	<p><i>“It was important to be aware that while some people are excited by the idea of working from home and use it as a platform to perform well, for others remote working can result in additional stress and loneliness, that can manifest into deteriorated performance”.</i></p> <p><i>“For some employees changes in the way of working meant fundamental changes in heir way of life and we had to make sure managers realized this”.</i></p>
Urgency and agility	<p><i>“Supporting teams to be more agile in how they worked became a problem”.</i></p> <p><i>“Leaders have shown a lack of urgency in dealing with the COVID-19 situation in my organization”.</i></p>
Business operations	<p><i>“We are becoming better as an organization as we now know that we can mobilise our staff at the drop of a hat to work from home, that now forms part of our business continuity plan”.</i></p> <p><i>“We have organized employees, so that about half are on COVID-19 related activities and half on business as usual”.</i></p>

Table 8: Illustrative examples of leadership capability

Themes	Illustrative examples
Trust	<p><i>“Prior to COVID-19 working from home (WFH) was simply not an option. Our CEO requires visibility and does not trust employees to be productive whilst remote working. He jokingly says, “when people are working from home you will find them sunbathing at the beach”.</i></p> <p><i>“All managers were instructed to develop specific WFH KPI’s for their team members. Rather than acknowledging this was an unusual time and providing guidance on how to manage a remote workforce, the HR focus was on ensuring staff did not ‘slack off’ – this didn’t help the situation”.</i></p>
Poor messaging	<p><i>“For example, six weeks after revealing two staff were to be stood down, the CEO revealed that some staff were to be made redundant and that all staff would be receiving a call from their line manager that day. This made every staff member feel insecure in the employment, increasing stress and could have encouraged people whose jobs were safe to look elsewhere. The messaging was terrible”.</i></p>
Resistance to remote working	<p><i>“Leaders had little awareness of what was involved in remote working and, resisted it as much as they could”.</i></p>
Understanding of HR issues and employment law	<p><i>“Our role was central as HR because leaders and managers had very little understanding of employment law and the changes that were happening”.</i></p> <p><i>“If leaders and managers learned anything it should be that they need to listen to HR about the law”.</i></p>

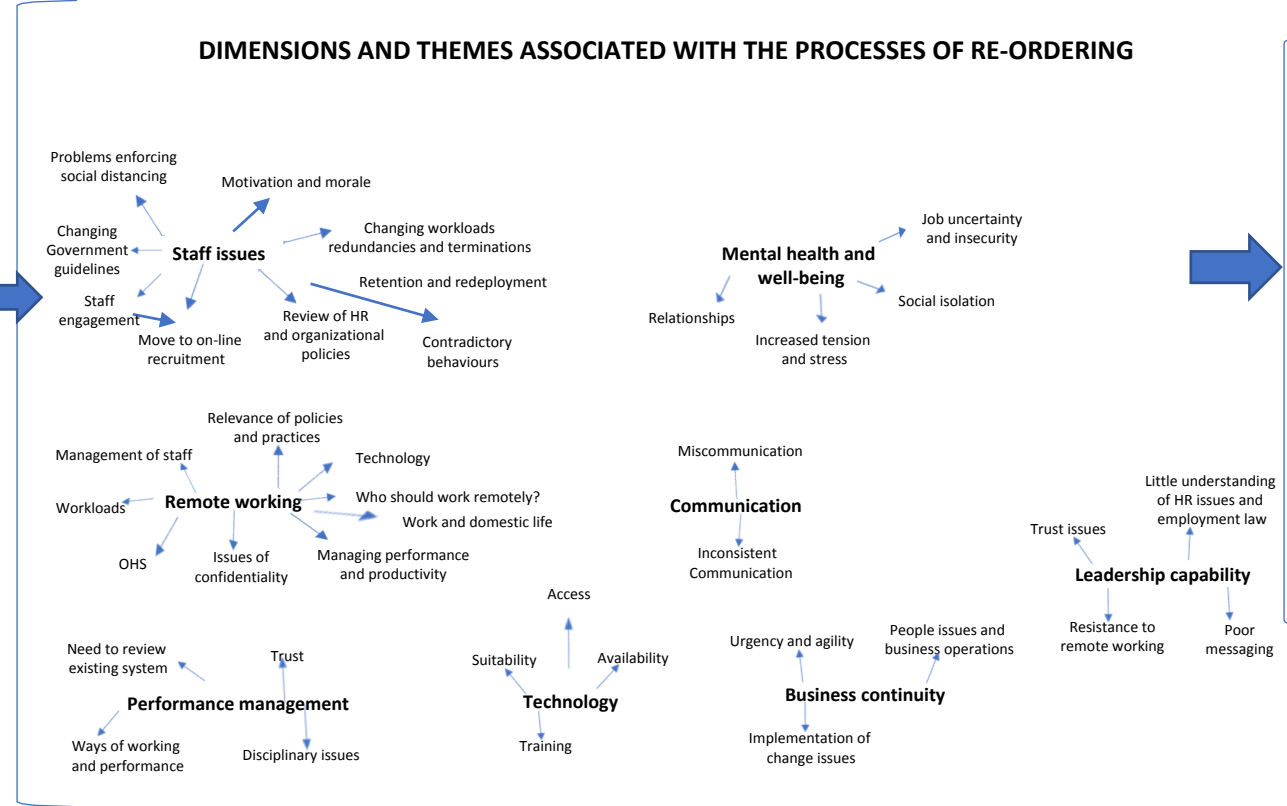
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THE LIMINAL INTERVAL

DIMENSIONS AND THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROCESSES OF RE-ORDERING

Pre-COVID19
Equilibrium/Order

- Staffing
- Mental health and well-being
- Working practices
- Communication
- Performance management
- Technology
- Staff uncertainty
- Business continuity
- Leadership capability



- Envisioning post-COVID HRM and work and a new equilibrium?**
- More flexibility in working practices
 - More focus on cost reduction
 - Efficiencies and workforce shaping
 - Better focus on performance management
 - Greater use of HR Tech
 - More focus on work design
 - Focus on more dynamic and fluid HR policies, practices and systems.
 - Anticipate and scenario plan the shape of the future workforce, shape rather than plan.
 - Re-imagine, continuously, the whole HR landscape
 - Enhance the employee experience
 - Greater concern for mental health
 - Better, more relevant leadership development

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Chart 1: Survey respondents by sector/industry

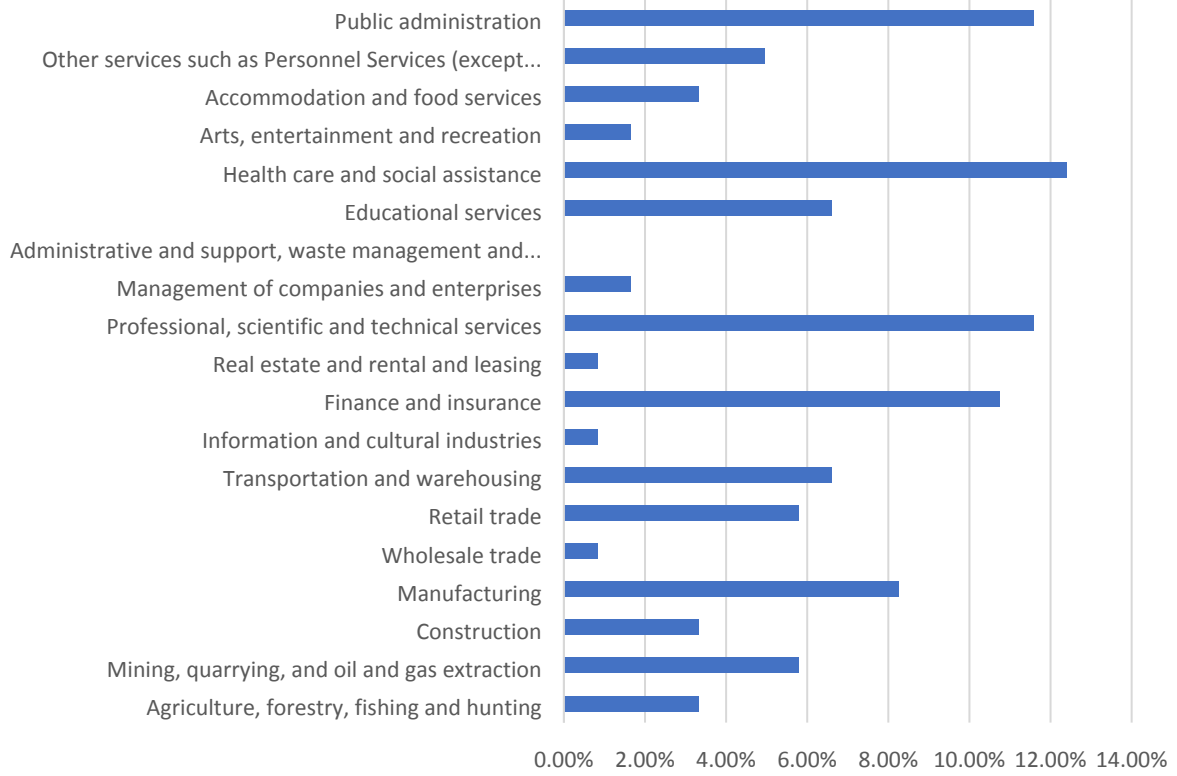
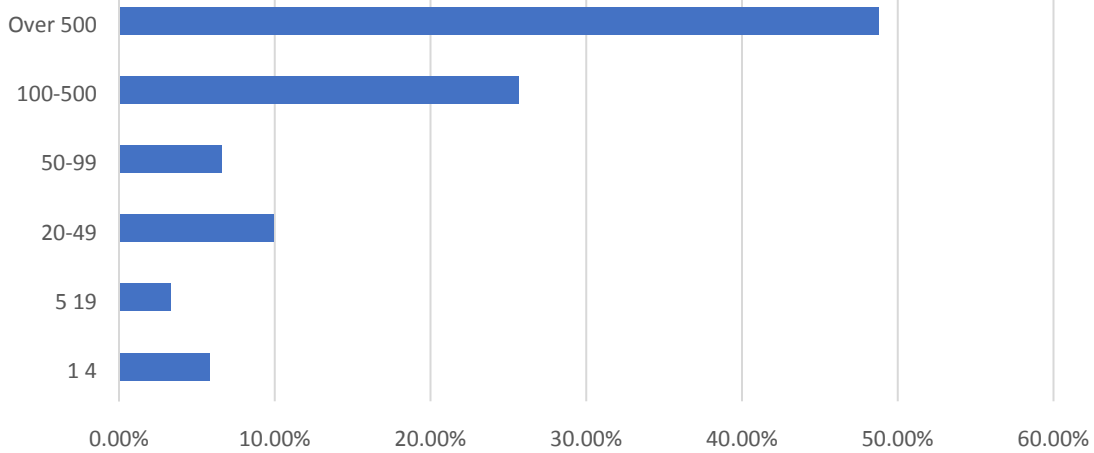
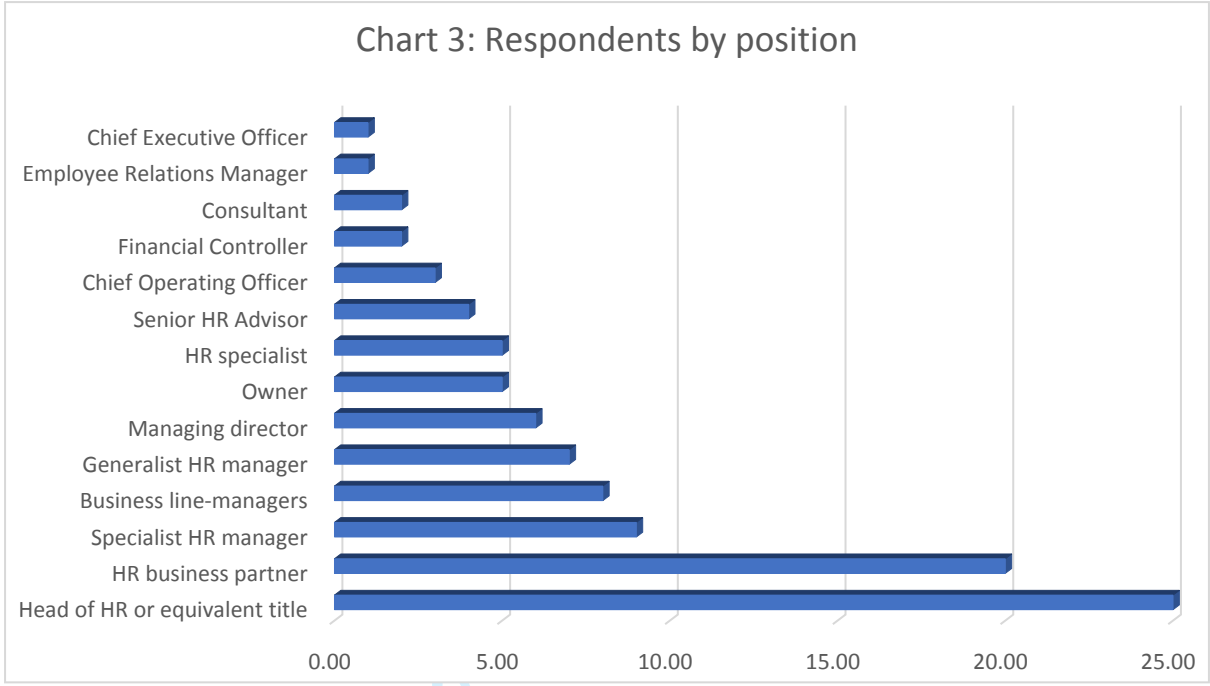


Chart 2: Respondents by organization size



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Personnel Review