

# Turnaround and Human Capital Strategies during and Post-COVID-19 Eras: Challenges and Implications for People Managers in the Zimbabwean Gold Mining Sector



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to assess how COVID-19 impacted the Zimbabwean gold mineral sector and the Human Capital Management (HCM) strategies deployed to mitigate the negative consequences. The COVID-19 scourge created an intricate and challenging environment for human capital management professionals, and a crisis is imminent in the mining sector unless survival strategies are formulated by management. An exploratory research design was therefore employed. This study also hinged on the qualitative research approach. The study was guided by the principle of saturation. Saturation was reached by 20 participants. The research used a purposive sampling technique. We found that employee motivation, talent management, health and safety, and employee engagement are essential for propelling mining firms to prosperity during pandemics. The study recommends that managers develop and implement a policy focused on employee health and safety. Furthermore, employee engagement should be promoted, as it can lead to valuable business outcomes. Additionally, organizations should train their employees to develop modern skills, which are vital in today's dynamic world. Finally, people managers should consistently provide clarity of expectations, adjust difficulty levels, and offer opportunities for recognition to motivate employees. The country stands to benefit from the diverse and rich mineral resource base if employees are well motivated as this engenders employee commitment.

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## INTRODUCTION

For the past three years, much debate and discussion throughout the globe have been centred on Covid 19. A plethora of studies have been done to explore the causes, prevention, and cure and how it impacts the competitiveness of various businesses and the well-being of people in various communities.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 plague strongly impacted Human Capital Management (HCM) within mining organisations.

<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Reza Azizi et al., "Innovative Human Resource Management Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Narrative Review Approach," *Heliyon* 7, no. 6 (June 2021): e07233, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07233>. Sergio Madero Gómez et al., "Stress and Myths Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic's Effects on Remote Work," *Management Research: Journal of the Iberoamerican Academy of Management* 18, no. 4 (2020): 401–20; Eric J Chow, Timothy M Uyeki, and Helen Y Chu, "The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Community Respiratory Virus Activity," *Nature Reviews Microbiology* 21, no. 3 (2023): 195–210.

This resulted in unprecedented shifts in the global business arena. The pandemic led to the digital transformation of the business environment as well as giving birth to remote working systems. COVID-19-associated measures changed traditional HCM and brought in a new era of managing human capital. The pandemic left organisations irrespective of size grappling with uncertainty, volatility and ambiguity.<sup>2</sup>

COVID-19 brought a new dawn to mining firms as the management had to deal with the arduous task of embracing a remote working culture.<sup>3</sup> Undeniably, at its core, the COVID-19 pandemic was a human crisis. Thus, human capital leaders had to come up with survival strategies as the virus was wreaking havoc globally. Human capital managers kept employees informed about the pandemic's impact on the organisations. Thus, by amplifying the role of human capital leaders, COVID-19 became an inflexion point with substantive implications for human resource practitioners globally.<sup>4</sup> In the highly complex world of people management, organizations are obliged to maintain both inward and outward approaches in times of crisis. The health crisis period called for the people managers to be equipped with knowledge and skills so as to adequately manage capital resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic had an effect on all firms globally hence the mining sector in Zimbabwe was no exception as miners faced layoffs, and reduced working hours ultimately leading to financial hardships. The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted global health,<sup>5</sup> leading to logistics disruptions,<sup>6</sup> and commodity price volatility.<sup>7</sup> Many miners reduced or suspended operations in a bid to comply with government restrictions.<sup>8</sup> Lockdowns, the closure of borders, and the disruption of logistics affected the supply of critical goods and equipment and caused uncertainties.<sup>9</sup> The lockdown policy enacted by the government was mandatory.<sup>10</sup> Thus, exploration and development projects were delayed and in certain instances cancelled due to restrictions and uncertainty.<sup>11</sup>

Survival strategies however need to be crafted so as to keep the mining industry afloat as currently it is the only driver of the economy. Business organisations globally are making various adjustments regarding human capital management and work practices. The people management function forms an integral part of living and is essential wherever human efforts are to be undertaken to achieve desired objectives. HCM plays a pivotal role in the sustainability of mining organisations as they adapted performance management practices to accommodate remote work as the business climate continued to change. People managers ensure that effective performance and employee well-being are of utmost priority in keeping organisations afloat during a crisis.<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that both employers provide

<sup>2</sup> Mitika Nangia and FARHAT Mohsin, "Revisiting Talent Management Practices in a Pandemic Driven VUCA Environment-a Qualitative Investigation in the Indian IT Industry," *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 7 (2020): 937–42.

<sup>3</sup> Pawan Kumar Singh et al., "COVID-19 Pandemic and Transmission Factors: An Empirical Investigation of Different Countries," *Journal of Public Affairs* 21, no. 4 (2021): e2648; Javad Yoosefi Lebni et al., "How the COVID-19 Pandemic Effectuated Economic, Social, Political, and Cultural Factors: A Lesson from Iran," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 67, no. 3 (2021): 298–300.

<sup>4</sup> Paula Caligiuri et al., "International HRM Insights for Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications for Future Research and Practice," *Journal of International Business Studies* 51, no. 5 (July 2, 2020): 697–713, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00335-9>;

Kevin M. Kniffin et al., "COVID-19 and the Workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights for Future Research and Action.," *American Psychologist* 76, no. 1 (January 2021): 63–77, <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000716>.

<sup>5</sup> International Labour Organization Monitor, "COVID-19 and the World of Work: Updated Estimates and Analysis (Third Edition)," International Labour Organization, 2020, [http://oit.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_743146.pdf](http://oit.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> M. Wang, "A Measurement Model for Assessing the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Supply Chains," *International Journal of Agile Systems and Management (IJASM)*, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Kniffin et al., "COVID-19 and the Workplace: Implications, Issues, and Insights for Future Research and Action."

<sup>8</sup> Jos Akkermans, Julia Richardson, and Maria L. Kraimer, "The Covid-19 Crisis as a Career Shock: Implications for Careers and Vocational Behavior," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 119 (June 2020): 103434, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103434>.

<sup>9</sup> J Bingham et al., "Cultural Feminism in South Africa," *Mississippi: Jackson State University-CLL*, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> S. Bingham, "How HR Leaders Can Adapt to Uncertain Times," *Harvard Business Review*, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/08/how-hr-leaders-can-adapt-to-uncertain-times>.

<sup>11</sup> Léo-Paul Dana et al., "Strategic Futures Studies and Entrepreneurial Resiliency: A Focus on Digital Technology Trends and Emerging Markets," *Tec Empresarial* 16, no. 1 (2022): 87–100; P. Bhagat, "Supporting Mental Health at the Workplace," *ETHRWorld Contributor*, November 22, 2020, <https://hr.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/news/trends/employee-experience/supporting-mental-health-at-the-workplace/79346250>.

<sup>12</sup> Carine Rislely, "Maintaining Performance and Employee Engagement during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Library Administration* 60, no. 6 (2020): 653–59; Adriana AnaMaria Davidescu et al., "Work Flexibility, Job Satisfaction, and Job Performance among Romanian Employees—Implications for Sustainable Human Resource Management," *Sustainability* 12, no. 15 (July 29, 2020): 6086, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12156086>.

additional support to employees who were disproportionality affected by the ravaging pandemic.<sup>13</sup> Human capital professionals took proactive and responsive measures and by doing so played a pivotal role in navigating the challenges imposed by the Covid 19 scourge.

Scholars assert that human capital professionals organised virtual events and team building activities to maintain employee engagement and connection when Covid, 19 pandemic was at its peak.<sup>14</sup> The human capital managers added to their regular functions, the development of innovative and effective strategies or remaining operational amid a ‘storm.’ The human capital practitioners worked with leaders to develop contingency plans for reduced staffing, absenteeism and other business disruptions. Gold miners in Zimbabwe suffered from low productivity hence set targets were not met. It is however noteworthy that despite all the COVID-19 challenges that the mining sector faced, the human resources management came up with viable winning strategies to remain productive.

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to diminished revenue to the government from mining operations due to decreased production and prices.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the COVID-19 outbreak shed new light on the need to be strategically nimble on the part of human capital practitioners by encouraging open conversations about mental health and wellbeing so that mining firms can remain productive and viable. Azizi et al. (2021) opine that while the COVID-19 pandemic hit different countries around the globe with varying intensity, HCM practitioners reviewed talent management and succession planning processes to ensure business continuity and above all prepare for future challenges. This implies that responding to the crisis presented an unprecedented challenge to human capital managers both in scale and in-depth during a period of significant disruption.

It can therefore be noted that amidst the pandemic, human capital managers encountered challenges specifically in employee engagement, health and safety, boosting morale, skill management as well as restoring motivation and productivity. Davis et al., opine that human capital practitioners had to grapple with the delicate balancing act between maintaining health and safety standards and employee morale amid the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, human capital management strove to mitigate some of the negative consequences induced by the COVID-19 virus such as low productivity by crafting survival strategies in a bid to remain afloat. Extant studies on turnaround human capital strategies with a particular focus on the mining sector are rare neither are there studies on strategies.

In light of the aforementioned, this study seeks to establish the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Zimbabwean gold mineral sector operations and the challenges encountered by human capital management. In addition, it seeks to unearth subsequent strategies to curb the mayhem.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview and Concepts

The 21st century witnessed a wave of disruption of operations, as the COVID-19 epidemic brought the entire world to a standstill. The coronavirus appeared and ravaged the entire planet within days as it moved at breathtaking speed and in the process killed thousands of people.<sup>17</sup> Organisations worldwide incurred additional costs for personal protective equipment (PPE), testing, and quarantine facilities. Many businesses experienced a decline in revenue due to reduced consumer spending as they were kept indoors due to lockdowns. Thus, world economies were severely battered due to COVID-19. Further, the operating conditions all over the globe were changed within a month due to the pandemic. Companies

<sup>13</sup> Aidin Salamzadeh and Leo Paul Dana, “The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Challenges among Iranian Startups,” *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship* 33, no. 5 (2021): 489–512.

<sup>14</sup> Waleed M. Al-ahdal et al., “The Impact of Corporate Governance on Financial Performance of Indian and GCC Listed Firms: An Empirical Investigation,” *Research in International Business and Finance* 51 (January 2020): 101083, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ribaf.2019.101083>; Nisha Chanana and Sangeeta, “Employee Engagement Practices during COVID-19 Lockdown,” *Journal of Public Affairs* 21, no. 4 (2021): e2508.

<sup>15</sup> Chow, Uyeki, and Chu, “The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Community Respiratory Virus Activity.”

<sup>16</sup> Everod Davis, Melva Robertson, and Stacey Reynolds, “Human Capital Strategies to Foster Employee Engagement Within Post Pandemic Layoffs,” *Compensation & Benefits Review* 56, no. 3 (2024): 177–89.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Adnan Shereen et al., “COVID-19 Infection: Emergence, Transmission, and Characteristics of Human Coronaviruses,” *Journal of Advanced Research* 24 (2020): 91–98.

without business continuity plans in place were severely affected by the coronavirus.<sup>18</sup> Zimbabwe was no exception to the disastrous effects of COVID-19. The Zimbabwean mining sector which is the epicenter of economic recovery almost ground to a halt as employees got infected. The government of Zimbabwe had to enact lockdowns in an endeavor to at least control the spread of the pandemic. The mining industry which was regarded as an essential service continued to operate but with reduced personnel.

It is noteworthy that the COVID-19 pandemic called for firms to adapt and innovate in order to survive and thrive. The infectious disease led to prolonged periods of isolation among employees and hence the continued lack of social interaction contributed to mental fatigue. Thus, HCM in the mining industry had a difficult task in dealing with employees' mental health and well-being. Employee health and wellness issues increasingly became a significant concern because of virus infection. More so, the novel coronavirus also led to less socialisation due to social distancing, job insecurity and uncertainty in all firms worldwide.<sup>19</sup> It became imperative for Human Capital managers to be engrossed in ensuring the safety of personnel and also be able to manage their depression, anxiety as well as level of stress. Furthermore, it is tough for human capital practitioners to manage a distributed workforce due to the pandemic<sup>20</sup> and above all remote working led to limited face-to-face interaction.

In an endeavour to remain afloat in crisis times, the human capital managers in the mining environment had to employ virtual meetings and flexible work arrangements.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, it became very imperative for managers and employees to upgrade their technological and digital skills to remain relevant in the new work environment.<sup>22</sup> Fundamentally, employee wellness and support were considered significant concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic era.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Human Capital Management experienced critical challenges emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic as employees faced a bleak future.

The human capital practitioners of various mining organisations took the lead to assist companies in navigating the uncertainties considering the imminent loss of production exacerbated by COVID-19-induced lockdowns. Therefore, maintaining productivity and employee morale became a key managerial role.<sup>24</sup> Human capital managers play a commanding role in keeping mining firms afloat amid the COVID-19 crisis. Dash-Mohapatra asserts that investors become more risk averse hence the future outlook for mining organisations remains gloomy due to the pandemic.<sup>25</sup>

It is also of paramount significance to note that operating with depleted staff due to COVID-19 restrictions rendered various mining companies non-viable. It can however be argued that transmission was very high, particularly in underground mines.<sup>26</sup> It is also of essence to note that the people managers had to be agile in responding to changing government regulations.

<sup>18</sup> Herman Aguinis, Isabel Villamor, and Kelly P. Gabriel, "Understanding Employee Responses to COVID-19: A Behavioral Corporate Social Responsibility Perspective," *Management Research: Journal of the Iberoamerican Academy of Management* 18, no. 4 (August 12, 2020): 421–38, <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRJIAM-06-2020-1053>.

<sup>19</sup> Parul Bansal, "The Ravaged Psyche: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Human Mind," *Human Arenas* 5, no. 4 (December 28, 2022): 694–706, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-021-00190-6>.

<sup>20</sup> Iza Gigauri, "Challenges HR Managers Facing Due to COVID-19 and Overcoming Strategies: Perspectives from Georgia," *Archives of Business Research* 8, no. 11 (November 21, 2020): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.14738/abr.811.9313>.

<sup>21</sup> D. Narayandas, V. Hebbar, and L. Liangliang, "Lessons from Chinese Companies' Response to Covid-19," *Harvard Business Review*, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/06/lessons-from-chinese-companies-response-to-covid19>.

<sup>22</sup> Emma Parry and Valentina Battista, "The Impact of Emerging Technologies on Work: A Review of the Evidence and Implications for the Human Resource Function," *Emerald Open Research* 1, no. 4 (2023). Lia Kvirchishvili, "The Evolving Workforce: Technological Advancements and Their Impact on Employee Skills and Characteristics," in *International Scientific-Practical Conference* (Springer, 2023), 81–96.

<sup>23</sup> Tanja Van der Lippe and Zoltán Lippényi, "Co-workers Working from Home and Individual and Team Performance," *New Technology, Work and Employment* 35, no. 1 (2020): 60–79; Md. Mizanur Rahman et al., "Psychological Status of Private Commercial Bank Employees in Bangladesh during COVID-19," *Journal of Business Strategy Finance and Management* 3, no. 1–2 (December 28, 2021): 66–73, <https://doi.org/10.12944/JBSFM.03.01-02.07>; Michael C Peasley et al., "Can't Leave It at Home? The Effects of Personal Stress on Burnout and Salesperson Performance," *Journal of Business Research* 117 (2020): 58–70.

<sup>24</sup> Munyaradzi Chikove, "The Effect of Training and Development on Employee Attraction and Retention in the Gold Mining Sector in Zimbabwe," *International Journal of Scientific and Management Research* 6, no. 03 (2023): 41–59.

<sup>25</sup> Bighnesh Dash Mohapatra, "Managing Manpower amid and Post Pandemic in India; An Evocative Study," *International Journal of Research in Human Resource Management* 2, no. 2 (2020): 1–8.

<sup>26</sup> Karin Sanders et al., "Unraveling the What and How of Organizational Communication to Employees during COVID-19 Pandemic: Adopting an Attributional Lens," *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 56, no. 3 (2020): 289–93.

## The Impact of COVID-19 on Work Context

COVID-19 changed the way work is done in many organisations as it gave birth to remote work. It also accelerated digital transformations across industries. It also forced mining organisations across the globe to redesign their jobs.<sup>27</sup> The pandemic disrupted traditional industry dynamics hence the potential for fractures between employee groups also increased. For example, there was a cutback on non-essential spending. Thus, COVID-19 required a combination of physical, emotional and financial strategies to remain afloat.<sup>28</sup> The pandemic significantly changed how work was done as HCM moved towards the more nuanced conceptualisation and measurement of HR practices such as flexibility engagement and motivation among others.<sup>29</sup>

The leadership style of the human resources managers had to change as they tried to grapple with the pandemic.<sup>30</sup> Flexible work arrangements became the order of the day across different employee groups. In an endeavour to enhance the sustainability of the mining sector, the HR managers had to adopt flexibility as a key human resource practice without overlooking culture and or values. The HCM practitioners also adopted robust communication mechanisms to relay key information timeously to employees.<sup>31</sup> As a survival strategy, the firms had to respond most effectively to the pandemic to remain viable.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for workers to develop new skills for example in areas like virtual collaboration.<sup>32</sup> Extant research highlighted the positive impact of HR's recognized unique operational competencies in times of COVID-19 such as employee engagement, talent management and motivation among others. Further, the pandemic led to liquidity problems as the movement of goods was restricted among countries.<sup>33</sup> At some mining firms salaries were reduced to survive in the short term. This brought challenges for human capital management in dealing with employee morale. Although the pandemic disrupted mining operations and negatively impacted corporate finance, gold mining firms in Zimbabwe had difficulty navigating the crisis. The COVID-19 shock has naturally also affected operations and demand.

## Challenges and Implications for Human Capital Managers

The role of HCM is primarily to hire, manage and develop people to tap the best out of them.<sup>34</sup> COVID-19 provided significant challenges for human capital managers and personnel including the following;

### Health and Safety

The health and safety of personnel were put in jeopardy by COVID-19. According to Rice, employees value their safety as the environment they ply their trade is risky.<sup>35</sup> The management in Zimbabwe mining should motivate their employees by providing a safe work environment. Fundamentally, the human capital manager is obliged to make sure that the environment in which employees work is not harmful

<sup>27</sup> Md Mizanur Rahman et al., "Work to Family, Family to Work Conflicts and Work Family Balance as Predictors of Job Satisfaction of Malaysian Academic Community," *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy* 14, no. 4 (2020): 621–42.

<sup>28</sup> Bansal, "The Ravaged Psyche: Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Human Mind."

<sup>29</sup> Corine Boon, Deanne N Den Hartog, and David P Lepak, "A Systematic Review of Human Resource Management Systems and Their Measurement," *Journal of Management* 45, no. 6 (2019): 2498–2537.

<sup>30</sup> David G Collings, Kamel Mellahi, and Wayne F Cascio, "Global Talent Management and Performance in Multinational Enterprises: A Multilevel Perspective," *Journal of Management* 45, no. 2 (2019): 540–66.

<sup>31</sup> Christina Fuchs and Astrid Reichel, "Effective Communication for Relational Coordination in Remote Work: How Job Characteristics and HR Practices Shape User–Technology Interactions," *Human Resource Management* 62, no. 4 (2023): 511–28.

<sup>32</sup> Scott R Baker et al., "How Does Household Spending Respond to an Epidemic? Consumption during the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic," *The Review of Asset Pricing Studies* 10, no. 4 (2020): 834–62.

<sup>33</sup> Sanders et al., "Unraveling the What and How of Organizational Communication to Employees during COVID-19 Pandemic: Adopting an Attributional Lens."

<sup>34</sup> Mamta Chawla et al., "Sustainability in Human Capital Management: Shaping the Future With Technology," in *Sustainable Management Practices for Employee Retention and Recruitment* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2025), 265–90.

<sup>35</sup> D. Rice, "The 6 Biggest Challenges HR Faces in a Post COVID World," HR Exchange Network- keeping HR professionals at the forefront of industry change, 2021, <https://www.hrexchangenetwork.com/hr-talent-management/articles/the-6-biggestchallenges-hr-faces-in-a-post-covid-world>.

and that safety standards are maintained.<sup>36</sup> The employee's psychological wellness was strongly hampered by personal health issues, isolation, concern for the family as well as fear of job security.<sup>37</sup>

It can therefore be noted that for mining organizations in Zimbabwe to tap the best out of their employees, a policy focusing on employee health, safety, and welfare should be drawn. It should be in the interest of both the employer and management for the mining organizations to prevent accidents by having a culture of maintaining safe working conditions.<sup>38</sup> This means that strategies should be put in place by the management to have a safe workplace. Employee health and wellness regulations should be enacted in endeavor to protect employees and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

## Communication

Effective communication is the lifeblood of any organisation hence information should be disseminated timeously in crisis times.<sup>39</sup> Communication is essential in any organisation when giving information about the change, maintaining morale, avoiding rumours, maintaining discipline and satisfying statutory obligations.<sup>40</sup> This means that employees who feel that management does not relay information timeously are bound to be demotivated. Employees should be kept abreast with all that happens at an organisation so as to guard against discontent and lack of interest which tend to flourish if information dissemination is limited.<sup>41</sup> This means that failure to keep employees informed dampens their morale and they could resign.

## Employee Engagement

Employee engagement was greatly affected by the pandemic as their morale declined to unprecedented levels. Business practices and workforce preferences were changed by the sudden shift to remote working which means the work-from-home method.<sup>42</sup> Human capital managers found it tough to convey ideas emotions and feedback through digital channels. In this regard, it was not easy for the people managers to maintain a systematic workflow in remote working environments. In addition, it was an arduous task to keep employees aligned with the organisational goals and objectives as well as ensure employee engagement in the same vein.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, the solitary confinement of working from home led to loneliness during COVID-19 times, employee efforts were distracted and remote work led to blurred boundaries hence disconnection from the firm's purpose.<sup>44</sup>

Additionally, COVID-19 led to an increased risk of burnout due to pressure to be constantly available and responsive.<sup>45</sup> Work-life balance became an arduous task during the pandemic.<sup>46</sup> Human capital managers developed formal policies which took into account individual employee needs vis-a-vis organisational objectives.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, employee retention became the cornerstone of organisational

<sup>36</sup> Chikove, "The Effect of Training and Development on Employee Attraction and Retention in the Gold Mining Sector in Zimbabwe."

<sup>37</sup> R. Hasteer, "Expected Challenges for HR Professionals in Startups," October 17, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Rice, "The 6 Biggest Challenges HR Faces in a Post COVID World"; Nishath Anjum, "Covid-19 Pandemic: How Does Social Media Affect Psychological Wellbeing?—A Synthesis of Literature Review," *International Journal of Indian Psychology* 8, no. 3 (2020): 1698–1707; Jack T. Dennerlein et al., "An Integrative Total Worker Health Framework for Keeping Workers Safe and Healthy During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Human Factors: The Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society* 62, no. 5 (August 9, 2020): 689–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018720820932699>.

<sup>39</sup> Singh et al., "COVID-19 Pandemic and Transmission Factors: An Empirical Investigation of Different Countries."

<sup>40</sup> L. Morse, "Addressing Post-COVID HR Issues," July 28, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Hasteer, "Expected Challenges for HR Professionals in Startups."

<sup>42</sup> Morse, "Addressing Post-COVID HR Issues."

<sup>43</sup> B. D. Roy, "Challenges of HR and Its Shift Post COVID-19 Pandemic," Vantage Circle Blog, 2021, <https://blog.vantagecircle.com/challenges-of-hr/>.

<sup>44</sup> Hasteer, "Expected Challenges for HR Professionals in Startups." Akanksha Jaiswal and Neethu Prabhakaran, "Impact of Employee Well-Being on Performance in the Context of Crisis-Induced Remote Work: Role of Boundary Control and Professional Isolation," *Employee Relations: The International Journal* 46, no. 1 (2024): 115–32.

<sup>45</sup> Rahman et al., "Psychological Status of Private Commercial Bank Employees in Bangladesh during COVID-19."

<sup>46</sup> Rahman et al., "Psychological Status of Private Commercial Bank Employees in Bangladesh during COVID-19"; L. M. Giurge and V. K. Bohns, "3 Tips to Avoid WFH Burnout," *Harvard Business Review*, 2020, <https://hbr.org/2020/04/3-tips-to-avoid-wfh-burnout>.

<sup>47</sup> Viorel Lefter, Adriana AnaMaria Davidescu, and Ionut Casuneanu, "Identifying the Main Factors of Workplace Flexibility among Romanian Employees," in *Solutions for Business, Culture and Religion in Eastern Europe and Beyond: The 2016 Griffiths School of Management Annual Conference on Business, Entrepreneurship and Ethics (GSMAC)* (Springer, 2018), 115–28.

prosperity. The leaders of firms designed employee retention policies in an endeavour to retain key personnel.<sup>48</sup>

### Skill and Talent Management

The COVID-19 scourge led to the multi-skilling of personnel so that organisations have the requisite skills and expertise to maintain operations during the pandemic. Therefore, the health crisis led to massive changes in the work environment as mining entities firms had to grapple with restructuring, furlough and redundancies. This led to the loss of skilled personnel. In addition, the mining organisations had to adapt to the new way of doing business.<sup>49</sup> This calls for a spate of training needs to be inculcated to employees. Training will enable people to acquire the right skills for the right roles. Therefore, training helps to increase job knowledge and the skills of employees.<sup>50</sup> COVID-19 calls for new behaviour from employees of which training becomes key.

Talent acquisition policies were modified by the human capital managers because remote work allowed employees to be equipped with the right skills and hence enables organisations to respond quickly to changing market conditions.<sup>51</sup> Fundamentally, the ultimate performance of any organisation rests on the quality of its personnel who amass skills through training. In their study, Retno et al., observe that career planning and development are important in goal attainment as these are linked to personal development plans.<sup>52</sup> The frequency of training engenders high employee morale as much as management training in the performance appraisal system has positively influenced work engagement.

Fundamentally, in crisis times only those firms which are able to adapt will survive. It is noteworthy that the managers had to be resilient as they came up with problem-solving skills in an endeavour to steer the organisations to safety.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the training and development of people become key in times of COVID-19.<sup>54</sup> Due to the effects of COVID-19 firms that do not wish to rehire employees can alternatively re-skill their existing employees. Employees are therefore encouraged to develop critical skills that potentially add value to their labour and enhance their chances of employability.<sup>55</sup> Talent management calls for agility as the business landscape is altered.

### Motivation

Lockdown led to improved employee engagement and employees were also handsomely rewarded for their hard work. Business organisations have been operating on an eggshell-thin veneer since the outbreak of COVID-19. Sanders, et.al opine that during a health crisis, employers shifted to remote work and virtual meetings. This allowed employees to work more flexibly and at times of the day that suit them.<sup>56</sup> This helped reduce the risk of transmission and allowed the mining business to continue operating.<sup>57</sup> A demotivated employee ceases to be productive as he/she sees no reason to be committed when the future is not certain.<sup>58</sup> It can however be noted that, if there is no internal drive then there is no commitment.

<sup>48</sup> Ibrahim Nandom Yakubu et al., "The Effectiveness of Internal Control System in Safeguarding Assets in the Ghanaian Banking Industry," 2017; Shuana Zafar Nasir, "Emerging Challenges of HRM in 21st Century: A Theoretical Analysis," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2017): 216–23.

<sup>49</sup> Rice, "The 6 Biggest Challenges HR Faces in a Post COVID World"; Singh et al., "COVID-19 Pandemic and Transmission Factors: An Empirical Investigation of Different Countries."

<sup>50</sup> Chikove, "The Effect of Training and Development on Employee Attraction and Retention in the Gold Mining Sector in Zimbabwe."

<sup>51</sup> Vasyly Hoichuk and Nadiya Lyubomudrova, "THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT ON THE COMPETITIVENESS OF AN ENTERPRISE," *Three Seas Economic Journal* 5, no. 2 (2024): 1–6.

<sup>52</sup> Bayu Retno et al., "Human Resource Management Strategy the Role of Managers and Career Development," *Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen Kesatuan* 12, no. 4 (2024): 951–60.

<sup>53</sup> Morse, "Addressing Post-COVID HR Issues." Baker et al., "How Does Household Spending Respond to an Epidemic? Consumption during the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>54</sup> Hasteer, "Expected Challenges for HR Professionals in Startups."

<sup>55</sup> Jaiswal and Prabhakaran, "Impact of Employee Well-Being on Performance in the Context of Crisis-Induced Remote Work: Role of Boundary Control and Professional Isolation"; Natasa Urbancikova and Nurillo Umarchonov, "Enhancing Employability Excellence: Perceptions of the Importance of Skills by Employers and Alumni," *Quality Innovation Prosperity* 28, no. 1 (2024): 154–73.

<sup>56</sup> Sanders et al., "Unraveling the What and How of Organizational Communication to Employees during COVID-19 Pandemic: Adopting an Attributional Lens."

<sup>57</sup> Jaiswal and Prabhakaran, "Impact of Employee Well-Being on Performance in the Context of Crisis-Induced Remote Work: Role of Boundary Control and Professional Isolation."

<sup>58</sup> Mohammed Ali Bait Ali Sulaiman, Mohammed Nazeer Ahmed, and Muhammad Salman Shabbir, "Covid-19 Challenges and Human Resource Management in Organized Retail Operations," *Zenodo*, 2020, 81–92.

Human capital professionals ought to craft motivational strategies to keep employees focused on the task at hand.<sup>59</sup> Fundamentally, in an endeavour to retain employees a plethora of strategies should be put into effect.<sup>60</sup> The managers should note that hybrid work coordination requires job satisfaction and employee commitment to be taken into account.<sup>61</sup> The management of mining firms ought to plan and implement various motivational techniques such as benign supervision to raise employee productivity.<sup>62</sup>

It is equally important to note that people managers should reward their employees handsomely to engender their longevity at the organisation. Thus, an organization should have a reward management strategy in place to motivate employees. The managers used financial and non-financial rewards to motivate their personnel. Employees can be motivated financially for example through salary hikes, bonuses and incentives among others. On the other hand, non-financial rewards such as flexible working hours and employee empowerment can also come in handy in motivating the workers.<sup>63</sup> Human capital managers should realise the essence of employee flexibility and employee engagement in employee motivation.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study adopted the population ecology theory. Population ecology theory proposes that it is only those organisations that can adapt will survive.<sup>64</sup> An individual organization's survival is then based on the ability of the managers to be wary of the environment and be able to adapt. The failure of an organisation to change and or transform will lead to its demise. Although "adaptive change is not impossible, or even rare, it is severely constrained"<sup>65</sup> at the individual organization level due to inert internal and external forces. The population ecology theory has several key assumptions. The first assumption is that organizational change occurs at the population level through organizational births and deaths.<sup>66</sup> The population ecology theory is borrowed from the animal kingdom and it implies that it is only those animals that can adapt in tough times which will survive. Organizations in a bid to remain afloat ought to change,<sup>67</sup> but often the transformation can be extremely detrimental to an organisation's survivability.

The ability of mining organizations to be able to adapt to their environment hinges on the strategic foresight of their leaders. The people managers should take a helicopter view of the organisation to be able to adapt and come up with survival strategies.<sup>68</sup> Population ecology theory has valuable insights for sustainability in organizations, as the theory hinges on the managers being able to adapt to the new way of doing business induced by COVID-19. Proponents of population ecology derive their view on survival of the fittest.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the theory focuses on the ability to adapt when there is a need for change.

It can be noted that only those firms that can quickly adapt to the needs of the day will survive and vice versa. The environment is dynamic hence COVID-19 altered the firms' operations. Thus, the way the mining firms reacted to change induced by the pandemic was key. The firm's structure is also liable to change. No matter how big or robust the firm is if the management fails to adapt the business

<sup>59</sup> Parry and Battista, "The Impact of Emerging Technologies on Work: A Review of the Evidence and Implications for the Human Resource Function."

<sup>60</sup> Amer Saeed et al., "Green Human Resource Management and Environmental Performance: The Role of Green Supply Chain Management Practices," *Benchmarking: An International Journal* 29, no. 9 (November 24, 2022): 2881–99, <https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-05-2021-0297>.

<sup>61</sup> Narayandas, Hebbur, and Liangliang, "Lessons from Chinese Companies' Response to Covid-19."

<sup>62</sup> Azizi et al., "Innovative Human Resource Management Strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Narrative Review Approach."

<sup>63</sup> Nishath Anjum et al., "Do Intrinsic Rewards Matter on Motivation?," *SEISENSE Journal of Management* 4, no. 1 (January 19, 2021): 47–58, <https://doi.org/10.33215/sjom.v4i1.534>.

<sup>64</sup> G. Carroll, *Ecological Models of Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1988).

<sup>65</sup> Carroll, *Ecological Models of Organizations*.

<sup>66</sup> S.S. Salimath and R. Jones, "Population Ecology Theory: Implications for Sustainability Management Decision," *Emerald Group Publishing Limited* 49, no. 6 (2011): 874–910.

<sup>67</sup> Karin Doolan et al., "The 'Dark Side' of Organizational Resilience: The Civil Society Sector in Croatia," *Journal of Civil Society* 20, no. 3 (2024): 209–27.

<sup>68</sup> Salimath and Jones, "Population Ecology Theory: Implications for Sustainability Management Decision."

<sup>69</sup> Michael R. Ford, "Population Ecology Theory of Organizations," in *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 4830–34, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9\\_74](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9_74); Fredrik O. Andersson and Michael R. Ford, "Social Entrepreneurship Through an Organizational Ecology Lens: Examining the Emergence and Evolution of the Voucher School Population in Milwaukee," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 27, no. 4 (August 8, 2016): 1760–80, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-015-9576-0>.

sinks.<sup>70</sup> The longer the firm takes to make a decision the more leverage it has on its competitors. In times of COVID-19, managers should not believe in instilling fear in employees but ought to motivate them.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, data was gathered from participants through questionnaires. The study's sample was guided by the principle of saturation. Open-ended questionnaires were drafted. The qualitative research approach and the exploratory research design were employed in this study. The purposive sampling technique was employed in this study. The participants were selected on the basis that they were likely to generate useful data for the project. The study was carried out at some selected gold mines in Mberengwa District. The researcher chose those employees in the mining sector who were knowledgeable on the subject matter and above all those who have five years and above in terms of experience.

Saturation was, however, arrived after 20 participants at the selected gold mines in Mberengwa District. The researcher monitored the respondents to complete the questionnaires to ensure that they did not discuss and hence influenced each other's responses. The participants were encouraged to answer questions independently. The researchers also told the participants not to write their names on the questionnaires. The researchers recovered all the questionnaires. The permission to conduct the study was sought from the management of various gold mining firms in Mberengwa District. This was followed by a pilot study, conducted to assess the effectiveness of the instruments in relation to aspects such as length, wording, and validity.

The participants gave their informed consent before participating in the study. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers directly to participants after obtaining a sampling frame from the human capital department which allowed the researchers to group the miners into different groups, such as functional categories. The researchers considered ethical considerations throughout the research process such as confidentiality. Furthermore, withdrawal from the research process even after informed consent had been given, was allowed.

According to Hall and Mansfield, preparation for data analysis and knowledge of the procedures to be followed for each approach in mixed-method research are crucial for the straightforward and organized presentation of results.<sup>71</sup> Thematic analysis was used in this study's data analysis, which was carried out using systems and processes. It is a structured procedure with six phases, according to Gan et al., which involves coding tales and creating basic themes that are then combined to form global themes.<sup>72</sup>

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

**Table 1. Health and Safety**

Theme	Quotes	Interpretation/remark
Theme 1	<i>The health of the employees was in danger. (Informant 1, male, 26 years old)</i>	Covid 19 had a negative effect on employee's health.
Theme 2	<i>The mental well-being of the personnel was affected due to the uncertainty of how this pandemic would end. (Informant 5, Male, 21 years old)</i>	Employee state of mind was affected by the pandemic because of its severity.
Theme 3	<i>Honestly, my stress level increased. (Informant 8, Male, 38 years old)</i>	Undeniably, employee were stressed hence affecting their efficiency and effectiveness.
Theme 4	<i>People were really psychologically affected. (Informant 11, Male, 58 years old)</i>	The COVID-19 pandemic because of its effect on employee future psychologically affected them.

<sup>70</sup> Matthew E Archibald, "An Organizational Ecology of National Self-Help/Mutual-Aid Organizations," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2007): 598–621.

<sup>71</sup> Jennifer Hall and Louise Mansfield, "The Benefits and Complexities of Integrating Mixed Method Findings Using the Pillar Integration Process: A Workplace Health Intervention Case Study," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 19, no. 1 (2025): 20–40.

<sup>72</sup> QingQiu Gan, Raymond Yiu Keung Lau, and Jin Hong, "A Critical Review of Blockchain Applications to Banking and Finance: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis Approach," *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management* 37, no. 4 (2025): 387–403.

**Table 2. Employee Engagement**

Theme	Quotes	Interpretation/remark
Theme 1	<i>At times I burnout because we are few in my department (Informant 17, Female, 36 years old)</i>	Burnout leads to stress hence negatively affecting employees' health.
Theme 2	<i>And when you have a group of engaged employees working together, the team naturally performs at its best as well. (Informant 18, Male, 46 years old)</i>	Employees produce more results as a team.
Theme 3	<i>As a manager, it is always very natural to focus your attention on your team's goals. (Informant 10, Female, 34 years old)</i>	Teamwork has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
Theme 4	<i>During COVID-19 they really scrapped my mid-month bonus (Informant 9, Male, 50 years old)</i>	The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative effect on employee welfare.

**Table 3. Worklife Balance**

Theme	Quotes	Interpretation/remark
Theme 1	<i>I think I still have a positive attitude towards myself and the work I do. (Informant 7, Female, 41 years old)</i>	A positive attitude engenders job satisfaction.
Theme 2	<i>Be mindful of when and how you push people because people will leave this company. (Informant 13, Male, 52 years old)</i>	Employees need to be treated with respect so that they can be productive.
Theme 3	<i>I totally agree highly employees need time with their families (Informant 15, Male, 49 years old)</i>	Work-life balance affects employee efficiency and effectiveness.
Theme 4	<i>This thing known as work-life balance is good. I spend a lot of time here at this organisation. (Informant 14, Male, 57 years old)</i>	Employees need time off so as to feel motivated.

**Table 4. Skills and Talent Management**

Theme	Quotes	Interpretation/remark
Theme 1	<i>Trained people tend to be a bit innovative I think. (Informant 11, Male, 33 years old)</i>	Trained workers exhibit innovation skills.
Theme 2	<i>Trained people can think analytically. (Informant 19, Male, 45 years old)</i>	Skilled employees perform above par.
Theme 3	<i>It leads to openness (Informant 20, Male, 47 years old)</i>	Trained personnel are willing to share ideas.
Theme 4	<i>There are things like organisational citizenship which comes from being trained thoroughly. (Informant 12, Male, 30 years old)</i>	Training engenders organisational citizenship.
Theme 5	<i>I have seen that those trained people do work better. (Informant 5, Female, 42 years old)</i>	Set targets are met by skilled personnel.

## DISCUSSION

This section of the study discusses COVID-19 challenges and how the human resource managers managed to deal with the huddles. The study established that COVID-19 restrictions and regulations impeded operations within the mining sector. The scourge barred people in the gold mineral sector from conducting their work freely. Gutierrez-Romero and Ahamed opined that the COVID-19 pandemic risked

wiping out the progress made by the global community in reducing poverty.<sup>73</sup> The pestilence caused several businesses to close due to restrictions such as lockdowns, masking and distancing.<sup>74</sup> Studies opine that organisations faced a multiplicity of obstacles due to COVID-19 such as dwindling productivity and loss of key personnel.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, the study showed the health and safety of employees, mental well-being, flexibility and employee engagement as well as talent management are the most common challenges. The findings are consistent with Nangia and Mohsin, who observed that COVID-19 put the employee health and safety of employees at stake as firms sought to strike a balance between employee well-being and productivity.<sup>76</sup> The new challenges had ripple effects in terms of work-life balance, psychological effect, and sustaining high employee morale in an environment which was volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.

The verbatim from the respondents reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic had serious implications for employee health. This is in tandem with the views of Dennerlein et al., who affirm that the pandemic affected the personnel's overall health and mental well-being.<sup>77</sup> Remote work led to employees missing out on social interactions and human connections. Thus, isolation negatively influences the psychological wellness of the personnel.<sup>78</sup> Fundamentally, the Covid-19-induced lockdowns could result in an epidemic of employee burnout and stress-related absenteeism in the post-COVID-19 era. The results corroborate with the views of Anjum who asserts that employee health and mental well-being of personnel became a key priority for employers during the COVID-19 era.<sup>79</sup>

The study also revealed that today, the personnel are willing to exert themselves and be even more committed to organisations that value their physical and psychological health. This is in tandem with Respondent 15 who affirmed that; 'My health is very important.' The physical well-being of employees entails wearing face masks, having access to clean and sanitized office spaces as well as the availability of equipment needed to work safely among others. The findings are consistent with Maqsood et al., who opine that psychological well-being is associated with positive emotions such as happiness, joy, and contentment.<sup>80</sup> People with good psychological well-being tend to be healthier and more committed to their work.

The study also revealed that employee engagement is very key in times of COVID-19. Thus, speaking of meeting set targets, employee engagement plays a huge role in a team's success and achievements. Managers of mining companies should realise that engaged employees are more likely to deliver high-quality work. Engaged employees are more likely to make informed thoughtful decisions.<sup>81</sup> The difference lies in how it is managed, as well as the outcomes of that stress. For engaged employees, some stress at work is usually much easier to manage and could even become a motivator. Employees who are engaged tend to be more self-aware and can better detect when their stress levels surpass a healthy threshold.

Scholars such as Chikove advocate employee engagement is more likely to stay with the organisation. Engaged employees share information, knowledge, and expertise thereby reducing the risk of knowledge loss.<sup>82</sup> Thus managers in times of COVID-19 should be mindful of when and how they push their employees. The results corroborate with the views of Morse who propounds that absenteeism

<sup>73</sup> Roxana Gutiérrez-Romero and Mostak Ahamed, "COVID-19 Response Needs to Broaden Financial Inclusion to Curb the Rise in Poverty," *World Development* 138 (2021): 105229.

<sup>74</sup> Takupiwa Nyanga, Herbert Zirima, and Nhamo Mashavira, "Withering COVID 19 Storm: Survival Strategies Employed by Informal Traders in Masvingo Urban, Zimbabwe," *Management Dynamics* 20, no. 1 (2020): 1–9.

<sup>75</sup> Nishath Anjum and Md Saidur Rahaman, "Human Resource Management amidst COVID-19 Pandemic: Behavioral Implications for HR Practitioners," *Journal of Advanced Research in Economics and Administrative Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2022): 57–66.

<sup>76</sup> Nangia and Mohsin, "Revisiting Talent Management Practices in a Pandemic Driven VUCA Environment-a Qualitative Investigation in the Indian IT Industry."

<sup>77</sup> Dennerlein et al., "An Integrative Total Worker Health Framework for Keeping Workers Safe and Healthy During the COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>78</sup> Hasteer, "Expected Challenges for HR Professionals in Startups."

<sup>79</sup> Sadia Anjum, "Impact of Internship Programs on Professional and Personal Development of Business Students: A Case Study from Pakistan," *Future Business Journal* 6, no. 1 (2020): 2.

<sup>80</sup> Aneela Maqsood et al., "The Paradigm Shift for Educational System Continuance in the Advent of COVID-19 Pandemic: Mental Health Challenges and Reflections," *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences* 2 (November 2021): 100011, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crbeha.2020.100011>.

<sup>81</sup> Neha Gahlawat and Subhash C Kundu, "Exploring the Connection between Socially Responsible HRM and Citizenship Behavior of Employees in Indian Context," *Journal of Indian Business Research* 13, no. 1 (2021): 78–91.

<sup>82</sup> Chikove, "The Effect of Training and Development on Employee Attraction and Retention in the Gold Mining Sector in Zimbabwe."

has become a big issue in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>83</sup> In the United States alone, nearly one million people skip work each day due to stress. Alarming, those who take time off for mental health reasons are seven times more likely to be absent in the future. It is tough to maintain a systematic workflow in remote working environments, keeping employees aligned with the work objective and ensuring their engagement.<sup>84</sup>

Consequently, the solitary confinement of employees to home working engendered the risk of loneliness in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This, to a certain extent, distracted employee commitment and they got disconnected from the company's purpose.<sup>85</sup> As a result, workplace flexibility became the order of the day. Human capital managers need to develop formal policies regarding how the employees make their work fit into their lives by taking into account the individual needs of each employee.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, human resources need to maintain its existing workforce to balance out again correctly. Thus, human resources leaders must design better employee retention policies and focus on succession planning.

The study revealed that skill and talent management are vital in times of COVID-19. The massive changes in the work environment due to redundancies, restructuring, and furlough during the COVID-19 pandemic left organizations lacking skilled manpower. Effective training has the potential to provide a range of benefits for a business such as higher quality, better productivity, and improved motivation through greater empowerment.<sup>87</sup> In addition, the acquisition of new skills by employees engenders the provision of excellent customer service leading to increased customer satisfaction. Additionally, the altered work environment during the COVID-19 era demands skilled employees who contribute to organisational profitability through improved efficiency, productivity and innovation.

It is important to note that adaptability, resilience as well as problem-solving skills were identified as critical roles in COVID-19 times.<sup>88</sup> The results are consistent with the views of Hoichuk and Lyubomudrova who adduce that the human resources department needs to modify its talent acquisition policies because remote work allows candidates to pick up positions in entirely different locations and pushes a greater workforce diversity with a broader pool of available talents.<sup>89</sup> Training enables employees to settle quickly into a professional work environment, receive relevant skills development and get hands-on experience, either working in a specific role within an established team or through working on a number of assignments in different areas of the organization.<sup>90</sup>

It is imperative to note that internal mobility can create opportunities for organizations to redeploy internal employees with the right skill sets and also can help to improve the retention of top talent. In that case, training is essential to fill the skill and knowledge gap of those who took on different roles or additional responsibilities.<sup>91</sup> Thus, HR needs to develop a competency framework that defines the skills and expertise required for performing the job efficiently, which will help revitalize the workforce and lead to excellence. An organization's training program must focus on its employees' overall growth and career development during crisis times rather than focusing on specific job skills. Furthermore, in an endeavor to retain key personnel managers should prioritise the training and development of personnel.<sup>92</sup> While coordinating hybrid work, individual performance factors such as work characteristics, satisfaction, and commitment should also be taken into account.

The study also revealed that the motivation of employees is crucial in times of COVID-19. It is also noteworthy that businesses weathered the storm through the COVID-19 lockdown and into the first

<sup>83</sup> Morse, "Addressing Post-COVID HR Issues."

<sup>84</sup> Roy, "Challenges of HR and Its Shift Post COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>85</sup> Hasteer, "Expected Challenges for HR Professionals in Startups."

<sup>86</sup> Lefter, Davidescu, and Casuneanu, "Identifying the Main Factors of Workplace Flexibility among Romanian Employees."

<sup>87</sup> Chikove, "The Effect of Training and Development on Employee Attraction and Retention in the Gold Mining Sector in Zimbabwe."

<sup>88</sup> Baker et al., "How Does Household Spending Respond to an Epidemic? Consumption during the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic."

<sup>89</sup> Hoichuk and Lyubomudrova, "The Impact of Strategic Human Capital Management on the Competitiveness of an Enterprise."

<sup>90</sup> Chikove, "The Effect of Training and Development on Employee Attraction and Retention in the Gold Mining Sector in Zimbabwe." Hoang Ho and Bård Kuvaas, "Human Resource Management Systems, Employee Well-being, and Firm Performance from the Mutual Gains and Critical Perspectives: The Well-being Paradox," *Human Resource Management* 59, no. 3 (May 23, 2020): 235–53, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21990>.

<sup>91</sup> Linda M. Hite and Kimberly S. McDonald, "Careers after COVID-19: Challenges and Changes," *Human Resource Development International* 23, no. 4 (August 7, 2020): 427–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2020.1779576>.

<sup>92</sup> Saeed et al., "Green Human Resource Management and Environmental Performance: The Role of Green Supply Chain Management Practices."

stages of 2021. In this regard motivating employees is absolutely key to business success. Fundamentally, during lockdown, businesses were forced to adapt to change at breakneck speed towards becoming fully remote. Suddenly all staff meetings became online affairs and almost 100% of meetings were held online through video conferencing.<sup>93</sup> Thus, sound employee motivation acts as a vital motivational tool which can be used to guard against the low productivity in the Zimbabwean gold mining industry.

The findings of the study revealed that study concludes that intrinsically and extrinsically motivated employees are willing to stay at their places of work for longer periods as they will be job satisfied. Intrinsic motivation leads to a sense of personal satisfaction and fulfillment. It is imperative to note that new research from Anjum and Rahaman has shown that a third of employers have said that having employees working from home during COVID-19 has boosted productivity.<sup>94</sup> Many employees have found that their productivity and overall motivation increased with more freedom to divide their time and plan their work flexibly around their day-to-day routine.

Further, the absence of a daily commute was key to employee wellbeing with employees gaining multiple hours back a week which they could devote to other areas of their lives. The results are consistent with the views of Saeed et al. who opine that by moving out of lockdown employers will have to adapt to offering more working-from-home days to their staff.<sup>95</sup> This will allow employees to work more flexibly and at times of the day that suit them. The managers should consistently provide clarity of expectations, the ability to adjust to difficulty, and the opportunity to gain recognition from employees so as to motivate them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that managers craft and implement organisational policies and practices that support employee well-being. For example, leaders of mining firms can generate a safe and healthy working environment by providing employees with personal protective equipment, implementing social distancing measures, and regularly cleaning and disinfecting work surfaces.

Managers can also promote employee welfare by providing flexible work arrangements, offering financial assistance to employees in need, and providing access to counseling and other support services. In addition, managers can motivate employees by setting clear and achievable targets, making sure that feedback is provided on a regular basis and timely recognising and rewarding employees for their contributions. Managers can also foster employee engagement by creating a positive and supportive work environment, encouraging employees to participate in decision-making, and empowering them to take ownership of their work.

It is noteworthy that to help employees adapt to change, managers can upgrade the skills of their personnel by rigorously training them on new technological processes as well as offering avenues for professional development. Thus, a culture of continuous learning should be part of the organisation's operation. Managers can also ensure optimum productivity levels by timeously furnishing the personnel with key resources so that they can do their jobs effectively, and by creating a work environment that is conducive to productivity. By implementing these strategies, Zimbabwean gold mining firms can position themselves for success during and after the pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

This research was aimed at exploring the human resource management strategies deployed to mitigate the negative consequences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that employee health and safety, welfare, motivation, engagement, adaptation to change, skill and talent management, and optimum productivity levels are critical for mining firms to survive and thrive during the pandemic. It was established that work-life balance positively influences employees' morale in pandemic times. Thus, maintaining a balance between work and personal life helps reduce stress and anxiety related to the pandemic. It can therefore be noted that a healthy work-life balance supports mental well-being, reducing the risk of depression, anxiety and burnout. In addition, employee engagement engenders organisational

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<sup>93</sup> Anjum et al., "Do Intrinsic Rewards Matter on Motivation?"

<sup>94</sup> Anjum and Rahaman, "Human Resource Management amidst COVID-19 Pandemic: Behavioral Implications for HR Practitioners."

<sup>95</sup> Saeed et al., "Green Human Resource Management and Environmental Performance: The Role of Green Supply Chain Management Practices."

citizenship behaviour. This means that engaged employees are more willing to stay with the organisation and above all they can make better decisions for the good of the organisation.

Fundamentally, in pandemic times regular transparent and open communication drives employee engagement. Additionally, work engagement and social support at the workplace also play crucial roles in lowering the likelihood of employees wanting to leave. It is of essence to note that in pandemic times employees value their health hence by prioritising health and safety, employers can minimise business disruptions, maintain operations and ensure continuity. Furthermore, adhering to health and safety guidelines ensures compliance with government regulations and industry standards.

The research study also concludes that effective skills and talent management equip employees with the right skills and knowledge to perform tasks more efficiently. In addition, employees who feel their skills are being utilised and developed are more likely to be engaged. It is also of essence to note that with a strong talent pipeline, mining organisations in the gold sector can make informed decisions about succession planning and leadership development. It is also imperative to note that organisations that effectively manage skills and talent can gain a competitive advantage in the market.

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### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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