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Professor, IIM Tiruchirappalli

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# A FRESH LOOK AT HRM

At least one area of management has seen much change due to COVID-19 – human resources management. Have the institutes kept up?

by Pritha Roy Choudhury

**T**he coronavirus pandemic transformed the way employees across sectors work. As offices emptied, workers took work home. Entire cycles of recruitment were initiated and completed online. Even campus placements were conducted virtually.

Teachers at business schools took note and some institutions have developed new human resources management (HRM) courses, or encouraged projects that address the challenges presented by the new ways of working.

The Indian Institute of Management

(IIM) Tiruchirappalli launched a Post Graduate Programme in Management-Human Resources (PGPM-HR) in 2020. "The institute has started taking classes on how to address HR practices in a pandemic kind of situation; it is yet to be included in the course curriculum," said Upam M, professor, IIM Tiruchirappalli.

There are discussions on handling work-from-home policies, holding interviews online and using technology and analytics in HR.

## HRM and the COVID crisis

"The role of a human resource manager was always important and it has become





all the more important and at the same time very difficult during this time,” said Chinmoy Mishra, a first-year student of IIM Nagpur. The institute reworked its HRM curriculum and rechristened it “people management”; it is taught in the first year of the two-year programme.

This year, students were asked to work on different activities relating to recruitment during COVID. The students mainly observed the changes in the methods for interviewing candidates. “What we predominantly learnt from the project is how to make the processes more structured,” added Mishra.

As the teachers themselves have to change the way they work, they are incorporating new elements into their lessons.

“We are learning as faculty members; we are also incorporating that in our content. It is a mutual discussion,” said Anita Sarkar, professor, XLRI Jamshedpur. “We prepare students for [such] eventualities, but because of this new normal we are teaching them how to even adapt themselves in this new normal.”

They have had to rework the curriculum, pedagogy and exam pattern. “We have to think of everything which

is volatile, full of ambiguity. Content-wise, because the situation is forcing us to re-think many things, we are emphasizing on planning. Nobody knew that planning could become this critical. So, we are also incorporating these elements in our courses,” added Sarkar.

The teachers say the students are involved in understanding HR practices like managing work from home and a hybrid design. “It is becoming a more team-based structure, more task forces were created because of the COVID,” added Upam.

### HRM and analytics

The academics also anticipate the field HRM to gain more specialized domains. Sarkar believes HR analytics has become more vital now.

“It is not only the seniors, but a person at the junior level too needs to be aware of HR analytics. Faculty members need to incorporate a lot of content on that so that [students] can handle the technology that is going to come up. It’s an ongoing process,” she added.

Online surveys are also growing more popular, Sarkar said. To gain from them, HR needs to embrace technology more fully. “The beauty of it lies in the surveys through which I can understand how many got the idea I am trying to get across, or understand their [employees’] satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It is an instant or constant measurement, and incorporating it in the courses is a feasible option,” she explained.

### Work-life balance and online recruitment

The pandemic has left teachers with experiences that they are now considering to incorporate in the curriculum. “Even though the timeline it can be 24\*7, HR professionals can schedule meetings keeping contingencies in mind,” said Sarkar adding that “students are being taught about these aspects, it will be included in the curriculum.”

Online interviews have shown up in HRM projects. “In a mock interview, we were asked to interview candidates for a job. What we understood is that online interviews require much more time. We had to ask 20 questions instead of 10.



**Chinmoy Mishra,**  
First-year Student,  
IIM Nagpur

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It takes time to understand the candidate online,” said Mishra. “It is stressful both for the recruiter and the candidate,” he added, and there is no examining the candidate’s body language for extra insight.

Dealing with the emotion of the employees and the candidates seeking jobs is another aspect that needs to be included in the curriculum of the human resource management programme, felt teachers. ▣