

**What Were the Main Challenges of HR Managers During the COVID-19 Period in
NGOs of Northern Iraq?**

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Abstract

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic presented novel challenges to the non-governmental organizations operating in Northern Iraq. The purpose of this study is to explore the main challenges that human resource managers faced during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs in Northern Iraq. The study was accomplished by conducting in-depth interviews with employees from the HR department of NGOs in Northern Iraq and answering the three research questions: What were the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely during the period of COVID-19 for the NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq? What lessons can be learned from the experience of HR managers in Northern Iraq NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can they be applied to the future crises? What strategies do HR managers in NGOs in Northern Iraq use to prevent partiality and nepotism during the employee selection process?

A qualitative research methodology was used by conducting in-depth interviews with participants from HR departments in NGOs in northern Iraq, as the data were analyzed using MAXQDA software.

The main challenges resulted from transitioning to remote work, as work flexibility, professional development, communication, work-life balance, employee well-being, and mental health were presented as advantages and disadvantages of remote work. Lessons learned on remote work management, crisis management, importance of mental health, technology, communication, and commitment to the NGO's strategies and policies were presented as the findings of the study, in addition to enhanced policies and strategies for preventing partiality and nepotism during the process of employee selection.

Keywords: *COVID-19 pandemic, NGOs, Northern Iraq, HR managers, remote work.*

Pagrindiniai Šiaurės Irako NVO žmoniškųjų išteklių valdytojų iššūkiai Covid-19 laikotarpiu

Santrauka

COVID-19 pandemijos protrūkis sukėlė naujų iššūkių Šiaurės Irake veikiančioms nevyriausybiniams organizacijoms. Šio tyrimo tikslas – ištirti pagrindines problemas, su kuriomis per COVID-19 laikotarpį susidūrė žmoniškųjų išteklių valdytojai Šiaurės Irako NVO. Tyrimas buvo baigtas surengus išsamius pokalbius su Šiaurės Irako NVO žmoniškųjų išteklių departamento darbuotojais, atsakant į tris mokslinių tyrimų klausimus Kokie buvo darbo nuotoliniu būdu COVID-19 laikotarpiu Šiaurės Irake veikiančioms NVO pranašumai ir trūkumai? Ko galima pasimokyti iš Šiaurės Irako NVO žmoniškųjų išteklių valdytojų patirties per COVID-19 pandemiją ir kaip ją galima pritaikyti būsimai krizei? Kokias strategijas Šiaurės Irako NVO žmoniškųjų išteklių vadybininkai taiko, kad darbuotojų atrankos proceso metu būtų užkirstas kelias šališkumui ir nepotizmui?

Kokybinė mokslinių tyrimų metodika buvo naudojama atliekant išsamius pokalbius su Šiaurės Irako NVO žmoniškųjų išteklių departamentų dalyviais, nes duomenys buvo analizuojami naudojant MAXQDA programinę įrangą.

Pagrindiniai sunkumai kilo pereinant prie nuotolinio darbo, nes darbo lankstumas, profesinis tobulėjimas, bendravimas, darbo ir asmeninio gyvenimo pusiausvyra, darbuotojų gerovė ir psichikos sveikata buvo pristatyti kaip nuotolinio darbo privalumai ir trūkumai. Patirtis, įgyta nuotolinio darbo valdymo, krizių valdymo, psichikos sveikatos svarbos, technologijų, komunikacijos ir įsipareigojimo laikytis NVO strategijų ir politikos srityse, buvo pateikta kaip tyrimo išvados, papildančios sustiprintą politiką ir strategijas, kuriomis siekiama užkirsti kelią šališkumui ir nepotizmui darbuotojų atrankos proceso metu.

Raktažodžiai: *COVID-19 pandemija, NVO, Šiaurės Irakas, žmogiškųjų išteklių vadybininkai, nuotolinis darbas.*

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Dedication

This research paper is dedicated to my beloved family for their endless love and support, which were the reason behind my success in my academic journey. Thank you for being my source of strength and believing in me every step of the way.

I also dedicated this work to the victims and survivors affected by the crimes of ISIL, who committed genocide against the Yazidi community on August 3rd, 2014. May their resilience and courage inspire us to work toward a better world where such acts of violence are eradicated. I hope this research paper contributes in its small way to understanding the impact of such tragic events and raising the endeavor for peace, justice, and healing for those affected.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on businesses globally, including those in Northern Iraq. As organizations swiftly adapted to new work methods to ensure their employees' safety, HR managers faced unprecedented challenges in managing their workforce. The measures implemented to contain the virus, such as lockdowns and remote work, have markedly altered the traditional work environment, impacting HR practices that have been in place for years.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges faced by HR managers in Northern Iraq during the period of COVID-19, starting in spring 2020 and continuing until the present. This study aims to understand the changes in HR practices required to manage the workforce during the pandemic, and how HR managers responded to these challenges. By examining the experiences of HR managers in Northern Iraq, this study will contribute to a better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on HR management practices and provide insights on how organizations can prepare for future crises.

Overall, this research intends to provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities that emerge for HR managers in times of crisis and to offer suggestions on how to manage the workforce effectively in similar future situations.

Background

Northern Iraq has experienced significant instability and insecurity due to conflicts and displacement of people, creating a complex humanitarian crisis. NGOs play a critical role in providing aid and assistance to those affected by the crisis. However, HR managers of these NGOs face various challenges in managing their staff, such as recruitment, training, retention, and motivation of personnel. These challenges became even more complex with the

emergence of the COVID-19 crisis in 2019. Since the invasion of ISIL into many areas of Northern Iraq in 2014, many people have been displaced and have fled from the crimes committed by ISIL, particularly against the Yazidi people. Many NGOs were established in the Sinjar area after 2015 to encourage families to return to their places of origin. The primary source of assistance in the area has been provided by NGOs, as there has been no significant government role since then.

Iraq has been through many political and ethnoreligious conflicts throughout history. Nonetheless, the last crisis of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) was the worst, especially for the northern part of Iraq. Many people became victims of ISIL crimes in 2014, and those who survived ended up being internally displaced or migrating to other countries. Around 200,000 Yazidis fled from Sinjar City as a result of the ISIL attack on the area; hundreds were killed, and around 50,000 were stuck on Sinjar Mountain and surrounded by ISIL members. Many died of thirst and hunger. After the liberation of the invaded areas, NGOs began to implement their humanitarian projects to facilitate the process of people returning to their areas of origin (Jahn, n. d.).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was significant for the NGOs operating in Northern Iraq, especially since it brought various challenges for the human resource management department in those NGOs, as it was responsible for dealing with such a recent and unique crisis. NGOs in Northern Iraq operate in a context of ongoing conflicts, political instability, and economic challenges, which were compounded by the pandemic. Restrictions on travel and movement, disruptions to supply chains, and a shortage of essential resources made it difficult for NGOs to deliver services, especially in remote and conflict-affected areas. The pandemic affected the mental health and well-being of employees as well, highlighted pre-existing inequalities, and required NGOs to comply with new health and safety policies. For HR managers, it was also essential to create a secure work environment

for their staff, as effective procedures, regulations, and techniques were required from HR managers to address for both organization and staff during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Yahya, 2022).

As the United Nations Development Programme (2020) stated, the Sinjar area has been through a genocide committed by what is called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The destruction and displacement of people made the area of Sinjar very vulnerable and in need of humanitarian support. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) took the humanitarian supportive role as the role of the government was almost unavailable to support the community of northern Iraq, as they have been providing various services such as education, reconstruction, medical support, etc. What the crisis caused will remain for a long time, yet the NGOs played a significant role to help people to rebuild their lives again despite that NGOs have and still are facing many political and environmental challenges, as without their support it would have been very difficult to survive in such circumstances and environments.

Given the importance of the work that NGOs do in Northern Iraq, it is essential to identify strategies to address the challenges faced by HR managers. This study aims to explore the primary challenges faced by HR managers of NGOs in Northern Iraq during the COVID-19 period and to identify potential solutions to address these challenges, as well as the decisions that have been made that lead to prosperity in such crises.

Overview of the Literature

In this section, the researcher provides a brief overview of the literature review conducted for this research project. The purpose of this overview is to describe the literature which is most relevant to this research, while the overall literature review is presented in detail in chapter two of this research.

Human Resource Management (HRM) is the process of managing the employees of an organization, which is considered valuable. This process includes designing and implementing policies, regulations, and effective systems that contribute to enhancing the performance of an organization and achieving the designed goals. HRM encompasses a set of effective and valuable functions such as workforce planning, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, employee relations, and HR analytics. The main goal of HRM is to create an appropriate work environment for the employees, train them, and motivate them to increase their performance to achieve the organization's objectives (Lussier & Hendon, 2018).

Chai (2020) refers to human resource management (HRM) as the process that contributes to the overall enhancement practice of the employees of an organization, engaging in the implementation and design of policies and regulations of the organization to create a work environment conducive to the achievement of the organization's mission and vision. He also states the importance of HRM as the responsible department that creates an effective workforce for the health of the business, through hiring skilled employees and providing them with suitable training and development approaches.

Challenges are essential for HR managers as they provide opportunities for personal and professional growth, which eventually enhances their ability to handle different tasks and responsibilities effectively. According to a study conducted by Banfield and Kay (2012), the modern workplace environment is highly dynamic, complex, and unpredictable. As a result, HR managers face various challenges, such as employee retention, talent management, and diversity management, which require them to think critically, communicate effectively, and make informed decisions. These challenges enable HR managers to develop their problem-solving skills, creativity, and flexibility, which are vital attributes for successful HR professionals. Therefore, HR managers must embrace challenges as an integral part of their

job to improve their competencies and contribute positively to their organization's overall success. Furthermore, several other articles were reviewed and analyzed as part of this study, as outlined in detail in the literature review in chapter two.

Gaps in the Literature

Furthermore, there is a dearth of literature that examines the specific challenges faced by human resources (HR) managers of NGOs in Northern Iraq during the COVID-19 pandemic. While some studies have highlighted the general challenges faced by organizations during the pandemic, there is a need for research that focuses specifically on the HR function of NGOs in Northern Iraq. Some potential areas of inquiry could include the challenges of recruiting, onboarding, and training new staff during the pandemic, the impact of remote work on team dynamics and productivity, and the implementation of health and safety protocols in the workplace. Additionally, investigating how HR managers developed contingency plans and strategies to ensure their organizations' survival during the pandemic is crucial, as it highlighted the need for preparedness for future crises and challenges.

Addressing these gaps in literature can help identify effective HR strategies and practices for NGOs in Northern Iraq to navigate future crises and challenges.

Definition of Key Words and Terms

COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic is a global outbreak of a highly infectious respiratory illness caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. This pandemic has been first declared on the 11th of March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO). The virus spreads mainly through respiratory droplets and can cause mild to severe signs, including fever, cough, and difficulty in breathing. Vaccines have been made and improved around the world due to the danger of the pandemic and to reduce the number of infected cases, as the pandemic has significantly impacted the globe's health and economy (World Health Organization, 2020).

NGOs-Non-Governmental Organisations: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are separated institutes from the governments that provide social or political services usually to assist vulnerable groups of people who face crises. They are typically humanitarian entities that work independently from any government (FOLGER, 2023). Moreover, NGOs can help to promote transparency and accountability in governance and provide a voice for citizens to participate in decision-making processes. They are often recognized for their flexibility, agility, and innovation, and can offer alternative approaches to complex social or environmental challenges.

Human Resource (HR): Human resources (HR) refers to the process of equipping people of an organization with the necessary and appropriate resources as this process involves both people and the HR department of the organization. It is the process of enhancing the balance between both employer and employee to support the strategy of the organization by creating a positive work culture and providing policies and regulations that lead to the mission of the organization (Shweta, 2022).

Human Resources Management (HRM): is considered the process of enhancing and developing the staff of an organization to make them qualified and able to reach the designed goals of the organization. This includes functions such as the recruitment process, developing training, performance enhancement, rewards, and employee communication improvement. The primary goal of HRM is to attract, develop, and retain talented employees who can contribute to the success of the organization. With effective HRM performance, an NGO can gain a competitive advantage and increase the productivity of the organization (Snell, Morris, & Bohlander, 2020).

Employee: An employee is an individual who works for an employer to be paid an amount of money in exchange for performing designated tasks by the employer. The type of contract and the payment amount are determined by the employer. Moreover, this process of

employment takes place by announcing a vacancy that includes a job description and requirements, while the employee applies for the announced position, undergoes an interview, and is selected accordingly based on the required skills and experiences (Heathfield, 2022).

Remote Work: refers to the practice of job duties outside of the traditional office setting, it is also known as working from home or any other place rather than the usual work location. It is a sort of flexible work arrangement through which the usual tasks are implemented by employees outside of the location they used to work from (Nickson & Siddons, 2012).

Work environment: Work environment refers to the objective place where the work is performed by the individuals, improving this environment and enhancing the relationship among the employees' community can lead to a positive atmosphere for the competitive advantage of a company or an NGO (Teams, 2023).

Recruitment: recruitment is the process of declaring a job vacancy for a needed employment position through which the most qualified candidate is selected according to the applicant's skills and experience that being identified by the panel of employers, this process of recruitment leads to a strong workforce and achieve the business goals when an effective recruitment is practiced (Paul Sparrow, 2017).

Nepotism: Kokemuller (2023), states that nepotism stands for the practice of preferring relatives and friends over other employees or candidates during the process of selection and promotion in an organization, as this process is considered an unethical act and may lead to negative consequences within the work environment and impact the organization's reputation.

Importance of the Study

This study aims to investigate the challenges faced by HR managers during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs running in Northern Iraq. The pandemic crisis impacted many sectors, leading to high consequences during that period. The findings of the study may have important implications for HR managers and policymakers in the region, providing insights into strategies for overcoming challenges and improving the effectiveness of performance management systems in public sector organizations. The importance of this study relies on addressing the main challenges that were faced during such sudden crises in order to find the best strategies that would help in the future to raise the productivity and performance of NGO employees in such vulnerable areas where there is a significant gap in the literature. It is also important to identify such challenges during a crisis to be ready for any relevant circumstances in the future. By doing so, one would be able to contribute to reducing the consequences.

Research Questions

This research indicates the importance of identifying the main challenges that HR managers faced during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs of Northern Iraq in order to be ready for such crises in the future. A qualitative methodology will be used in this research to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1: What were the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely during the period of COVID-19 for the NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq?

Research Question 2: What lessons can be learned from the experiences of HR managers in Northern Iraq NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can they be applied to future crises?

Research Question 3: What strategies do HR managers in NGOs in Northern Iraq use to prevent impartiality and nepotism during the employee selection process?

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an overview of the research topic and its background, as well as identified the research problem and question, objectives, and significance of the study. The chapter has also presented the theoretical framework and a review of relevant literature. The subsequent chapters of this research will build upon this foundation and present the methodology, analysis, and findings of the study. Chapter 2 will provide a detailed description of the literature review for this research, while Chapter 3 will cover the methodology and approach. Chapter 4 will present the results of the data analysis, and Chapter 5 will discuss the findings.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to recognize the main challenges faced by human resource managers during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs that operate in North Iraq, as its importance is concentrated on finding such main challenges analyzing them and realizing to how overcome such challenges in the future. This literature review will reveal literature gaps that are relevant to the purpose of this study using a general to specific order method throughout this chapter starting with the main functions that HR managers perform, the general challenges that HR managers face and delve deeper into the challenges specific to NGOs (non-governmental organizations), examine the global challenges that HR managers have encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the unique challenges faced by HR managers in NGOs during this time.

Human Resources Management

Human resource management (HRM): The term human resource was first used during the 1990s to describe the collective work of employees within an organization. HRM stands for the entire process of managing the employees who work for an organization in addition to the processes of hiring and recruiting them. It is also responsible for enhancing the workforce by providing an appropriate work environment and balancing the relationship between the employees and the organization (Chai, 2020).

The United Nations Development Programme (n.d.) indicates that HR management is the correct approach to controlling the most valuable assets of an organization, as these valuable assets are considered the group of people who work for the organization which points to the people who are working there. Those groups of employees are the most valuable assets because they contribute to the success of the organization and increase productivity.

According to Heathfield (2021), HR management is considered the process through which all aspects connected to the people who are working in an organization are managed, it is the process that leads to the achievement of goals and objectives of the organization via enhancing the role of its employees and managing an effective workplace environment.

The International Labour Organization (2017), states that human resource management contributes to developing the human resources of an organization by creating effective procedures, policies, and programs that aim to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization.

Human Resource Management is considered as an operative, managerial, and advisory position within an organization which is basically seeks to increase the productivity of the organization through managing work culture and all functional aspects of its employees, which contributes in enhancing the workforce of the organization to achieve the final goals and objectives of the organization, as the operative responsibilities of HRM covers recruitment, training and development, professional development, compensation and benefits, performance appraisal, and ensuring legal compliance, while the managerial responsibilities are more involved to the planning, organizing, orienting employees, and controlling, as the advisory functions include top management advice regarding the procedures and policies besides improving the relationships among the co-workers, also departmental head advice may include advising the heads of different departments about the procedures and policies that help on improving the workforce. (Human Resource Management (HRM): Definition & Functions, n.d.)

Functions that HR Managers Perform

Human resource managers are responsible for managing employees in a company. They create and implement plans that are supportive of the company's overall business goals. They also work to improve relationships between management and employees by addressing

concerns and complaints. HR managers are in charge of the hiring process and ensure that the company has the staff it needs to meet current and future demands. They maintain benefits and pay schedules and analyze training requirements. HR managers must also comply with laws and regulations when managing human resources. Overall, they work to create a supportive workplace where employees can perform at their best ("What are the Roles and Responsibilities of an HR Manager", 2022).

According to Mathis and Jackson (2021), Human Resource (HR) management covers the full scope of activities correlated with managing an organization's human resources. These duties are significant for attracting, developing, and retaining a talented and engaged workforce that can help an organization achieve its mission. The essential activities of HR management include:

- Job analysis and design,
- Recruitment and selection,
- Training and development,
- Performance management,
- Compensation and benefits,
- Employee relations,
- Safety and health,
- Human resource information systems (HRIS), and
- Diversity and inclusion.

According to Simplilearn (2023), one of the most important departments for any organization is the human resource department. It states that there are ten important functions that should be taken into consideration when you intend to join the HR department. These functions are: HR planning, recruiting and selection processes, performance management,

employment planning, participation and communication, health and safety, personal well-being, administrative responsibilities, industrial relations, and rewards.

Human resources management is considered the most valuable resource when running a business. Its essential purpose is to contribute to achieving the immediate and long-term goals of the businesses. Human resource management considers employees their most valuable assets, so it is important to focus on helping employees professionally and personally as this process helps raise the cooperation between the members of an organization and recognize the shared objectives. There are various functions of human resource managers, like job analysis, which is considered a crucial part of HRM as it provides a clear identification of each position in business. Recruitment and selection, through which applications are received, interviews are conducted, and the best candidates are chosen for the advertised position. Providing trainings, performance evaluations, providing work safety, enhancing the relationship between co-workers, workforce planning, introduction and orientation of employees, promotion, employee output – all these tasks are run by HR managers in order to increase the productivity of an organization (Team, 2023).

Vulpen (2023) states that understanding human resource management leads to figuring out the functions of HRM. He points to a group of helpful functions that increase the productivity of the organization, including human resource planning, recruitment and selection, performance management, learning and development, career planning, function evaluation, rewards, industrial relations, employee participation and communication, health and safety, personal well being, and administrative responsibilities.

General Challenges of HR Managers

Human resource managers face several challenges during performing their duties, such as selecting the right candidate from a pool of applicants, ensuring the emotional and physical well-being of employees, striking a balance between the interests of management

and employees, executing training and development programs, and fair compensation, and conducting performance evaluations. Moreover, human resource managers must manage trade unions accurately, taking into account both union demands and management interests (Chand, n.d.)

Human Resource Managers face a set of challenges that require strategic planning and creative solutions. The technology growing and remote work raised challenges for HRM. In order to handle the overall problem, it is essential for HR managers to ensure that the time, money, and resources for an organization are spent correctly. One of the biggest challenges is attracting top talent to the organization. Embracing change with an open mind is another challenge for HR managers, who must ensure that employees are well-equipped to deal with change and have rich communication channels. Empowering the leaders of tomorrow is another challenge, which requires HR managers to provide specific training sessions, clear progression paths, and chances to lead and present to the team. Building a culture of nonstop learning is also a challenge, but this can be achieved by adopting a growth mindset, setting learning goals, and using online, gamified, and microlearning methods. HR managers must also build a diverse team by conducting cultural awareness activities, educating leaders to be inclusive, celebrating cultural diversity, and encouraging diverse hires. Finally, HR managers must look after the health and safety of employees and manage turnover rates by creating a quality employee experience (Azmi, 2022).

According to Brewster, Houldsworth, Sparrow, and Vernon (2016), human resource management faces various challenges, including:

- Managing diversity and inclusion
- Talent management and development
- Employee engagement and retention
- Succession planning

- Complying with employment laws and regulations
- Managing employee relations
- Dealing with change and uncertainty
- Promoting health and well-being
- Utilizing technology and data analytics

Gupta (2022), states that despite of how small or big the organization is, challenges always appear when it comes to improving the workforce of an organization since the great responsibilities present great challenges which effectively impact on managing human resources, so HR managers encounter numerous challenges like attracting top talent, changing the management, reskilling and upskilling, building digital dexterity, managing diversity, employee engagement, employee retention, leadership development, employee health and well-being, employee onboarding, training the new staff, remote workforce management, employee experience, measuring HR effectiveness, and compensation and benefits, all these practices bring various challenges for the human resource as it is important to put them all into consideration to raise the productivity and achievement of organizational goals.

Challenges of HR managers in NGOs

Holleman and Warria (2019) state that HR managers in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) encounter various challenges that are typical to the sector. One of the most challenging aspects is the process of making a balance between financial constraints and the practice of interesting and retaining talented staff. According to the authors, NGOs typically have limited resources, and HR managers must create strategies to provide competitive salaries and benefits packages that will encourage qualified candidates to join the organization. This can be particularly challenging in a sector where many employees are interested in the organization's mission, rather than monetary incentives.

According to Divya (2014), NGOs are organized according to their own policies and measurements that are away from the interference of any government, as they are non-profit and serve societies in times of need and to a great part volunteer. He states that the term NGOs appeared when the private and public sectors failed to manage the problems of communities. One of the difficult missions that NGOs in general face, especially challenging for the human resource department, is to attract, motivate, and retain the workforce in the NGOs. He also states that NGOs fail in their role as employers in providing training programs to their employees to enhance the workforce. It will be extremely challenging for human resources when the NGO acts as an employer and does not follow effective strategies of HR such as training, motivation, and compensation. He also reveals through the results of his study that there are several main factors that lead to high turnover in NGOs like low payment, lack of resources, lack of job satisfaction, lack of leadership skills, insufficient training and development programs, unhealthy connection between the employer and the employees ...etc.

The human resource department in NGOs faces various challenges while trying to enhance and preserve the valuable mission and vision of the organization. As one of the challenges is the difficulty in attracting and retaining talented individuals who might be passionate about the mission of the organization, also working conditions are one of the challenging aspects for HR to be implemented in any environment. Tracking and fostering performance is another challenge for human resources in NGOs, in addition to complying with legal instructions and factors of each environment. Finally, the lack of human resource management process and the lack of resources are also challenging for the performance of HR in NGOs (Crosta, n.d.).

In summary, the difficulties faced by HR managers in NGOs include the necessity to balance financial constraints with attracting and retaining talent, navigating complex legal

and regulatory frameworks, and keeping staff morale and motivation in the face of emotionally challenging work.

In conclusion, HR managers in NGOs face many challenges in managing human resources. These challenges have resulted from limited resources, high turnover rates, and managing a diverse workforce. HR managers in NGOs must be capable of developing creative and strategic methods for human resource management to attract and retain talented employees while promoting diversity and inclusivity in the workplace.

Global Challenges of HR managers during COVID-19

One of the biggest challenges for HR managers during the COVID-19 pandemic was managing remote work, this includes ensuring that the employees are well-equipped and providing essential resources to work from home, providing adequate support and communication, and maintaining employee engagement and productivity. Other challenges include the obligation of imposing and enforcing health and safety protocols, managing employee mental health and well-being, and dealing with furloughs and layoffs. HR managers also face the challenge of adapting to new technologies and finding innovative ways to recruit and onboard new employees in a virtual environment. The uncertainty and constantly changing nature of the pandemic present additional challenges for HR managers as they navigate these unprecedented times (HR, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented numerous challenges for Human Resources (HR) managers in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) globally, concluding managing productivity and job guarantee. Additionally, the specific number of staff working on-site due to safety concerns has presented a challenge for HR managers in NGOs, who are responsible for keeping the required level of productivity and work quality despite reduced manpower. Furthermore, during the period of COVID-19, people needed humanitarian support, and thus employee engagement practices have become increasingly important during the COVID-19

lockdown, as HR managers in NGOs strive to maintain employee morale and motivation while adapting to the remote working environment. The shift to remote work was very challenging, as it is important for HR managers to ensure that employees are well-equipped and have the appropriate resources for their performance efficiency. Despite these challenges, HR managers in NGOs have demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness in adapting to the new normal and finding innovative solutions to ensure that they continue to deliver on the mission of the organization (Rajkumar, 2022).

Overall, despite that the pandemic period has been challenging for HR managers as they faced difficult situations trying to balance the needs of their employees with the needs of their organization, it also provided a good chance for the NGOs to improve their strategies and make their workforce stronger than before to ensure employee safety, support employee well-being, and maintain business continuity during the pandemic.

In conclusion, during the COVID-19 pandemic HR managers faced many challenges globally. These challenges include managing employee health and safety, employee commitment and motivation, and adapting to new recruitment processes. HR managers needed to adjust quickly to new required ways of working and enhancing new strategies to ensure the well-being of their employees while maintaining business continuity.

Challenges of HR Managers during COVID-19 in NGOs

According to Pragya (2022), life became very challenging during the crisis of COVID-19. A new culture of working from home has been spread all over the world as a result of the implementation of lockdowns trying to reduce infections, organizations and employees were obliged to adopt this new culture from one side, and it resulted in various challenges for human resource regarding talent management and development from another side. She also points to the three major challenges including:

1. Employee Engagement: it was highly challenging to ensure that employee engagement and employee productivity were not impacted by the consequences of COVID-19, as there was an obvious shift regarding the work environment which made the mission more difficult for the HR to adjust appropriate engagement programs that help on retaining employee performance.
2. Employee Recruitment and Retention: the process of recruitment and retaining qualified employees was another major challenge for HR to handle. The workload became virtual as the IT sector employees were highly preferred and it was challenging to retain them in such circumstances.
3. Employee well-being: mental health is considered one of the most important issues in the world nowadays, so this was the most prioritized challenge for human resources to deal with. What was threatening the mental health of employees during the period of COVID-19, was staying at home for a long time and seizing social activities, besides the terrible situation of many people dying.

In conclusion, times of COVID-19 were hugely challenging for both organizations and the human resource department to enhance the overall workforce for keeping productivity and employee performance in healthy condition.

Saxena (2023) states that it is well-known that the COVID-19 crisis had brought numerous challenges to various aspects of life and almost all other fields, yet people could adapt to these challenges. The sudden actions and regulations resulted by COVID-19 greatly impacted the role of human resource managers as many operations have been restricted by the COVID-19 crisis and the unpredictable circumstances including some basic areas like:

- Working environment: the working environment was the most area impacted by COVID-19 as it witnessed many changes including work hours, job plans, rest hours, and the physical and mental atmosphere at the workplace. Many NGOs had to

follow working from home due to the lockdown as this was widely challenging to be managed, as some employees had to be at the workplace and follow social distancing and protection measures.

- Hiring and staffing: one of the difficult tasks to be handled during the period of COVID-19, was managing the financial situation of organizations since a variety of projects were affected as some organizations had closed for being unable to manage this financial impact. It became even harder for the human resource managers as many employees lost their jobs as an action for the NGOs to save their costs and seized the recruitment process accordingly.
- Adopting digitalization: during the lockdown of COVID-19, many organizations adjusted digitization widely as an alternative approach for survival, yet it was challenging for the managers to replace it with traditional work since remote work was only possible with the availability of technology.
- Performance evaluation: for the new work environment and the different circumstances of each employee, it was greatly challenging for human resource managers to evaluate the performance of their staff, since their tasks were not stable due to the death of family members and difficult conditions people were facing.
- Training and development: it was very challenging for human resource managers to enhance the workforce to the new work environment as they more like needed virtual skills and experiences as they needed to learn the new procedures of remote work, especially learning the use of ICT for communication and tasks accomplishment, as HR managers had to provide appropriate pieces of training for enhancing the workforce.
- Communication and mental health: a huge gap in communication witnessed during the period of COVID-19 due to remote working. Mental health and many other

new factors brought stress for the workforce to manage the numerous virtual tasks and data collection as face-to-face interactions reduced as this created a negative work environment and it was very challenging for the HR managers to handle.

- Compensation: This factor was considered the most challenging and complicated one for human resource managers as it is used for the most important process for an organization of employee retention as it was difficult to offer compensation due to financial lack during the COVID pandemic.

Challenges of HR managers during COVID-19 in NGOs in Iraq

Despite the sort of crisis, the recruitment and selection processes are always challenging to be managed during a crisis. It is even more challenging in Iraq since the area is considered a very vulnerable spot due to various conflicts and the unstable security situation, in addition, the country has many locations that are attractive for investments and business operations. It became challenging as diverse foreign people apply for jobs in Iraq, especially in the Kurdistan region and such actions require talent management. During crises, the most challenging aspects are found in the talent management and recruitment process (Yaseen, n.d.).

According to UNDP (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic impacted NGOs in Iraq. NGOs in Iraq have faced several challenges as a result of the pandemic, including a decrease in funding, a decline in the number of volunteers, and difficulties in reaching vulnerable communities due to movement restrictions and the implemented lockdown. Many NGOs needed to shift their programs to fit the needs of communities affected by COVID-19. Additionally, the report highlights that the pandemic created a more challenging environment than before in Iraq, including the country's health system, economy, and social cohesion, further complicating the work of NGOs in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, as

usually the fund-focus for areas of crises and conflict unless for COVID-19 pandemic it was everywhere and no enough financial abilities to face the crisis.

Despite the massive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of NGOs around the world. Research conducted on numerous conflicts in Iraq yet very little research has been conducted on the specific challenges faced by HR managers in NGOs operating in Iraq, particularly in the north of the country and in areas like Sinjar during the period of COVID-19. This knowledge gap in the literature addresses the need for further research to identify the unique challenges that HR managers in these organizations are facing during the ongoing pandemic. This gap is relevant to research questions that seek to explore and understand the main challenges that HR managers in these organizations have faced during this time. It highlights the need for further research to fill this gap and provides insights that can help inform HR management practices in NGOs operating in similar contexts.

Conclusion

This chapter of the literature review has provided a general overview of human resources management and the functions that HR managers perform. The general challenges HR managers have been provided with and addressed are the ones within NGOs. It also reveals the global challenges that have been faced during the period of COVID19 by HR managers, then specifies the ones faced within NGOs. It also presents the challenges of HR managers within NGOs who work in Iraq during the period of COVID-19.

The next chapter will explore the methodology of this study, it will state the purpose of the study and address the research questions, in addition to identifying the sampling research method that will be used during data collection and data analysis besides the methods that will be used. Moreover, chapter 3 will also indicate the validity and reliability of collected data and explore the processes that will be used to come up with relevant results for this study.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative study aims to explore the challenges that have been faced by HR managers during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs of Northern Iraq, and its impact on the productivity of work. Throughout this chapter, the methodology will be presented, in addition to the techniques and procedures that will be used to conduct this research. The chapter will outline the purpose of the study and the research questions that will guide the research process. Next, it will indicate the purposive sampling. The chapter then will discuss the data collection method that will be used, which involves collecting data through interviews with the participants. The chapter will also detail the data analysis method that will be used to analyze the collected data, in addition to the data validity and reliability. Finally, the chapter will provide a summary, as a conclusion at the end of the chapter, of what has been explored throughout the methodology chapter.

Purpose and Research Question(s)

This study explores the main challenges that human resources (HR) managers faced during the period of COVID-19 in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Northern Iraq. This study seeks to explore how the human resource department dealt with the crisis of COVID-19 pandemic and what strategies and policies did they use to overcome the faced challenges to keep the work productivity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), providing a deeper understanding of the potential impact, as well as the measures that HR managers may take to overcome these challenges. What interested this researcher about this study is that we cannot say it is the end of similar crises as COVID-19 and it is predicted that

we might face more similar crises, so that such conditions should be studied and researched in order to be ready in future, also the area of Sinjar is almost neglected by the Iraqi government as it is considered as a disputed area and vulnerable that depends on humanitarian assistance which is provided by NGOs and thus, it is important to address the challenges for more productivity. Another interesting issue is pointing to the partiality and nepotism through the process of employee selection to preserve the reputations of NGOs throughout the area. specifically, the study aims to address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What were the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely during the period of COVID19 for the NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq?

Research Question 2: What lessons can be learned from the experiences of HR managers in Northern Iraq NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can they be applied to the future crises?

Research Question 3: What strategies do HR managers in NGOs in Northern Iraq use to prevent partiality and nepotism during the employee selection process?

By addressing these research questions, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the challenges that HR managers faced in NGOs during the period of COVID-19 in Northern Iraq and into future situations similar to COVID-19. The study seeks to inform the future HR practices and strategies in response to the pandemic and to contribute to the existing literature on the potential impact of the pandemic on HR management in the non-profit sector. Additionally, the study contributes to providing recommendations for NGOs in Northern Iraq to enhance their HR practices and strategies in the face of future challenges.

Sampling Method

To achieve the purpose of this study and answer the research questions, a qualitative research methodology was used by conducting in-depth interviews with participants who were main employees in the human resource department of non-governmental organizations

that operate in northern Iraq and precisely in Nineveh (Sinjar) and Duhok governorates, as this study requires. According to Research Methodology (2022), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants were selected based on specific characteristics or traits that are relevant to the research question or objectives. The researcher intentionally chose participants who could provide valuable information or insights into the research topic. Purposive sampling is also known as judgment sampling or selective sampling, and it is commonly used in qualitative research studies, particularly when the population of interest is small, and the researcher requires participants with specific knowledge or expertise. The researcher used this approach of purposive sampling method which is known as the judgment sampling method due to the researcher's knowledge and experiences with NGOs since 2016, this researcher is aware of the services and projects they are implementing at the selected area. The selection criteria were based on the role and positions of participants with NGOs in the targeted area, those who were able to provide valuable insights into the research questions. Focusing on participants who were engaged as HR managers in NGOs during the period of COVID-19 was important in addressing the difficulties and challenges they faced. Thus, the purposive sampling method was used based on knowledge and experiences to select the most appropriate samples for this research questions.

The process of participation continued with invitations to employees from the human resource department of NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq to participate in in-depth interviews. The researcher did his best to select the most popular or those who are providing more projects in the area according to their experiences and background in order to provide the most appropriate answers to this research questions. The interview included nine main open-ended questions and they were designed in a way that aims to discover the main and valuable aspects of the research questions.

Due to the experiences and background of this researcher in the humanitarian sector for a long time, and through attending general meetings for NGOs, this researcher knows the well-active NGOs in the area. First, the site authorization was sent to the most active international and local NGOs in the area, and then after approval, the researcher sent the selected participant a very detailed email attaching the informed consent form. The researcher avoided choosing those he had worked with and his friends and colleagues to keep confidentiality, and privacy, and avoid bias for the collected data, also to have a diversity of suitable answers and information for the research. As the researcher was aware of the importance of selecting the right participants for this study from HR management of NGOs in Northern Iraq, to ensure that the participants are relevant and have the necessary knowledge and expertise. The researcher first determined the active NGOs, then the site authorization was provided and after receiving the permission the researcher contacted the selected employee from the HR department of each NGO some by phone and others were emailed, introduced myself, explained the study, and clarified the purpose of the study and addressed its importance to make them participate, as the researcher sent the participants an email including a clear explanation of the study and request, as the informed consent document was attached to better understand and also to sign it if agreed in addition to the interview questionnaires to arrange a date for conducting the interview and also to be familiar with the questions, To encourage participation, the researcher emphasized the importance of the study and how the results can contribute to the development and improvement of HR practices within the nonprofit sector in Northern Iraq. Clear communication of verbally informing via phone contact and providing the informed consent document via email was established with potential participants to ensure they fully understand the purpose of the study and their role in it. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. Follow-up was

made to confirm the participant's willingness to participate and to schedule an interview time that is convenient for them.

This researcher requested verbal consent from the participants and asked them to sign the consent form before conducting the interview. During the interviews the researcher introduced himself to the participants, thanked them for their participation, and provided them with a general overview of this study and its purpose to ensure that everything is clear enough to start, besides the researcher informed them that the interview will be voice-recorded for the purpose of analysis and only the researcher will listen to it, and the participants were asked for permission to be recorded and in case anyone of them refused or did not like to be recorder they were provided with the choice of answering the questions by typing, as the interviewee does not need to mention personal information or information concerning the NGO, during the interview, the important notes were written in a notebook in addition they have been compared during the process of transcription to what had been mentioned for accuracy, the researcher record the face-to-face interviews via the researcher's phone and the online ones through the Skype recorder after taking the permission from the participants. All the collected information and data were saved in the new google drive account with two-authentication factor to secure them, besides the hard copies and the taken notes were saved inside the personal locked cabinet which is accessible only by the researcher in his own room to be well-protected. For confidentiality and respect for the participants, they were all informed that the researcher will destroy all hard copies and erase the soft copies after accomplishing this study exactly on August 31, 2023. This researcher concentrated on the importance of preserving the participants' identities and personal information as the researcher again expressed gratitude to the participants for involving in this study and thanked them for their time and efforts at the end of the interview.

Overall, the recruitment plan aimed to identify and recruit a diverse sample of HR managers from NGOs in Northern Iraq who could provide valuable insights into this research questions. By selecting relevant participants from active NGOs and ensuring their participation, the researcher could obtain valid and reliable data that could contribute to the development of effective HR practices within the nonprofit sector.

Data Collection

The researcher collected the data of the study from Eight participants from different and well-active NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq, all of them from the human resource department as five were from INGOs (International non-profit organizations) and the other three were from LNGOs (Local non-profit organizations). This researcher first depended on the NGOs that are mostly active and well-known in the area and ensured the relevancy of the participants to this research question and who had the necessary knowledge and experience to provide useful insights. The data were collected through structured interviews, using the purposive sampling method. Before conducting, the participants received an informed consent including a clear plan of what was required and what the study would be about, in addition to highlighting the importance of this study. The researcher did inform all the participants about keeping the conditionality and their names and personal information will be shared nowhere, the hard copies of taken notes, signed site authorization form, signed informed consent forms, and other transcribed data were stored inside a locked cabinet in the personal room of the researcher, beside the soft copies of recorded memos were saved to the new personal google drive, and the researcher informed them that they will be all removed and destroyed after completing this study on August 31, 2023. All hard copies will be destroyed by using a cross-cut shredder and the researcher will make sure to shred them into unreadable and small pieces, for the soft copies as all were gathered in the allocated new google drive account, the researcher will first delete them all then delete them permanently

from the Trash, after making sure that they are all deleted permanently then the google drive account will be deleted, the researcher will also make sure to left nothing in the used USB driver and format it. Participants were also explicitly informed that their involvement in the study is entirely voluntary, and no compensations or rewards were provided, Furthermore, the researcher assured participants' had the right to withdraw from the study at any time with pleasure and according to their comfort.

Before conducting the structured interviews, this researcher had a clear understanding of the research questions and the interview questions that need to be answered, 9 open-ended standardized questions were used in the same order and provided to the Eight selected participants. After site authorization approval from NGOs and receiving verbal consent approval from the participants, the researcher started to conduct structured interviews. Two interviews were conducted face-to-face, two were conducted online via Skype, while four participants preferred to answer the questions by writing, as they did not like to be recorded. In both ways notes were taken in addition voice recording was used during the interviews after getting agreement from the participants. For the face-to-face interviews, Only the researcher and the participant were in the interview as all the eighth interviews were answered in the English language since all relevant participants were familiar with the English language.

Data Analysis Method

Once structured interviews were accomplished, the relevant qualitative data were collected and gathered, such as transcripts, written notes, and documents and the researcher organized them all for the analysis process. The researcher used MAXQDA software for organizing, coding, and analyzing the collected qualitative data. The thematic approach was used for this process and the data analysis process, as proposed by Yin (2016), consists of

five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and drawing the conclusion, which was used to analyze the data and answer the research questions.

In the first step of the framework, the data were gathered and organized securely, including interview notes, recordings, and other relevant materials. Appropriate tools including two-factor authentication, a personal password-protected computer, a new google drive account, and personal locked cabinets were used to ensure that the data were well-safeguarded.

In the second step, disassembling, the researcher broke down the collected data into manageable parts or pieces to facilitate the coding process. For coding the interview data, the researcher used constructs, recordings, and notes as primary identifiers. The researcher leveraged MAXQDA software to import and organize codes and sub-codes for the collected data.

Through the third step, reassembling, the researcher put the pieces back together by linking codes and sub-codes with patterns and themes based on the collected data from the participants. This process was designed to effectively address the research questions and achieve the overall objectives of this study.

In the fourth step of interpreting the data, the pattern, themes, notes, transcripts, recordings, codes, and sub-codes were thoroughly reviewed to ensure the accuracy and efficacy of the data interpretation. This step also involved linking the produced themes to the research questions and specifying the findings. Moreover, to strengthen the themes, quotes from participants that support the identified themes were cited to provide a link between the themes and the interviews.

The final step of the framework, of conclusion, involved addressing the data analysis method and explaining how Yin's five-phased cycle was used to complete the study and

answer the research questions. It has been concluded by summarizing the key findings and their implications for future research.

Validity

In research, validity refers to the extent to which a study precisely represents or evaluates the particular concept or idea that it aims to measure (McLeod, 2018).

In this study, the researcher ensured that the data analysis process and the sample population meet the requirements of validity by approaching several steps. First, pilot interviews were conducted using the prepared questionnaires with some of friends, colleagues, and coworkers making sure that the questions were clear and relevant to the research questions as all their comments were taken, recommendations, and notes into consideration. Also a translated copy of the questionnaires in Arabic language was provided for ensuring that they are easily understandable by the targeted population as both copies were shared with the participants. Second, the researcher ensured that the sample population was large enough by using a purposive sampling method to select participants who had the relevant experience and knowledge required for the study. Additionally, the researcher ensured the safeguards enhance the validity of the data by implementing measures such as password-protected computer and locked cabinets for ensuring the security and confidentiality of the collected data. Furthermore, the researcher used MAXQDA software which assisted in the data analysis process, and helped in ensuring that the data were analyzed accurately and efficiently, as the taken notes were compared against the transcriptions. Overall, these measurements enhanced the validity of the data and ensured that the findings of the study are reliable and credible.

Reliability

In this study, the researcher ensured that the participants were selected based on their positions and experiences with popular NGOs in Northern Iraq, especially those who were

operating during the hard times of COVID-19 pandemic. Verbal consent was provided as mentioned before, in addition to creating a flexible and comfortable environment for them by choosing the right place for the interviews and the way they prefer, either face-to-face or through Skype in order to enhance their efforts, opinions, and performance while answering the required questions. The data collection process was conducted consistently and systematically. This involved using the same interview guides for all participants and ensuring that each interview is conducted in a standardized way. To ensure the validity and precision of the findings in this study, also a thorough quality control process was implemented. This involved carefully reviewing the recorded interviews and cross-checking the responses provided by participants, comparing them to the notes taken during the interviews. The researcher aimed to enhance the reliability of the data collected and mitigate the potential for errors or inconsistencies in the results. As this researcher was confident that the conclusions drawn from this study were well-supported and accurately reflected the perspectives and experiences of the participants. Using MAXQDA with the assistance of the advisor ensured that the coding process is consistent and accurate. The soft and hard copies of the collected data were safeguarded and well-protected. Thus, how the study met the requirements of reliability and provided dependable and consistent findings.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the methodology adopted in the present study. The purpose and research questions were clearly outlined to address the challenges faced by HR managers during the COVID-19 period in NGOs of Northern Iraq to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research, as a set of relevant questions are determined. The sampling method used for this qualitative study was discussed and determined the purposive sampling to be used for data collection, along with data collection describing the methodology of collecting data and how to keep privacy and confidentiality, in

addition to addressing the analysis methods and using MAXQDA for organizing and coding the collected data. The reliability and validity of the data were also addressed to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the results obtained. In the next chapter, chapter 4, a thorough analysis of the collected data through interviews will be provided to present a clear overview of the results and findings of the study.

Chapter 4 Results

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher concentrated on the findings of the study by analyzing the data that were collected from eight interviews with participants from the HR department of NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq. The researcher started with the purpose of the research, research questions, sampling method, and data analysis. The researcher used Yin's Five-Phased cycle approach of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding to analyze the collected qualitative data for answering the research questions and illustrating the purpose of this research.

The purpose of the research

This study explores the main challenges that Human Resources (HR) managers faced during the period of COVID-19 in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Northern Iraq. The study seeks to explore how the HR department interacted with the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and what strategies and policies they used to overcome the challenges faced to keep the work productivity of NGOs. This provides a deeper understanding of the potential impact, as well as the measures that HR managers may take to overcome these challenges. What interested this researcher about this study is that we cannot say it is the end of crises similar to COVID-19, and it is predicted that we might face more similar crises in the future. Therefore, such conditions should be studied and researched to be ready for the future. Also, the area of Sinjar is almost neglected by the Iraqi government, as it is considered a disputed and vulnerable area that depends on humanitarian assistance, which is provided by NGOs. Thus, it is important to address the challenges for more productivity. Another interesting issue is pointing out the partiality and nepotism in the process of employee selection, to preserve the reputations of NGOs throughout the area.

Research questions

Research Question 1: What were the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely during the period of COVID-19 for the NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq?

Research Question 2: What lessons can be learned from the experiences of HR managers in Northern Iraq NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can they be applied to future crises?

Research Question 3: What strategies do HR managers in NGOs in Northern Iraq use to prevent partiality and nepotism during the employee selection process?

Sampling Method

To achieve the purpose of this study and answer the research questions, a qualitative research methodology was used by conducting in-depth interviews with participants who were main employees in the human resource department of non-governmental organizations that operate in northern Iraq, precisely in Nineveh (Sinjar) and Duhok governorates, as this study requires. See below, Table 1.

Table 1 Participants

Participant Code	Participant Position	LNGO or INGO
P01	Country HR Manager	INGO
P02	HR Manager	INGO
P03	HR & Admin Coordinator	INGO
P04	HR/Administrative Manager	LNGO
P05	HR Officer	LNGO
P06	HR Assistant	LNGO
P07	HR Manger	INGO
P08	HR Manager	INGO

Data Analysis

The researcher used Yin's five-phased cycle to analyze the collected data from the conducting of eight interviews as the collected data were compiled, disassembled, reassembled, interpreted, and concluded. It is an effective approach that helps researchers to analyze the collected data clearly and it simplifies the process of analysis (Yin, 2016). To effectively address the research questions of this study, the five phases of analyzing the data will be explored throughout this chapter.

Compiling: Throughout the first phase, the researcher completed conducting the eight interviews and transcribed recordings of the interviews directly once they ended using MS Word documents, the researcher also cleaned the transcriptions from extraneous words as all the interviews were conducted in the English language. To increase the accuracy, the researcher checked the taken notes with the audio recordings and the transcriptions to well understand what had been mentioned, and then all the eighth interviews were gathered in one secured general folder under the name of Conducted Interviews. After that, this researcher created eight folders inside the general folder, one for each participant to be well organized, and named them accordingly to the codes of the participants. The researcher also gathered the signed informed consent, site authorization, and transcribed files of each participant and inserted them into each one's own folder.

Disassembling: in the second phase, the researcher coded in sequence each transcribed document with a number, one zero, and the letter 'P, which stands for (Participant) P01, P02, P08, to maintain confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of the interviews. After that, all transcribed files were uploaded into MAXQDA and arranged in order. The researcher reviewed the transcriptions again and double-checked the taken notes against them. Based on the answers of the participants and their relevance to the interview questions, the researcher created the primary codes using MAXQDA. A list of twelve

The researcher linked the analyzed data to the research questions by creating the patterns that link codes and sub-codes by reassembling the disassembled data, and then this researcher collected the patterns, codes, and sub-codes in a table using MS Word for analyzing and interpreting purposes. The researcher reviewed the taken notes and the data in MAXQDA to increase the accuracy and quality of patterns, codes, and sub-codes. Patterns, codes, and sub-codes are shown in Appendix F.

Depending on the linking of participants' responses, codes, sub-codes, and form patterns, the researcher formed three themes that linked the collected data to the research questions to find the final main answers and improve the accuracy of the findings. The process of forming the themes helped find the relationship between patterns, which helped in answering the research questions clearly and accurately. The relationship between themes and patterns is shown in Appendix G.

Interpretation: After compiling, disassembling, and reassembling, the researcher interpreted the collected data through the three formed themes and found the relevant answers to the research questions by addressing the relationship between patterns, themes, codes, and sub-codes. The researcher did an accurate analysis to come up with the themes that are formed and linked to the codes and patterns according to the answers of the participants, as these themes answer the research questions, which leads to a better understanding of the main challenges that HR managers faced during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs in Northern Iraq.

The first theme is **“The impacts of remote work for NGOs during the period of COVID-19.”** This theme is directly linked to the first research question, ‘What were the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely during the period of COVID-19 for NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq?’. Five different patterns were covered and linked to this theme: ‘remote work has numerous advantages for employees and NGOs’, remote work

presents many challenges to employees' performance', 'transitioning to remote work posed significant challenges for human resource department', 'the COVID-19 pandemic presented the human resource department with significant management challenges', 'implementing comprehensive strategies and policies can effectively reduce the challenges encountered during crises'. The first pattern, 'remote work has numerous advantages for employees and NGOs' is linked to the first primary code, 'positive impacts of remote work' (See Appendix F). While conducting the interviews, the participants mentioned several advantages of working remotely for both NGOs and their employees, like cost savings, remote work benefits, professional development, flexibility, less work pressure and comfort, and improved focus and autonomy as these factors assist in addressing new skills and abilities for both employees and employers and also help to adapt to a new work environment and workforce.

All the participants mentioned 'work flexibility' as a main element of remote work. P04 participant outlined that "the most positive thing is most of the employees need to take a rest from the pressure of the work, so the work itself became more flexible". P07 participant mentioned, "It is something fun actually being next to your family and working at the same time". The same participant pointed to the cost savings for the NGOs "You don't have to afford them with desks, chairs, stationery, electricity, as remote work introduced the whole world to a new world trend as it became obvious to all of us that working remotely is possible". P02 participant stated that "The positive side actually, we learned how to work remotely, how to operating systems, like setting up weekly meetings, even like at the very beginning we set up daily meetings". Despite that, remote work had various advantages for the benefit of both employees and NGOs unless it was challenging to adapt, as this is covered in the second pattern 'remote work presents many challenges to employee's performance' which is linked to the second primary code 'negative impacts of remote work'. P06 participant stated that "the impact of remote work on employee performance during the COVID-19

pandemic was a mixed bag; while it provided flexibility, improved focus, and increased autonomy for many employees, it also presented challenges related to social interaction, communication, and work-life balance”. For the second code, participants provided various responses like 'difficulties in adaptation to remote work environment', difficulties in arranging meetings and interviews, productivity and job opportunities decreased', 'following up with the staff', 'social interaction', 'communication difficulties', 'staff well-being', challenges of remote work setup', 'access challenges' and 'work-life balance'.

Many participants found remote work negatively impacting their employees' performance and productivity, especially for the HR department. Working remotely during the period of COVID-19 was very challenging in various terms, especially communication and following up with the staff. P01 participant mentioned, "Impacted pandemic fears and communication was difficult due to internet connection and no access to office and field location because of COVID". P02 pointed out that “the performance of the support staff almost remained the same, while the performance of field staff dropped down a few levels”. P03 participant stated that “we have access challenges to meet the beneficiaries and to deliver our services”, the same participant added “we had to implement a lot of safety and mitigation measures and policies for health side, as it was difficult for line managers to and for HR to track staff and to follow up with the staff”, he also referred to the performance of support staff and program staff saying “I would say there is no big change in support unit HR, Logistics, Finance, IT, Admin, it was almost the same because even when we are at home the objective somehow just changed, but to be more specific at that period the evaluation for program team became more challenging, I can not say like the productivity of the staff increased or decreased because it was out of their control”. P04 participant indicated to “COVID-19 had a great negative impact on them as it reduced job opportunities; many projects were withdrew”. P05 participant said “Generally, work was more slowly than

working in office, especially the field staff (program staff) was not capable to reach the beneficiaries, and the work was harder for them”. Remote work was negatively impacting employee performance during the period of COVID-19 as it was very challenging for the entire organization to control and adapt to the situation. Some of the participants mentioned the sudden restriction and lockdown implementation by the government impacted their projects and work plans, plus it was very difficult regarding employee well-being and the health situation as fear and tension increased and employees were frightened to go to offices or to the field which impacted their mental health and HR department had to provide more sessions and training to overcome the hard situation.

The third pattern, 'Transitioning to remote work posed significant challenges for human resource department' which is linked to the third primary code, 'challenges of transitioning to remote work' and to the interview question, 'What were the main challenges HR department faced as a result of transitioning to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic? During the interviews, participants pointed to a lot of challenges, especially for the HR department, as a result of transitioning to remote work. Since they had difficulties following up with the staff with the absence of fingerprints as a safety procedure, it was also very challenging, and tasks increased since they had to check up on employees' well-being and follow up with the infected cases. P03 participant said that “it was difficult to follow up on the staff attendance with the absence of fingerprints, as we were calling the candidates to come to the office for the test and interview to better evaluate them, but during COVID everything was remotely to be managed”. The same participant mentioned the health situation of the staff, raising HR tasks, and how hard it was to check on the staff: “Sometimes we have twenty staff were affected by COVID, and you need to call all of those people and check up their situations, so this was taking a lot of time and put more pressure on HR to follow up with them”. P04 participant indicated to staff unavailability to perform their task

within their deadlines: “The availability of the employee during the exact timing that we need them to do their work, or maybe they get sick and it has been taking long time to recover from this, so the work has been postponed and delayed from the determined date.” P06 participant mentioned that “Some of the main challenges that HR departments faced during the transition to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic included Communication and collaboration, Employee engagement and motivation, Technological infrastructure and support, Performance management, Employee well-being and mental health.” For communication and collaboration, he said “HR had to ensure effective communication and collaboration among remote teams, as in-person interactions were limited. Finding suitable platforms and strategies for virtual meetings, training, and team building became crucial.” As for employee engagement and motivation, he said, “Keeping employees engaged and motivated while working remotely presented a challenge. HR had to find ways to foster a sense of belonging, provide adequate support, and promote work-life balance in a remote work environment.” The challenges of technology and support were stated as “Setting up the necessary technological infrastructure to support remote work, including providing employees with the required hardware, software, and technical support, was a challenge for HR departments.”

On performance management P06 participant said, “HR had to adapt performance management processes to the remote work context, including setting clear goals and expectations, implementing remote monitoring and feedback mechanisms, and ensuring fairness and objectivity in evaluating employee performance”, and for the last challenge, according to P06 employee well-being and mental health, was that “The pandemic brought forth increased stress, isolation, and burnout. HR departments had to prioritize employee well-being, offer mental health support, and implement initiatives to maintain a healthy work-life balance”. According to P07 "It was difficult to manage tasks as the government was

implementing curfew suddenly and you have to take immediate actions”. The same participant said, “Communication was difficult because when you are in the office you can reach out to anyone you need; it’s just like 1 meter away from you, but when you are working from home you either call them or email them, which is difficult actually; you don’t get as quick answers as possible”.

The next primary code that is linked to the first theme is 'Overall Challenges' which is linked to the interview question 'What were the main overall challenges faced by HR department during the period of the COVID-19 crisis?'. Throughout conducting interviews, participants represented numerous challenges they faced during the period of COVID-19, as remote work was the main biggest challenge for the majority of participants. The participants referred to transitioning to remote work, staff engagement and communication, performance decreasing, difficulties in implementing projects, employees’ well-being and mental health, crisis management, learning and development, recruitment and onboarding, legal consideration and compliance, response problems, logistical support, increase in workload, and social interactions as the main challenges that participants pointed to. P02 participant said, "The biggest challenge we had was tracking all the staff on daily basis; it was not easy for us because they could not use fingerprints". The same participant pointed out another challenge as a part of the recruitment process: "The hiring process, when setting up tests and interviews, we cannot see candidates face-to-face, especially in Sinjar area, so everything has to be done remotely or online”. Several participants pointed to the responses that were provided for the previous interview questions, ‘What were the main challenges HR department faced as a result of transitioning to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic’? P03 participant said, "The big number of sick people because of COVID, and the new responsibilities that we assign for HR to follow up." Pointing to the challenges faced, the same participant mentioned an example, "I was spending about four hours per day to call all

patients and gather a lot of information from them about their situation, while in normal life, these four hours or three hours were used for another task of HR." P04 participant said, "We were working under so much pressure, so we did not have too much time to think about the gaps and how to fill these gaps." P05 participant briefly said, "Communicating with employees was difficult." P06 participants referred to various challenges encountered by the HR department during the period of COVID-19 like 'transitioning to remote work, employee well-being and mental health, crisis management and business continuity, learning and development, recruitment and onboarding, and compliance and legal considerations.' P07 participant pointed out that "It affected HR, it also affected the work; people were very nervous; they were afraid to come to the office, so we gave them option to work from home, and it was very challenging for HR to follow up with the sick staff." 'Used strategies and policies to overcome the challenges' is considered the last primary code that is linked to this first theme.

During the interviews, participants referred to several strategies and policies implemented by HR to overcome the challenges they faced, like 'adaptation to technology and digital tools, implementing enhanced remote work strategies and policies, strategies of mental health and employee well-being, safety guidelines, crisis management, employee engagement strategies, communication improvement, learning, and development strategies.' P02 participant mentioned that "We gained a good experience during that period for setting up good internet services, good mobile network coverage, also we used all those health procedures." P03 participant stated that "We increased the number of training during COVID-19, training on health, safety and security, training on how to act in the field when they are dealing with their beneficiaries, training for line managers on how to manage remotely so they can lead their team effectively during COVID-19." The same participant added, "One of the strategies was regular meetings on department level, area level,

management level to be connected." Besides, they depended more on the technology side to overcome the challenges, as they used different tools and software for connection, online meetings, document signing, and communication. P06 participants mentioned in sequence the strategies and policies they used in overcoming the challenges they faced: "HR departments implemented policies and guidelines for remote work, ensuring employees had the necessary equipment, communication tools, and technology support. They also organized virtual training sessions and provided resources for employees to effectively work from home, remote work policies were developed to address expectations, communication protocols, and performance management in a remote setting, and flexible work schedules and accommodations for employees with caregiving responsibilities were also implemented. HR departments offered mental health resources and support, including virtual counseling services, webinars on stress management, and promoting self-care practices. Regular check-ins and virtual team-building activities were organized to foster a sense of community and connection. Policies were created to support work-life balance, encourage breaks, and provide flexibility in working hours. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) were expanded to provide additional mental health support. HR departments worked closely with management to develop crisis management plans, including communication strategies, remote work protocols, and safety guidelines. They ensured employees were aware of protocols and provided training on emergency response procedures. Policies were created to address health and safety measures, including remote work policies, social distancing guidelines, and personal protective equipment requirements.

Protocols for reporting COVID-19 cases, contact tracing, and quarantining were established. HR departments implemented regular communication channels, including virtual town hall meetings, team updates, and newsletters. They organized virtual team-building activities, recognition programs, and employee engagement surveys to gather feedback and

address concerns. Policies were developed to encourage employee recognition, such as virtual appreciation programs and rewards, and clear guidelines on communication expectations and virtual collaboration were established. HR departments leveraged online learning platforms and virtual training sessions to provide ongoing learning opportunities. They collaborated with managers to identify skill gaps and create development plans for employees. Policies were put in place to provide employees with access to online learning resources, encourage continuous learning, and support employees in their professional development goals. HR departments conducted virtual interviews and utilized video conferencing tools for remote hiring. They developed virtual onboarding programs, including online orientation sessions, video tutorials, and assigned mentors for new employees, Onboarding policies were adapted to include remote procedures, such as providing equipment and necessary resources to new hires, assigning virtual buddies or mentors, and ensuring regular check-ins for support and feedback. HR departments stayed updated on evolving regulations and guidelines, adapting policies and procedures accordingly. They communicated the changes to employees, provided resources on health and safety protocols, and implemented data privacy measures for remote work, policies were updated to reflect new legal requirements, such as remote work policies compliant with labor laws, health and safety guidelines, and data protection policies for remote work environments." P07

participant indicated that "We made some procedures like social distancing, wearing masks, sanitizing hands, no more than 10 staff in the car, checking the temperature of employees in the morning before they enter the office."

The second theme is formed as **‘Learned lessons from COVID-19 by HR management and implementing them to future crises.’** This theme is directly linked to the second research question, ‘What lessons can be learned from the experiences of HR managers in Northern Iraq NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can they be applied to

future crises? as this theme covers five primary codes ‘Key lessons learned’, ‘Applying learned lessons’, ‘Preparedness for future crises’, ‘Improving HR management’, and ‘Enhancement of NGO’s preparedness.’

For the code ‘Key lessons learned’ which is also linked to this theme according to the analysis of collected data from the participants and research questions, it is linked to the question ‘What key lessons did human resource management learn from the COVID-19 crisis?’. Through conducting interviews, participants stated various points regarding the lessons learned. Some of them said that they had learned a lot regarding managing remote work and adaptation, as it had been obvious to everyone that remote work is possible with enhanced management. As the COVID crisis put them in situations to be ready and improve their strategies and policies for future crises, it improved the vision of HR department to address the importance of employee well-being, the importance of communication, technological readiness, teamwork, and innovation, and take all these factors into consideration to enhance the workforce of the NGO. P03 participant said that "We learned a lot about remote work management by providing a lot of training, and the staff well-trained on the remote management". The same participant mentioned that they had learned a lot and adopted new ways of communication with staff, online meetings, and online platform systems to direct their employees and become more familiar with remote work. P05 participant said that "The organization must be ready for any crisis; social distance is important to avoid any coming pandemic". P06 participants pointed to various key lessons HR management learned from the COVID-19 crisis, including "Agility and adaptability: HRM recognized the importance of being agile and adaptable in response to sudden and unpredictable changes. This includes the ability to quickly implement remote work arrangements, adjust policies and procedures, and provide necessary support to employees during challenging times. Emphasis on employee well-being: The pandemic highlighted the

critical need for prioritizing employee well-being. HRM learned the importance of actively promoting mental health support, work-life balance, and maintaining open lines of communication to address the well-being needs of employees, Technological readiness: The crisis highlighted the significance of having robust technological infrastructure and systems in place to facilitate remote work and virtual collaboration. HRM recognized the need to invest in technology and ensure employees have the necessary tools and training to effectively navigate a digital work environment. Importance of communication: Clear, timely, and transparent communication emerged as a vital lesson. HRM understood the need for regular updates, providing accurate information, and maintaining open channels of communication to keep employees informed, alleviate uncertainty, and foster a sense of trust and connection, Flexibility in policies and practices: The pandemic necessitated flexibility in HR policies and practices. HRM learned the value of reviewing and adapting policies such as remote work, leave, and flexible schedules to accommodate changing circumstances while balancing organizational needs and employee well-being, and collaboration and teamwork: HRM recognized the significance of collaboration and teamwork across departments during a crisis. Building cross-functional partnerships and aligning HR initiatives with organizational goals became essential to navigate challenges effectively". P07 participant indicated that "it taught us that quantity does not matter, quality matters; it is quality that evaluates someone's performance, so working from home is not an issue if you are ready for it, so it taught us that working from home is possible". P08 participants also pointed out the key lessons learned as "Look into new innovations to live with life challenges and changes".

For the next primary code, "Applying learned lessons" which is linked to this theme, 'Learned lessons from COVID-19 by HR management and implementing them to future crises.' Participants indicated several ways of applying the lessons learned during COVID-19, like through raising communication and training, providing awareness for employees,

adaptation to online HR systems, enhancing the policies and procedures of remote work, investing in technology, caring about employees' well-being, and through raising collaboration and teamwork. P03 participant answered, “We know what technology we will need and ways of communication”. P04 participant said that we may apply learned lessons by “Providing the staff with more awareness, providing them with training on how to under such situations, how to communicate, and how to work.” The same participant mentioned, “It is very important to provide them with psychological support; maybe we would need to equip them with what’s needed to be ready for such crises”. P05 participant said by “Community awareness, employee awareness for social distance” which is indicating the ways in which to enhance the health policies and procedures.

In addition to that, P06 participant pointed out various ways of applying the lessons that HR management learned from the COVID-19 crisis: “To apply these lessons in the future, HRM can: Develop and refine remote work policies and procedures to accommodate various scenarios, ensuring clarity, fairness, and employee well-being, invest in technology and regularly assess and update the digital infrastructure to support remote work and virtual collaboration, establish and maintain communication channels that promote transparency, trust, and engagement, even in non-crisis situations, prioritize employee well-being by implementing comprehensive wellness programs, mental health support, and work-life balance initiatives, continuously review and update HR policies and practices to enhance flexibility, ensuring they can be adapted swiftly during unexpected disruptions, and foster a culture of collaboration, teamwork, and cross-functional partnerships, enabling HR to effectively collaborate with other departments during crises and beyond” the same participant added “By applying these lessons, HRM can enhance organizational resilience, employee engagement, and overall preparedness for future challenges”. The same participant added at the end, “These strategies and policies helped HR departments navigate the challenges

presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the well-being of employees, maintaining business continuity, and adapting to the remote work environment.” For the other code, ‘Preparedness for future crises’ which is also covered through this theme and linked to the interview question, ‘As HR department, have you identified ways you can prepare to face such crises in the future? If yes, can you describe the most important ones?’ Participants pointed out many ways through which to face future crises, like mitigation strategies and staff protection, psychological support and awareness, creation of crisis-related infrastructure and policies, creation of new communication and connection systems, policy adjustment and remote work, virtual hiring and onboarding strategies, learning and development tools and software. P01 participant said, “We created new instructions and policies related to the crises; for example, in COVID-19, there was a policy for COVID leave, insurance, and work from home.” P02 participant mentioned, “We do have a good online recruiting system.” P03 participant brought up “I would say mitigation measures that HR put in mind for protecting staff, plus encourage them on communication and keep connected while they are working from home.” P04 participant highlighted “raising awareness and to be prepared psychologically and make the staff qualified to face such crises.” P06 participant also said, “Creating systems for communication, and add overhead cost line on budget widely.” P08 participant said, “Yes, remote work and adjustment for policy for crises like COVID-19.”

The next covered code is ‘Improving HR Management’ which is linked to the interview question ‘Did the organization adopt any new tools, software, or systems to facilitate managing human resources? If yes, please describe the most effective ones?’ For this question, the participants discussed various approaches for facilitating HR management, like improvement of the online HR management system, new tools and software adaptation, training and development, policy enhancement, and providing resources for remote work. P03 participant said, “Our organization provided new applications for electronic signatures to

facilitate our work, and we have new tools for communication." P04 participant also indicated that "The organization provided us with many new tools and procedures." P05 participant said, "The organization didn't adopt any tools or systems for managing HR, the communication was by email and cellphone." P06 participant answered, "Yes, the organization adopted new tools and software to facilitate managing human resources during the pandemic. Some effective ones include Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) for centralizing employee data and video conferencing tools like Zoom for virtual meetings." P08 participant stated that "Yes, provide more resources to staff to facilitate their work remotely."

For the final code 'Enhancement of NGO's preparedness' which is also covered under this theme and linked to the interview question 'What further information would you like to add to enhance the preparedness of NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq in overcoming challenges during such crises in future, and could guide NGOs or other organizations in the future?' participants mentioned various sorts of information that assist on enhancing the NGOs' preparedness in overcoming challenges during such crises since they pointed to emergency preparedness, strong partnerships, staff training, capacity building, information management system, community engagement, flexibility and adaptability, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and resource mobilization, cooperation and coordination with LNGOs and INGOs, raising safety and security procedures, technology enhancement, enhanced policies and strategies, and local context understanding. P01 participants mentioned several information and guidelines as points: "understanding the context, preparing emergency plans, establishing networks with the stakeholders and NGOs, strengthening partnerships, staff capacity building, flexibility and adaptability for any changes, sharing and learning." P02 participant said, "It is important to make meetings with other NGOs and share information and experiences." P04 participant mentioned that "It is important to select very qualified employees who can work independently." P05 participant said, "Creating a system to

communicate and manage the employee, even thus field staff (program staff) with beneficiaries.” P06 participant clarified several important points: “To enhance the preparedness of NGOs operating in Northern Iraq or any other organizations facing similar challenges during crises, here are some additional points to consider: Local context understanding: Gain a deep understanding of the local context, including cultural, social, and political dynamics, as well as the specific challenges and vulnerabilities of the affected population. This knowledge will enable NGOs to tailor their response and interventions effectively. Strong partnerships and coordination: Foster strong partnerships and coordination with local communities, government authorities, other NGOs, and relevant stakeholders. Collaborate closely to share resources, information, and expertise, and avoid duplication of efforts. Robust emergency response plans: Develop comprehensive emergency response plans that outline specific protocols, roles, and responsibilities for various crisis scenarios. Ensure these plans are regularly reviewed, updated, and communicated to all staff members. Pre-positioning of resources: Pre-position essential resources and supplies, such as food, medical equipment, and emergency kits, in strategic locations to enable a rapid response during crises. Regularly monitor and replenish these stocks to maintain readiness. Staff training and capacity building: Invest in regular training and capacity-building programs for staff members, including topics such as emergency response, conflict sensitivity, trauma-informed care, and cultural competency. This equips personnel with the necessary skills to address challenges effectively. Information management systems: Establish robust information management systems to collect, analyze, and disseminate critical data and information during crises. This facilitates evidence-based decision-making and ensures efficient coordination among different teams and organizations. Community engagement and participation: Prioritize community engagement and participation throughout the crisis response. Involve affected communities in needs assessments, program design, and

implementation to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are addressed appropriately.

Adaptability and flexibility: Maintain a culture of adaptability and flexibility to respond to evolving situations and changing needs. Regularly review and adjust strategies and programs to align with the dynamic nature of crises.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning: Implement robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning mechanisms to continuously assess the effectiveness of interventions and identify areas for improvement. Use evidence-based findings to adapt strategies and enhance future preparedness.

Advocacy and resource mobilization: Engage in advocacy efforts to raise awareness about the specific challenges faced by the affected population and mobilize resources to support their needs. Collaborate with donors, local authorities, and other stakeholders to secure funding and resources for sustained response efforts." The same participant added, "By considering these points, NGOs and other organizations can enhance their preparedness to overcome challenges during crises. It is essential to remain adaptable, community-centered, and responsive to ensure effective support to vulnerable populations in times of crisis." P08 participants pointed out that "Foster strong partnerships and collaboration with local NGOs, government agencies, and other relevant stakeholders. Establish effective coordination mechanisms to avoid duplication of efforts, maximize resource utilization, and promote information sharing and joint decision-making." These were all mentioned by the participants regarding this theme.

The last theme, **‘The strategies and policies used by HR management during the process of employee selection’** was formed by the researcher based on the codes and participants' responses. This theme is linked directly to the last research question, ‘What strategies do HR managers in NGOs in Northern Iraq use to prevent partiality and nepotism during the employee selection process? This theme covers two primary codes: ‘Prevention of partiality and nepotism’ and ‘Evaluation methods for candidates.’

For the first code, 'Prevention of partiality and nepotism', which is linked to the interview question, 'Do you implement strategies and policies to avoid partiality and nepotism during employee selection? If yes, can you describe the most important ones?' Participants highlighted several aspects regarding this question, like non-discrimination policies, recruitment policies and procedures, equal employment opportunities, avoiding bias, transparency policies, clear selection criteria, diversity and inclusion initiatives, diverse interview panels, competency process, and multiple evaluators. P01 participant illustrated, "Yes, the organization has equal employment opportunities and has non-discrimination, safeguarding, conflict of interest, and recruitment policies." P02 participant stated that "Transparency and integrity are the most key values that we are following; we do always have three panels in interview, HR department, hiring manager, and another manager from another department or another project." P03 participant mentioned, "We have a standard recruitment policy to be transparent and avoid bias, we analyze everything in the job description and make sure that it is fit for the post holder." P05 participant said, "We use codes for each applicant so that the line managers do not recognize them."

A participant indicated the importance of being restricted to the organization's policies and following the procedures and instructions of the organization. P05 participant said, "Yes, by operation organization policy." Some other participants indicated various important aspects during the recruitment process to avoid partiality and nepotism in NGOs that operate in northern Iraq. Some of the important policies and strategies were to follow clear and transparent selection criteria, as P06 participant illustrated "Establish clear and objective selection criteria based on job-related qualifications, skills, and experience. Ensure these criteria are communicated to all applicants and hiring managers to maintain transparency and consistency." According to the responses of the participants, multiple evaluators and diverse interview panels also assist in avoiding partiality and nepotism as the same participant

pointed out: "Involve multiple evaluators and diverse interview panels to reduce individual biases and ensure different perspectives are considered during the selection process."

Participants also highlighted the importance of competency during the process of selecting employees and providing equal opportunities, as P07 participant acknowledged that "our current process is very competitive and transparent, as no position is filled without advertisement, and the opportunity is given to everyone in the community to apply."

The final code, 'Evaluation methods for candidates' is also linked to this theme and to the interview question, 'As HR department, what kind of assessments or tests do you use to evaluate the skills and abilities of candidates during the selection process to avoid partiality and nepotism?' During the interviews, participants highlighted many kinds of instructions and tests that HR departments follow to facilitate the selection process in NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq, as these strategies are considered enhance in evaluating candidates and avoiding partiality and nepotism. They pointed to multiple interview rounds, written tests and assessments, enhanced evaluation criteria, objective and job-related assessment, the process of shortlisting and longlisting, a strong scoring system, fairness and transparency, candidate coding, and face-to-face interviews. P03 participant stated that "Before advertising the position, we have our standard job description, like years of experience, working with NGOs, technical skills, soft skills, Microsoft skills, language skills, technical competency, and behavioral competency." It is important, according to the answers of the participants, that written tests and interviews highlight the skills of the candidates and provide equal opportunities. P04 participant illustrated, "At the beginning of the process, we are doing the written test to evaluate the initial skills of the applicants, and those who do well at the written test we then interview them face-to-face." The same participant referred to the importance of using tools and systems for evaluating the skills of the applicants "We have tools for evaluating each candidate depending on the post he applied for, as we have two parts of

questions, personal questions and professional questions." P05 participants responded to this question by saying, "By written test, computer test, first interview, and second round interview." P06 participant said, "It's important to note that the specific assessments and tests used may vary depending on the nature of the job and the organization's requirements. HR departments should carefully select assessments that are valid, reliable, and job-related, ensuring that they are administered and evaluated consistently for all candidates to avoid partiality and nepotism." The same participant pointed out several methods that contributed to evaluating the skills of candidates and help on avoiding partiality and nepotism in NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq. He also pointed out the importance of job-related skills assessments, saying, "Use skill-based assessments or tests that directly measure the specific skills required for the job. These may include technical assessments, coding challenges, writing samples, or case studies." The same participant illustrated the importance of cognitive ability tests by saying, "Assess candidates' general cognitive abilities, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and logical reasoning skills. These tests are designed to measure a candidate's potential to succeed in the role." Behavioral assessments and personality assessments were also indicated by the same participant: "Use structured behavioral assessments, such as situational judgment tests or behavioral interviews, to evaluate how candidates would respond to various work-related scenarios. These assessments help assess important competencies and behaviors required for the role and implement scientifically validated personality assessments to gain insights into a candidate's behavioral preferences and work style. These assessments can help assess cultural fit and identify traits relevant to job performance."

Other participants mentioned the importance of the shortlisting and longlisting processes, as P07 participant said, "The candidates go through longlisting from HR side and shortlisting from the line manager, and then we use interview evaluation." These are the

assessments and tests, policies and strategies, and instructions used by various HR departments to evaluate the skills and abilities of candidates during the recruitment process in NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq to avoid partiality and nepotism.

Concluding: This is considered the final step of Yin's Five-Phased Cycle, through which the results of this study were concluded and analyzed based on the purpose of this research. The purpose of this study was to explore the main challenges that human resources (HR) managers faced during the period of COVID-19 in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Northern Iraq. This study explored how the human resources department dealt with the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and what strategies and policies they used to overcome the faced challenges to keep the work productivity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The purpose of the study was to explore the research questions and find appropriate answers by conducting eight interviews with employees from the HR department and from different NGOs that operate in the north of Iraq. The purpose of the study was achieved through the findings that were provided by the participants and through the themes that were created and formed by the researcher based on codes and sub-codes that were identified using the MAXQDA software and MS Word, which contributed to achieving the purpose of this study.

The first theme, 'The impacts of remote work for NGOs during the period of COVID-19' which is linked directly to the first research question, 'What were the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely during the period of COVID-19 for the NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq?' through which many advantages and disadvantages were illustrated by the participants, like work flexibility, improved focus and autonomy, cost savings, professional development, a decrease in job opportunities and productivity, difficulties of communication and social interaction, employees' well-being, various challenges of adaptation to remote work, and increased workload.

The second theme, 'Learned lessons from COVID-19 by HR management and implementing them to future crises' which is linked to the second research question, 'What lessons can be learned from the experiences of HR managers in Northern Iraq NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can they be applied to future crises?' It has been explored through interpretation phase, as participants point out a lot of lessons that have been learned from COVID-19 pandemic, like remote work management, crisis management preparedness, emphasis on employee well-being, importance of teamwork and innovation, investment in technology, new tools and software adaptation, and raising training and development.

The last theme is 'The strategies and policies used by HR management during the process of employee selection' as this theme is linked to the research question 'What strategies do HR managers in NGOs in Northern Iraq use to prevent partiality and nepotism during the employee selection process?' where participants indicated numerous strategies and policies that help on preventing partiality and nepotism, including non-discrimination policies, equal opportunities, transparency policies and competency, enhanced evaluation criteria, and various improved assessments and tests that contribute to avoiding partiality and nepotism.

In sum, this study represented various beneficial approaches to remote work and key lessons learned from working during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic in NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq regarding strategies and policy enhancement, what affected on productivity, preparedness for future crises, and many other valuable insights and concepts illustrated by the participants from HR departments and analyzed accordingly by the researcher.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the purpose of the study and its research questions were illustrated, in addition to the sampling method and data analysis. The data were analyzed using Yin's Five-

phased cycle, through which the data were compiled, disassembled, reassembled, interpreted, and concluded, including the important role of the MAXQDA software program in specifying the codes, sub-codes, patterns, and forming themes based on the responses of participants and their involvement in research questions. Moreover, this chapter presented the findings and results of this study based on the three formed themes that were formed to answer the research questions and achieve the purpose of the study.

The themes highlighted numerous advantages and disadvantages as a result of working during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs in Northern Iraq, as many strategies and policies were illustrated that contribute to enhancing the performance of HR management and for more development and raising productivity, besides the key lessons learned from COVID-19 pandemic and to improving crisis management, as it assisted in learning how to reduce and overcome various challenges of future crises.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the findings and results of this study, which have been outlined throughout the previous chapter, in relation to the three main research questions: What were the advantages and disadvantages of working remotely during the period of COVID-19 for the NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq? What lessons can be learned from the experiences of HR managers in Northern Iraq NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can they be applied to future crises? What strategies do HR managers in NGOs in Northern Iraq use to prevent partiality and nepotism during the employee selection process? Then, this researcher will outline the conclusion of this research study according to the results of the study and the answers to the research questions. Moreover, the researcher will discuss the practical implications and how this research can contribute to developing the performance of NGOs regarding facing crises and reducing the challenges that they might face. This researcher will also illustrate the limitations and shortfalls of this study and how it enhanced the quality of this research study. The research will discuss the recommendations for future work and research related to enhancing the management of human resources and how it can be more effective in terms of responding to future crises and overcoming challenges.

Discussion of Results

First Theme: The impacts of remote work for NGOs during the period of COVID-19.

The participants from different NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq, stated that remote work was very impactful both negatively and positively on the productivity and performance of their employees, as the COVID-19 pandemic addressed numerous advantages and disadvantages of working remotely for NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq, as it indicated various challenges that HR department faced during that Period. In addition, participants

highlighted many guidelines and information for NGO to enhance their productivity, work continuity, crisis management improvement, adaptation to working remotely, improving emergency preparedness, and enhancing strategies and policies of the NGOs. In terms of advantages and disadvantages of remote work, participants pointed out various positive, negative, and challenging aspects like work flexibility, professional development, cost savings, maintenance of remote work policies and strategies, decrease in job opportunities and employment performance, decrease in implementation of projects and productivity, difficulties of communication and connection, work-life balance, employees' mental health and well-being, and challenges of remote work.

Second Theme: Learned lessons from COVID-19 by HR management and implementing them to future crises.

Throughout the second theme of this study, which is directly linked to the second research question, What lessons can be learned from the experiences of HR managers in Northern Iraq NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how can they be applied to future crises? This theme was linked to four primary codes, Key lessons learned, Applying learned lessons, Preparedness for future crises, and Improving HR management. The participants highlighted important lessons that they had learned from working during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs that operate in the north of Iraq, as they illustrated effective methods of applying those lessons. Remote work was very challenging for the HR department at the beginning as it required a lot of effective effort, yet according to the answers of the participants that they had learned a lot about remote work management and crisis management, as they learned to decrease concentrations on various effective aspects like employee well-being, importance of communication, technology, teamwork, flexibility in policies and procedures, teamwork, and innovation. Preparedness for future crises is an important part of this theme, through which participants referred to many important methods

and strategies that can raise preparedness for future crises in NGOs and specifically for the HR department. According to the participants, to enhance the workforce and productivity of the NGO and to be prepared for future crises, it is important to improve mitigation strategies and staff protection, raise psychological support and awareness, create improved crisis-related infrastructure and policies, improving communication and connection systems, improving remote work management, learning and development, and adopting effective tools and software. Improving HR management was also covered by this theme based on the participant responses and research questions, as the participants acknowledged several aspects of HR management to focus on for improvement, like online HR management system, adaptation to new effective tools and software, initiative of training and development, enhancement of policy and implementation, and providing effective and efficient resources in remote work.

Third Theme: The strategies and policies used by HR management during the process of employee selection.

This theme was formed by the researcher based on the participant responses and its linking to the third research question: What strategies do HR managers in NGOs in Northern Iraq use to prevent partiality and nepotism during the employee selection process? This theme covers two primary codes, Prevention of partiality and nepotism and Evaluation methods for candidates. The participants illustrated important strategies and policies that contribute to decreasing and preventing partiality and nepotism during the process of selecting employees and how important it is to commit to the regulations and policies of the organization, as they indicated several effective methods for evaluating the skills and abilities of the candidate during the process of employee selection in NGOs that operate in the north of Iraq. For preventing partiality and nepotism, participants highlighted the policies and procedures of non-discrimination and recruitment, as well as to provide equal employment

opportunities and void bias. It is important to have enhanced transparency policies and transparent and clear selection criteria, and some participants highlighted the importance of diversity for interview panels, multiple evaluators, and using competency processes for employee selection. For the code of evaluation methods for candidates, participants highlighted important methods for evaluating the skills and abilities of candidates during the process of employee selection and using different assessments and tests to avoid partiality and nepotism. According to the responses of the participants for this research study, the HR department needs to take into consideration various approaches and strategies to enhance their engagement in the process of selecting employees and to avoid partiality and nepotism, like using multiple interview rounds, using written tests and assessment, improving the evaluation criteria, using objective and job-related assessment, enhancing the process of shortlisting and longlisting, encountering a strong scoring system, using policies of avoiding partiality and bias, using coding system for candidates not to be recognized, and using face-to-face interviews.

In sum, the three formed themes answered the research questions and addressed the findings and results for this research study to meet the purpose of this study on exploring the challenges that HR management faced during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq and illustrated the policies and strategies they used in overcoming those challenges and improve preparedness for future crises.

Validity

In this study, the researcher assured that the data analysis process and the sample population meet the requirements of validity since the researcher conducted two pilot interviews using the prepared questionnaires with two coworkers who were very good at both English and Arabic to make sure that the questions are clear and relevant to the research questions and took all their comments and notes into consideration. The researcher also

provided a translated copy of the questionnaires into Arabic to ensure that they are easily understandable by the targeted population, as both copies were shared with the eight participants. Then the researcher used a purposive sampling method to select participants who had the relevant experience and knowledge required for the study, as all the participants were from the HR department of both international and local NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq, and five of them were from INGOs and three from LNGOs. See Table 1 in Chapter Four. Additionally, the researcher focused on the safeguards to enhance the validity of the data by implementing measures, since a password-protected computer and locked cabinets were used to ensure the security and confidentiality of the collected data. The researcher saved all soft copies of the data collected from the interviews in a newly created two-authentication Google Drive account, while the hard copies were saved in the researcher's lockable cabinet and only used in time of need. Furthermore, the researcher used the MAXQDA software program to assist in the data analysis process, which contributed to ensuring that the data are analyzed accurately and efficiently. Overall, all these measures were implemented to enhance the validity of the data and ensure that the findings of the study are reliable and credible.

Conclusion for the study results

The results of the study outlined the three themes that were formed by the researcher according to the research questions and the responses of the participants. The advantages and disadvantages of working remotely during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs of Northern Iraq were indicated throughout the first theme, as participants referred to positive impacts, negative impacts, challenges of transitioning to remote work, and overall challenges encountered by the HR department. According to the results and findings of the study, working during the period of COVID-19 was very challenging for the HR department and

negatively impacted the workforce and the productivity of NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq during that period.

Moreover, the results of the study also outlined numerous valuable lessons learned from the experiences of HR managers who were working during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic in NGOs in Northern Iraq, as those lessons were linked to the second theme and the second research question through which the participants addressed various important key lessons learned from the experiences of HR department, also highlighting the methods of applying those lessons to future crises.

Finally, the study outlined the strategies and policies that HR managers used during the employee selection process to prevent partiality and nepotism, which is considered the last research question as the last theme was formed accordingly. The participants acknowledged several strategies, regulations, and organization policies and highlighted their importance in avoiding partiality and nepotism, in addition to indicating value methods for evaluating candidates.

Practical Implications

This study demonstrated the importance of remote work benefits, professional development, and work flexibility, as NGOs that operate in the north of Iraq should consider these terms as the advantages of working remotely to enhance the workforce and the productivity of NGOs. Those NGOs should also take into account the negative impacts and challenges that had been encountered by the HR department, as this study demonstrated numerous disadvantages of remote work and challenges that HR management faced during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq. They should improve their strategies and policies to adapt to remote work, using enhanced techniques of communication and follow-up with staff, focusing on employee well-being and mental health, and enhancing technological infrastructure.

Moreover, this research study clarified that the NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq should consider the lessons learned from COVID-19 by HR management and how to implement them in future crises, as demonstrated throughout this study. NGOs should pay serious attention to key lessons learned from remote work management, crisis preparedness, agility and adaptability in response to changes, emphasis on employee well-being and mental health, improving remote work policies and strategies, and the importance of communication and technological readiness.

Finally, this study demonstrated that the HR department of NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq should carefully and seriously take into consideration the strategies and policies they use for the process of employee selection to avoid partiality and nepotism and to incorporate enhanced tests and assessments to evaluate the skills and abilities of candidates. HR management of NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq should pay serious attention to the importance of being committed to the policies and regulations of the organization, using transparent policies and clear selection criteria, also to use a diverse interview panel, and make the process more competitive, and relying on multiple evaluators to prevent partiality and nepotism during the process of employee selection. Finally, they should enhance their methods of candidate evaluation by considering multiple interview rounds, using enhanced tests and assessments, having a strong scoring systems, coding candidates, and using transparent policies and strategies.

Limitations

The researcher decided to conduct ten to twelve in-depth interviews, unless several NGOs refused to participate in this study due to several external factors that impacted their influence to participate in this research study such, as workload, time constraints, confidentiality concerns, and lack of interest to participate, as these factors impacted the willingness of several NGOs to engage in this research. These factors were challenging but

controllable for the researcher, as eight interviews were conducted with various international and local NGOs. The rejection by NGOs was very time-consuming and challenging for the researcher. Besides, there was non-response by NGOs, as some took much time to respond to the site authorization, while some of them never did.

Time constraints and confidentiality concerns were considered limitations to this research study, and accordingly, several NGOs refused to engage in this research. Besides, many of those who took part in this research refused to be recorded as they preferred to interact with the interview questions by typing, as arranging an interview may consume them much time. Asking for site authorization first was very challenging and then asking the participants for their approval to participate, was like getting two approvals from both NGOs and the participants themselves, as this was very time-consuming and caused some rejection by NGOs, as an international NGO required a confirmation letter for the research as a student in need of conducting a research interview with the organization.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study illustrated numerous effective aspects of addressing the challenges that HR management faced during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq. This study demonstrated valuable positivity, negativity, and challenges from COVID-19 crises encountered by HR managers of NGOs in Northern Iraq, such as work flexibility, professional development, remote work benefits, decrease in productivity and job opportunities, difficulty of communication and staff following up, work-life balance, mental health and employee well-being, and challenges of remote work. This study also focused on the key lessons learned by HR management and the methods of applying them to overcome the challenges of future crises. In addition, this research explored the strategies, policies, tests, and assessments of candidates' evaluation that the HR department used to prevent partiality and nepotism in NGOs that operate in the north of Iraq. As this study focused on

HR management and several participants illustrated that other departments and the entire NGO faced many challenges during the period of COVID-19, it is recommended to conduct other research targeting different managerial departments in NGOs in Northern Iraq.

Moreover, as this study concentrated on the NGOs operating in the north of Iraq, another study recommended targeting a different geographical area in Iraq as the challenges faced by HR management during the period of COVID-19 may differ from one location to another. Finally, as this was a qualitative study targeting the challenges encountered by HR management and the focus was only on NGOs, another mixed-method study concluding surveys is recommended to be conducted targeting profit and governmental organizations in Northern Iraq.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the researcher has presented the results of the study that were gathered from the conducted interviews. A conclusion for the study has been articulated by the researcher, based on the results and findings of this research study. Additionally, the researcher has illustrated the validity of the results and provided practical implications of the research findings. The limitations of the study that were encountered by the researcher have been clearly addressed throughout this chapter. Furthermore, the recommendations for future research studies were proposed based on the experiences that the researcher encountered while conducting this research.

This research study has delineated the main challenges faced by HR management during the period of COVID-19 in NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq. This is done by exploring the impacts of remote work for NGOs during that period, addressing the key lessons learned and the method of applying them to future crises, and discussing the strategies and policies used by HR management during the process of employee selection to avoid partiality and nepotism for NGOs that operate in northern Iraq.

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Appendix A

Site Authorization

Date

Name of Individual

Name of Company

Address of Company

Dear Sir,

RE: Request To Conduct Research Study

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study involving employees at your organization. I am currently enrolled in the Master's of International Management Program at LCC International University in Klaipeda, Lithuania, and am in the process of writing my Master's Thesis. The study is entitled *What were the main challenges of HR managers during the COVID-19 period in NGOs of Northern Iraq?*

I request your permission to recruit one of the main employees from your human resource department to anonymously complete an interview's open-ended questions. I am attaching a copy of the interview questions for your review. The participation in this study will take approximately 50-60 minutes for each participant. Those who volunteer to participate will be asked to give their consent either in writing, verbally, or electronically depending on the method of contact with the participant.

If your approval is granted, participants will complete the survey by being interviewed either face-to-face in an isolated lockable room, or through an online interview via Skype.

The survey results will be pooled for the thesis project, and individual results of this study will remain completely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your organization or the individual participants. The findings of this study could offer valuable insights and strategies improvement on human resources performance and better response to crisis like COVID-19. It will be pleasure to share aggregate results, analysis and recommendations with all NGOs upon request with keeping all information of the participants anonymous and keep confidentiality and privacy.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, you may contact me at my email address ssilo20@students.lcc.lt. You may also contact my Thesis Advisor *Dr. Donna Falloon* at dfalloon@lcc.lt.

If you agree, please sign below and return the signed form by email or contact me to collect the form in person.

Sincerely,

Shawkat Bapir Haji SILO

Student in Masters of International Management at LCC International University

Phone Number: +9647824948466

طلب نموذج لإجراء دراسة بحثية

التاريخ:

اسم الفرد:

أسم المؤسسة:

عنوان المؤسسة:

سيدي العزيز

بخصوص: طلب اجراء دراسة بحثية

أكتب إليكم لأطلب الإذن بإجراء دراسة بحثية في مؤسستك. انا مسجل حالياً في برنامج الماجستير في الإدارة الدولية بجامعة إل سي سي الدولية في كلايبيدا، ليتوانيا، و انا بصدد كتابة رسالة الماجستير الخاصة بي. الدراسة بعنوان (ما هي التحديات الرئيسية التي واجهها مدراء الموارد البشرية خلال فترة جائحة كوفيد-١٩ في المنظمات غير الحكومية في شمال العراق؟).

أطلب الإذن لتعين احد الموظفين الرئيسيين من قسم الموارد البشرية الخاص بك لإكمال الاسئلة المفتوحة للمقابلة بشكل مجهول. أرفق نسخة من أسئلة المقابلة لمراجعتها. تستغرق المشاركة في هذه الدراسة حوالي (٥٠-٦٠ دقيقة) لكل مشارك. سيطلب من أولئك الذين يتطوعون للمشاركة إعطاء موافقتهم إما كتابياً او شفهيّاً أو إلكترونياً اعتماداً على طريقة الاتصال مع المشارك.

إذا تم منح موافقتك، سيجيب المشارك عن الأسئلة (ستم مقابلة المشارك إما وجهاً لوجه في غرفة معزولة أو من خلال مقابلة عبر الانترنت عبر Skype).

سيتم تجميع نتائج المقابلة لمشروع الأطروحة، و ستظل النتائج الفردية لهذه الدراسة سرية تماماً و مجهولة المصدر. في حال نشر هذه الدراسة سيتم توثيق النتائج المجمعة فقط. لن يتم تكبد أي تكاليف من قبل مؤسستك او المشاركين الفرديين.

موافقتك على إجراء هذه الدراسة ستكون محل تقدير كبير. إذا كان لديك اي أسئلة، يمكنك الإتصال بي على عنوان بريدي الإلكتروني (ssilo20@students.lcc.lt) يمكنك ايضاً الاتصال بمستشار أطروحتي (الدكتورة دونا فالون) على (dfalloon@lcc.lt).

إذا كنت توافّق، يرجى التوقيع ادناه و إعادة النموذج الموقع عبر البريد الإلكتروني أو الاتصال بي لإستلام النموذج شخصياً.

مع فائق التقدير و الاحترام!

شوكت بابير حيي سلو

طالب في درجة الماجستير في الإدارة الدولية في جامعة LCC الدولية.

رقم الهاتف: +٩٦٤٧٨٢٤٩٤٨٤٦٦

Appendix B

Informed Consent Document

Dear _____

Please consider participating in a study about What were the main challenges faced by human resource managers during COVID-19 period in NGOs of Northern Iraq. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the interview at any time, as there will be no consequences and no known risks associated with participating in this interview.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of twelve questions, which will take about 50-60 minutes to complete. For data collection and analysis purposes, I am kindly asking for your consent to take the notes and record the interview.

All information collected from you during the interview will be kept confidential. Your name and any identifying information will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. The data will be kept on a password-protected computer and in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher will have access. The data collected during the interview will be used for research purposes only and will be anonymized to protect your identity. The results of the study will only be reported in aggregate form and no identifying information will be released, as all data will be destroyed by August 31, 2023.

This research project is being conducted by Shawkat Bapir Haji SILO, as part of the Master's degree thesis process at LCC International University, Klaipeda, Lithuania. The thesis advisor is Dr. Donna Falloon. If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your participation, please contact (Shawkat SILO, +9647510143165, ssilo20@students.lcc.lt, or Dr. Donna Falloon, dfalloon@lcc.lt).

I have read and understand the above information. I agree to participate in the research interview, and I am aware that I may withdraw from the interview at any time. I give my consent to the use of the data collected from me during the interview for the purposes outlined in this form.

Thank you for your time.

Name, signature of student researcher, date

Shawkat SILO

Participant's Signature/Date

وثيقة الموافقة المستنيرة

عززي/عزيزتي

يرجى النظر في المشاركة في دراسة حول (ما هي التحديات الرئيسية التي واجهها مدراء الموارد البشرية خلال فترة جائحة كوفيد-19 في المنظمات غير الحكومية في شمال العراق). المشاركة في هذه المقابلة طوعية تماما. لديك حق الرفض او الانسحاب من المقابلة في اي وقت تشاء. حيث لن تكون هناك عواقب ولا مخاطر معروفة مرتبطة بالمشاركة في هذه المقابلة.

إذا قررت المشاركة ، فسيُطلب منك الإجابة على سلسلة من اثني عشر سؤالاً ، والتي ستستغرق حوالي 50-60 دقيقة لإكمالها. لأغراض جمع البيانات وتحليلها ، أطلب موافقتك على تدوين الملاحظات وتسجيل المقابلة.

سيتم الحفاظ على سرية جميع المعلومات التي تم جمعها منك أثناء المقابلة. لن يتم استخدام اسمك وأي معلومات تعريفية في أي تقارير أو منشورات ناتجة عن هذه الدراسة. سيتم الاحتفاظ بالبيانات على جهاز كمبيوتر محمي بكلمة مرور وفي خزانة مقفلة لا يمكن الوصول إليها إلا للباحث. سيتم استخدام البيانات التي تم جمعها أثناء المقابلة لأغراض البحث فقط وسيتم إخفاء هويتك لحماية هويتك. سيتم الإبلاغ عن نتائج الدراسة في شكل إجمالي فقط ولن يتم إصدار أي معلومات تعريفية ، حيث سيتم إتلاف جميع البيانات بحلول 31 أغسطس 2023.

يتم تنفيذ هذا المشروع البحثي من قبل شوكت بابير حجي سلو ، كجزء من عملية أطروحة الماجستير في جامعة LCC الدولية، كلايبدا ، ليتوانيا. مستشارة الرسالة الدكتورة دونا فالون. إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو مخاوف بشأن الدراسة أو مشاركتك ، يرجى الاتصال (شوكت سلو 009647510143165 ، ssilo20@students.lcc.lt ، أو الدكتورة دونا فالون dfalloon@lcc.lt) ،

لقد قرأت وفهمت المعلومات الواردة أعلاه. أوافق على المشاركة في المقابلة البحثية ، وأدرك أنه يمكنني الانسحاب من المقابلة في أي وقت. أمنح موافقتي على استخدام البيانات التي تم جمعها مني أثناء المقابلة للأغراض الموضحة في هذا النموذج.

شكرا لك على وقتك

الاسم، توقيع الطالب الباحث، التاريخ

شوكت سلو

توقيع المشارك والتاريخ

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1- General questions:

a. How long have you been working in HR department?

☐ 1-2 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ More than 10 years

b. How long have you been at your current organization?

☐ 1-2 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ More than 10 years

c. How long the organization has been operating in the north of Iraq/Sinjar?

☐ 1-2 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ More than 10 years

d. What are the provided services?

2- What were the positive and negative impacts on your employee's performance while working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- 3- What were the main challenges HR department faced as a result of transitioning to remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 4- What key lessons did human resource management learn from COVID-19 crisis?
 - i) How could these lessons be applied in the future?
- 5- What were the main overall challenges faced by HR department during the period of COVID-19?
 - ii) What strategies and policies did you use to overcome these challenges?
- 6- As HR department, have you identified ways you can prepare to face such crises in the future? If yes, can you describe the most important ones?
- 7- Did the organization adopt any new tools, software, or systems to facilitate managing human resources? If yes, please describe the most effective ones?
- 8- Do you implement strategies and policies to avoid partiality and nepotism during employee selection? If yes, can you describe the most important ones?
- 9- As HR department, what kind of assessments or tests do you use to evaluate the skills and abilities of candidates during the selection process to avoid partiality and nepotism?
- 10- What further information would you like to add to enhance preparedness of NGOs that operate in Northern Iraq in overcoming challenges during such crises in future, and could guide NGOs or other organizations in the future?

أسئلة المقابلة

1- أسئلة عامة:

أ- منذ متى وأنت تعمل في قسم الموارد البشرية؟

☐ 1-2 سنة

☐ 3-5 سنوات

☐ 6-10 سنوات

☐ أكثر من 10 سنوات

ب- منذ متى وأنت في مؤسستك الحالية؟

☐ 1-2 سنة

☐ 3-5 سنوات

☐ 6-10 سنوات

☐ أكثر من 10 سنوات

ج- منذ متى تعمل المنظمة في شمال العراق / سنجار؟

☐ 1-2 سنة

☐ 3-5 سنوات

☐ 6-10 سنوات

☐ أكثر من 10 سنوات

د- ما هي الخدمات المقدمة؟

2- ماذا كانت الآثار الإيجابية والسلبية على أداء موظفيك أثناء العمل عن بُعد خلال فترة انتشار جائحة COVID-19؟

3- ما هي التحديات الرئيسية التي واجهها قسم الموارد البشرية نتيجة التحول إلى العمل عن بعد خلال جائحة COVID-19؟

4- ما الدروس الرئيسية التي تعلمتها إدارة الموارد البشرية من أزمة كوفيد COVID-19؟

(ط) كيف يمكن تطبيق هذه الدروس في المستقبل؟

5- ما أهم التحديات العامة التي واجهتها إدارة الموارد البشرية خلال فترة COVID-19؟

(ب) ما هي الاستراتيجيات والسياسات التي استخدمتها للتغلب على هذه التحديات؟

6- بصفتك قسماً للموارد البشرية ، هل حددت طرقاً يمكنك الاستعداد لمواجهة مثل هذه الأزمات في المستقبل؟ إذا كانت

الإجابة بنعم ، فهل يمكنك وصف أهمها؟

7- هل اعتمدت المنظمة أي أدوات أو برمجيات أو أنظمة جديدة لتسهيل إدارة الموارد البشرية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ،

يرجى وصف أكثرها فعالية؟

8- هل تطبق استراتيجيات وسياسات لتجنب التحيز والمحسوبية أثناء اختيار الموظف؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فهل يمكنك

وصف أهمها؟

9- بصفتك قسمًا للموارد البشرية ، ما نوع التقييمات أو الاختبارات التي تستخدمها لتقييم مهارات وقدرات المرشحين أثناء عملية الاختيار لتجنب التحيز والمحسوبية؟

10- ما هي المعلومات الإضافية التي ترغب في إضافتها لتعزيز استعداد المنظمات غير الحكومية التي تعمل في شمال العراق للتغلب على التحديات خلال مثل هذه الأزمات في المستقبل ، ويمكن أن توجه المنظمات غير الحكومية أو المنظمات الأخرى في المستقبل؟

Appendix D

Codes Definitions\Explanation

Primary Codes	Codes definitions\Explanation
Positive impacts of remote work	The positive impacts on the employees' performance when they were working remotely during COVID-19.
Negative impacts of remote work	The negative impacts on the employees' performance when they were working remotely during COVID-19.
Challenges of transitioning to remote work	The main challenges faced by HR as a result of transitioning to remote work during COVID-19 period.
Key lessons learned.	The key lessons HR management learned from COVID-19 crisis.
Applying learned lessons.	The way of implementing the learned lessons.
Overall challenges	The main overall challenges faced by HR department during the crisis of COVID-19.
Used strategies and policies to overcome challenges.	The strategies and policies that HR used to overcome the faced challenges during the period of COVID-1.
Preparedness for future crises.	The identified ways by HR department to be well-prepared for future crises.
Improving HR management.	The tools, software, or systems that the organization adopted to facilitate managing human resources

Prevention of Partiality and Nepotism.	The implemented strategies and policies of HR to prevent partiality and nepotism.
Evaluation methods for candidates.	The tests or assessments used by HR to evaluate the skills and abilities of candidates during the process of employee selection.
Enhancement of NGOs' preparedness.	Important information and guidelines to assist NGOs to overcome challenges and be prepared for the future crises.

Appendix E

List of Codes and Subcodes

Primary Codes	Subcodes
Positive impacts of remote work	Remote work benefits, less work pressure and comfort, improved focus and autonomy, cost savings, professional development, work flexibility.
Negative impacts of remote work	Adaptation to remote work environment, difficulties of arranging meetings and interviews, decrease of productivity and job opportunities, following up with staff, social interaction, communication difficulties, employees' well-being, challenges of remote work set up, access challenges, work-life balance
Challenges of transitioning to remote work	Performance and following-up, recruitment and conducting meetings, increased workload, communication and collaboration problems, document approval, work performance, projects implementation, employee engagement and motivation, technological infrastructure, performance management, employee well-being and mental health, challenges of sudden lockdown.

Key lessons learned.	Remote work management, collaboration with other NGOs, adaptation to remote work, crises preparedness, agility and adoptability in response to changes, emphasis on employees' well-being, importance of communication, technological readiness, flexibility in policies and procedures, teamwork, innovation.
Applying learned lessons.	Raising communication and training, community and employee awareness, adapt to online HR systems, Improving the remote work policies and procedures, Investment in technology, prioritize the well-being of employees, raise collaboration and teamwork, staff enhancement on remote work.
Overall challenges	Staff engagement and communication, transitioning to remote work, performance decreased, projects implementation, well-being and mental health, crises management, learning and development, recruitment and onboarding, legal consideration and compliance, response

	difficulties, logistical support, increased workload, social interactions.
Used strategies and policies to overcome challenges.	Adaptation to technology and digital tools, implementing remote work strategies and policies, strategies of mental health and employee well-being, safety guidelines, crises management, employee engagement strategies, communication improvement, learning and development strategies.
Preparedness for future crises.	Mitigation strategies and staff protection, psychological support and awareness, creation of crisis-related infrastructure and policies, creation of new communication and connection systems, policy adjustment and remote work, virtual hiring and onboarding strategies, improving the policies and strategies of remote work, learning and development tools and software.
Improving HR management.	Improvement of online HR management system, new tools and software adaptation, training and development initiative, implementation and policy enhancement, proving resources of remote work.

Prevention of Partiality and Nepotism.	Non-discrimination policies, recruitment policies and procedures, equal employment opportunities, avoiding bias, transparency policies, transparent and clear selection criteria, diversity and inclusion initiatives, diverse interview panels, competency process, multiple evaluators.
Evaluation methods for candidates.	Multiple interview rounds, written tests and assessments, enhanced evaluation criteria, objective and job-related assessment, shortlisting and longlisting, strong scoring system, fairness and transparency, partiality avoidance, candidates coding, face-to-face interviews.
Enhancement of NGOs' preparedness.	Emergency preparedness, strong partnerships, staff training, capacity building, information management system, community engagement, flexibility and adaptability, monitoring and evaluation, development, advocacy and resource mobilization, cooperation and coordination with LNGOs and INGOs, raising safety and security procedures, technology enhancement, raising communication and

	connection, enhanced policies and strategies, local context understanding,
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Appendix F

List of Patterns, Codes, and Subcodes

Patterns	Primary Codes	Sub-Codes
Remote work has numerous advantages for employees and NGOs	Positive impacts of remote work	Remote work benefits, less work pressure and comfort, improved focus and autonomy, cost savings, professional development, work flexibility.
Remote work presents many challenges to employees' performance	Negative impacts of remote work	Adaptation to remote work environment, difficulties of arranging meetings and interviews, decrease of productivity and job opportunities, following up with staff, social interaction, communication difficulties, employees' well-being, challenges of remote work set up, access challenges, work-life balance
Transitioning to remote work posed significant challenges for human resource department.	Challenges of transitioning to remote work	Performance and following-up, recruitment and conducting meetings, increased workload, communication and collaboration problems, document approval, work performance, projects implementation, employee engagement and motivation, technological infrastructure,

		performance management, employee well-being and mental health, challenges of sudden lockdown.
Human resource management encountered numerous and beneficial key lessons while working during the period of COVID-19.	Key lessons learned.	Remote work management, collaboration with other NGOs, adaptation to remote work, crises preparedness, agility and adoptability in response to changes, emphasis on employees' well-being, importance of communication, technological readiness, flexibility in policies and procedures, teamwork, innovation.
Applying learned lessons could improve the human resource management.	Applying learned lessons.	Raising communication and training, community and employee awareness, adapt to online HR systems, Improving the remote work policies and procedures, Investment in technology, prioritize the well-being of employees, raise collaboration and teamwork, staff enhancement on remote work.
The COVID-19 pandemic presented the human resource department with significant management challenges	Overall challenges	Staff engagement and communication, transitioning to remote work, performance decreased, projects implementation, well-being and

		mental health, crises management, learning and development, recruitment and onboarding, legal consideration and compliance, response difficulties, logistical support, increased workload, social interactions.
Implementing comprehensive strategies and proactive policies by human resource management can effectively decrease the challenges encountered during crises.	Used strategies and policies to overcome challenges.	Adaptation to technology and digital tools, implementing remote work strategies and policies, strategies of mental health and employee well-being, safety guidelines, crises management, employee engagement strategies, communication improvement, learning and development strategies.
Strengthening and enhancing the strategies and policies of human resource management is crucial for effectively navigating future crises and challenges.	Preparedness for future crises.	Mitigation strategies and staff protection, psychological support and awareness, creation of crisis-related infrastructure and policies, creation of new communication and connection systems, policy adjustment and remote work, virtual hiring and onboarding strategies, improving the policies and strategies of remote work, learning and development tools and software.

Providing the human resource department with essential resources will significantly reduce the hurdles they face and enhance their ability to overcome challenges effectively.	Improving HR management.	Improvement of online HR management system, new tools and software adaptation, training and development initiative, implementation and policy enhancement, proving resources of remote work.
Commitment to the policies and regulations of the organization is very important in preventing partiality and nepotism.	Prevention of Partiality and Nepotism.	Non-discrimination policies, recruitment policies and procedures, equal employment opportunities, avoiding bias, transparency policies, transparent and clear selection criteria, diversity and inclusion initiatives, diverse interview panels, competency process, multiple evaluators.
Incorporating enhanced tests and assessments in the evaluation of candidates' skills, can significantly minimize the risks of partiality and nepotism.	Evaluation methods for candidates.	Multiple interview rounds, written tests and assessments, enhanced evaluation criteria, objective and job-related assessment, shortlisting and longlisting, strong scoring system, fairness and transparency, partiality avoidance, candidates coding, face-to-face interviews.
It is important to use development and collaboration procedures to	Enhancement of NGOs' preparedness.	Emergency preparedness, strong partnerships, staff training, capacity

enhance the preparedness of NGOs to overcome challenges during future crises.		building, information management system, community engagement, flexibility and adoptability, monitoring and evaluation, development, advocacy and resource mobilization, cooperation and coordination with LNGOs and INGOs, raising safety and security procedures, technology enhancement, raising communication and connection, enhanced policies and strategies, local context understanding.
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Appendix G

Relationship between themes and patterns

Themes	Patterns
<p>The impacts of remote work for NGOs during the period of COVID-19.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remote work has numerous advantages for employees and NGOs. ● Remote work presents many challenges to employees' performance. ● Transitioning to remote work posed significant challenges for human resource department. ● The COVID-19 pandemic presented the human resource department with significant management challenges. ● Implementing comprehensive strategies and proactive policies can effectively reduce the challenges encountered during crises.
<p>Learned lessons from COVID-19 by HR management and implementing them to future crises.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Human resource management encountered numerous and beneficial key lessons while working during the period of COVID-19. ● Applying learned lessons could improve the human resource management. ● Strengthening and enhancing the strategies and policies of human resource management is crucial for effectively navigating future crises and challenges. ● Providing the human resource department with essential resources will significantly reduce the hurdles they face and enhance their ability to overcome challenges effectively. ● It is important to use development and collaboration procedures to enhance the preparedness of NGOs to overcome challenges during future crises.

<p>The strategies and policies used by HR management during the process of employee selection.</p>	<p>Commitment to the policies and regulations of the organization is very important in preventing partiality and nepotism.</p> <p>Incorporating enhanced tests and assessments in the evaluation of candidates' skills, can significantly minimize the risks of partiality and nepotism.</p>
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