

# The Effectiveness of HRM Crisis Management Practices in Enhancing the Performance of Employees and Organizations in Lebanon

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**Abstract:** *This research identifies the HR practices that have been applied by HR managers and departments to manage the current financial and economic crisis taking place in Lebanon. It also aimed at assessing the impact of these practices on increasing employees' performance, and accordingly its impact on improving the overall organizational performance in comparison to the impact of the market situation on the overall organizational performance. To conduct the study, a literature review was composed. It indicated that employee performance is determined by the management practices and that it would definitely affect the organizational performance. Moreover, it also highlighted how the macro - environmental factors affect the organizational performance. The literature review provided some insights on the Lebanese market and indicated the cruelty of the crisis taking place. To collect primary data, a quantitative research was done through a questionnaire and analyzed through SPSS. Accordingly HR managers had to change their goals and objectives, reduce HR budget on HR activities, add more control on employee's performance, release the least productive employees and promote the high performers, work on motivating employees and communicating information, and interfere to prevent conflicts. The HR practices proved to be effective in increasing employee performance, however, this increase in employee performance was not effective enough to increase the organizational performance, as the market situation proved to be greatly influential and more impactful than employee performance.*

**Keywords:** HRM, Crisis Management, Employee Performance, Organizational Performance, Market Situation

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Lebanon today is experiencing perhaps the most devastating economic, political, social, and health crisis in its history. According to BBC (2020) the country today lacks political stability leading to high insecurities in the market. In addition, the economic situation in Lebanon is not promising. Lebanon is an importing country that is highly dependent on US dollars to generate its production and deliver its products. With a financial crisis hitting the banking sector, the market lacks sufficient liquidity of the US currency, leading to a huge increase in the exchange rate of the Lebanese pound for the US dollar. Costs of production has greatly increased, purchasing power of customers diminished, and many companies were unable to survive and were therefore forced to shut down. "Lebanon had recently faced harsh political and economic crises" (Bizri et al., 2021). HRM had to take in action in many organizations to face the current crisis in order to sustain the survival of these organizations. Accordingly many organizations tend to apply new actions within their HRM strategies that had a direct effect on employees overall performance and organizational performance in particular.

### 1.2 Research Problem

The main research problem of the study is to identify what actions and practices HR managers applied within the Lebanese context in order to face and manage the crisis. In addition, to further explore the impacts of these activities and acts on employee performance and the overall organizational performance.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

In order to address the research problem of the study the following objectives should be met:

- 1) Identify the practices that have been made by Lebanese organizations as a part of their HRM strategy during crisis.
- 2) Assess the impact of HRM practices for crisis management on employee performance.
- 3) Assess the impact of employee performance on organizational performance.
- 4) Assess the impact of the current market situation on organizational performance.

### 1.4 Research Hypotheses

The study has different hypotheses that should be tested eventually by the end of the research:

- H1: HRM practices for crisis management are positively correlated with employee performance.  
 H2: Employee performance is positively correlated with organizational performance.  
 H3: Market situation is negatively correlated with organizational performance.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Buchner (2007) highlighted the vital role of adopting performance management methods in organizations looking for achieving gains through their employees in challenging economic periods. The author discussed "performance management theory", which indicates that employee performance is determined by the way they are managed. The theory is part of the HR studies and implies that HR managers can reach and direct their employees based on

their operations. The theory indicates that HR managers should set objectives to attain, enforce actions, and control the performance of the employees. Accordingly, HR practices are always correlated with the performance of the employees. The theory also calls for the continuous process of evaluating employees' performance and developing their skills to make them align and reach the organizational goals.

Relating this to the research objective, HR practices set for crisis management should be effective enough to increase and boost employees' performance and accordingly should be effective enough to increase and boost the overall organizational performance.

However, organizations can not be separated from their surroundings, as organizations are an open system always affected by what is running in their external environment, and exchange resources with it. This open - system view of organizations was one of the fruits of organizational theories. Önday (2016) discussed "the theories of organizations and environments" with an emphasis on the systems theory that was developed by the theorists Katz and Kahn, and led to the development of other theories. Its concept interprets organizations in a continuous interaction with their environment: the organization is a set of interrelated elements where any change in one of its elements affects the others; its activities are interrelated, rooted in and dependent on wider environments; and it exchanges resources with its environment in an attempt to survive. He highlighted how the macro - environmental factors are always uncontrolled and have greater impact on organizational performance, and that organizations opting to survive have to react successfully to the changes taking place in their environments, otherwise they may end out of business. The closed system view, which neglects environment changes and effects, has disappointed organizations. Accordingly, there are always external forces and conditions, beyond any organization capabilities, control, and boundaries. The impact of these factors are inevitable. Instead of avoiding them, which is impossible, organizations should know how to manage their risks, and adapt their resources to operate in these circumstances.

This theory is also applied in the case of Lebanon, where extra - ordinary macro - environmental forces are clearly showing negative effect on the performance and the operations of organizations. Lebanese enterprises can neither escape these factors nor control it, but should be able to adapt, react, and take successful decisions. Accordingly, this theory anticipates that the macro - environmental factors would have a greater impact on the overall organizational performance than any increase in its employees' performance, especially that the market situation is very harsh at both the economic and the political levels.

### 3. Empirical Review

#### 3.1 Market Situation

The Lebanese market and economy today suffer from different problems. "Since October 17, 2019, thousands of Lebanese all over Lebanon flood the streets furious with the economy collapse... Lebanon had been facing dramatic

economic drawbacks from 2009" (Youssef, 2020). "Even before the coronavirus pandemic at the start of this year, Lebanon seemed to be headed for a crash" (BBC, 2020). The political situation in Lebanon is very chaotic. There is no effective government, and the corruption is taking over the place permeating all levels of society, which increases insecurity in the market (BBC, 2020). From one side it does not encourage any kind of investments to increase cash flow in the markets, nor does it allow any foreign aid, because foreign parties have no trust in the acting government. Therefore, the Lebanese are stuck in the middle and organizations are suffering from no positive incentives to invest or spend money. Similar consumers are insecure and their purchasing behavior has diminished. The economic situation is at its worst situation ever (BBC, 2020). Many families became stuck in poverty due to the fragile economy and the concurrent banking crisis (Yassine et al., 2020). "Many business were forced to lay off staff or put them on furlough without pay" (BBC, 2020). The Lebanese banking sector is going bankrupt after it lent money to the government and the government was not able to cover the debt. The savings people have accumulated in the Lebanese banks have disappeared, including money of corporations, this means that even some organizations have their cash disappeared. With the lack of money in the market, lack of investment, the US currency is in shortage. Lebanon is a country that imports all its products, and if it doesn't, it imports the raw materials to produce its products. With the lack of USD, the value of Lebanese Pound has greatly devaluated, thus making the market greatly volatile (Holleis, 2021). Cost of production is always increasing, and the exchange rate varies. In addition to the global pandemic COVID 19, which also paralyzed the markets. Lebanon today is suffering from the worst economic, political, financial, social, and health crisis ever (Holleis, 2021). Bizri et al. (2021) described the pandemic by "an insult over injury for Lebanon... could not have come at a worse time for Lebanon. The country is on brink of bankruptcy, the healthcare system is struggling for survival and the government is striving to regain the trust of the population".

#### 3.2 HRM Practices for crisis management

Human resource management plays a vital role in managing crisis (Wang et al., 2009; Ahmadi et al., 2012; Sani, 2012; Mirzapour et al., 2019). In times of crisis and sudden changes, organizations needed to take action in order to survive. Kehoe and Wright highlighted how successful HRM practices have positive effects on the performance of both employees and organizations. The effective management of human resources, employee performance, and organizational performance is vital for successful organizations, due to the deep relationships existing among them (Schermerhorn et al., 2014).

Ochetan (2012) highlighted the importance of successful management of human resources and effective selection of employees, as employees are the critical resources that have the capacity to cope with any circumstances. Strategic HR model is very necessary because besides its benefits for better organization, it has great impacts on the performance of human resources. It applies solutions that contribute in solving problems related to any kind of legislative or

financial challenges in the market. It also solve problems resulting from economic or financial crisis affecting the organization. In case of crisis, planning human resources is vital to ensure economic and social stability and to make the business survive (Ochetan, 2012). For example, reducing costs and improving productivity becomes a major objective. During crisis, many organizations assess the performance of their employees where they release the least effective ones and promote the most effective ones or change their career orientation.

During crisis and financial problems, organizations face many problems, especially the generation of an overall tension at workplace. In this context, the flexibility of the organization in managing and reacting would be key to overcome obstacles, and “a certain consistency in the internal remuneration field has to be maintained in order to avoid the lack of the employees' motivation” (Ochetan, 2012). This means that HR departments should work on securing the benefits and compensation of the employees to avoid any kind of tension that would affect their performance. Motivating employees remains very vital as it has positive correlation with their performance and accordingly it should be given great importance. Yet during crisis, tasks and operations are handled as group work not individual. Ochetan (2012) indicated that in order to achieve a common business project, corporations schedule tasks for groups. “No employee can be secluded in logic of personal tasks because the problems that occur within the organization concern all the employees and can be solved only through a common and unitary action”. In addition, it is critical to develop the skills of employees, turn them able to operate in a creative way to avoid of the interpersonal conflicts that may rise. Communication is also key during crisis, and employees' involvement in decision making will make them confident and committed.

From an HR perspective, other functions of HR like extra training and development, should be avoided due to the lack of budget, whereas organizations, subject to continued or recurrent crises, have to anticipate a lifetime professional training that is intended to offset a possible instability of human resources (Ochetan, 2012).

Recruitment during crisis would be costly, and demand critical skills. Employees joining the organization during crisis should be very well selected, and should have high skills and standards to contribute in the survival of the organization (Ochetan, 2012).

Vardarlier (2016) also highlighted the critical role of human resources management in contemporary organizations, and how this role gains more importance in the times of crisis. Crisis greatly affects the operations of the business and results in different consequences including panic of both management and employees, loss of key staff and knowledge, high turnover in labor, lack of morale and motivation. This would definitely lead to low performance and productivity. Organizations will also be exposed to high expenses like health benefits costs, legislative expenditures, and others. New compensation policies are usually applied and might result in less employee's payment. During crisis, fake information becomes very common, employees become

tense and they are more likely to have personal conflicts with each other. It is very normal to have high work load after the release of many employees and many other candidates become disappointed after getting promoted to new positions. Recruitment and scheduled training programs become subject to cancellation. All these would reduce the work performance of the organization.

Resolving those effects and managing crisis becomes critical, as panic is the first impact that occurred on all individuals including managers and employees. Hence moving from the classical to modern approach of reducing panic becomes important, and forming a crisis management team is a vital action taken in the first steps of dealing with crises (Vardarlier, 2016). HRM during crisis should take actions to overcome these challenges. For instance, the talent management should develop loyalty among employees in order to avoid the loss of effective and productive employees, training and development should be perused in order to secure the proper functioning of the business, employees should be greatly assisted to avoid demotivation, psychological motivation coaching and mentoring should be given, partial payments and negotiation with employees should be done about the compensation policy, employees should always be informed with updates, and gossip should be managed. Furthermore, future positions and promotions should be offered to keep employees in the loop and sustain their good performance (Vardarlier, 2016). Many other practices also could be applied including: reorganizing and prioritizing recruitment, examination and reevaluation of job analysis, creation of crisis bonuses and incentives, review of goals and objectives, and identifying obstacles and taking necessary actions.

Therefore, HRM plays a critical role during crisis in managing performance and the response of its models constitutes a challenging topic to practitioners and academics. Moreover, it is relevant how turbulent times lead to changes in working practices, downsizing, unemployment, and decrease in payments (Rubery & Johnson, 2018).

### 3.3 Employee Performance

It is defined by “What is expected to be delivered by an individual or a set of individuals within a timeframe. What is expected to be delivered could be stated in terms of results or efforts, tasks and quality, with specification of conditions under which it is to be delivered” (Kumari & Malhotra, 2012, p.78). It is related to the tasks and duties the employees conduct, the quality they deliver, the time they need to complete their tasks, and the output they provide. During economic crisis employees handle much more tasks and duties than stable situations. They work extra time, and they will need to work effectively to provide better quality, and using less resources, otherwise they would be laid off. Ample literature discussed how employee performance is positively correlated with organizational performance (Neves and Eisenberger, 2012; Nassazi, 2013; Hankir and Berberoglu, 2020). Yet, despite them employees in crisis would not be achieving their goals because external factors could be more impactful than internal ones.

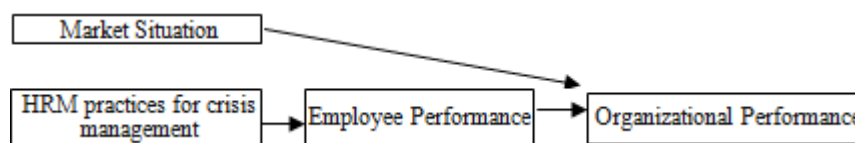
### 3.4 Organizational Performance

Performance of organizations includes three areas of performance: financial, product market, and shareholder return (Richard, 2009). It depends on internal and external factors, where the external ones are often out of their control, and their success depends only on their ability to adapt to their environment (Mohsin et al., 2020). In crisis situation, sales become very weak, and organizations will not be able to reach their financial goals and obligations (Ochetan, 2012). In financial crisis, markets shrink due to low demand on goods and products, such that organizations would experience drop in their sales and profits, an increase in their costs and expenses and they will have to deal with new risks every day. There is a strong correlation between crisis and organizational performance. Crises are well

known to greatly impact organizational performance and weaken their goal achievement. "Organizations sometimes face critical situations or crises that can induce severe consequences or even disasters if wrong decisions are made" (Lin, 2000).

### 3.5 Model of Study

Based on the literature review, three relations were detected. First of all, HRM practices for crisis management would affect employee performance, that already by itself affects overall organizational performance. However, organizational performance is greatly influenced by the market situation. Therefore, the following model can be concluded:



## 4. Method

The study aims to assess the impact of the crisis management practices applied within HRM strategies on the performance of employees on the one hand, and identify, on the other, the impact of each of employee performance and market situation on organizational performance, in Lebanon. Therefore, quantitative approach was considered suitable to assess relationships between independent and dependent variables. The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire constructed following the literature review.

The literature review presented the research main variables and their respective dimensions. It indicated the market situation, and the impacts of the political and economic situations on business firms. It also presented the practices of HRM applied to face and manage the crisis and then discussed the expected impact on employee performance and organizational performance. These information were used to design the items of the questionnaire. Accordingly four main variables were extracted from the literature review: market situation, HRM practices, employee performance, and organizational performance. Five point's Likert scale was used to answer the questionnaire statements.

The population concerned with the study is too large, as the study was conducted on all sectors operating in Lebanon. Random sampling technique was adopted, and respondents were chosen following their convenience and availability to the researcher.

Due to the global pandemic, the questionnaire was uploaded on a link using google forms and distributed randomly over employees who work within organizations in Lebanon. A sample of 220 was hardly collected (due to the situation), entered into SPSS, and analyzed accordingly. Cronbach's alpha was the first test done to confirm the reliability of the questionnaire, and that the data collected could be used for further analysis. For reliability to be approved, Cronbach's

alpha should score greater or equal to 0.7. Accordingly, it scored 0.917 approving high reliability and indicating that further analysis could be done. Factor analysis was the second test conducted to check the questionnaire validity and reduce the statements of each variable into one item. Only one statement was excluded. Third, mean test was done to assess the current market situation and identify the measurements taken by organizations to face and manage the crisis taking place in the market. Finally, both Pearson correlation and simple linear regression tests were done in order to either confirm or reject the research hypotheses and the findings from the literature review. Results were obtained and discussed hereunder.

## 5. Results and Discussion

This part aims to address the research questions of the study and address the hypothesis that have been developed.

### Mean Test

The study aimed to assess the current market situation and identify the measurements taken by organizations to face and manage this economic and political crisis striking Lebanon. The mean test would provide the average score agreement out of 5 that will indicate if the sample responded agree or disagree with the statements.

**Table 1: Market Situation**

Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean
Political instability is greatly affecting the market the organization operates at	220	4.3591
The economic situation of the market is at its worst times	220	4.5409
Cost of production are greatly increasing	220	4.1773
The current market is greatly volatile	220	4.5409
Valid N (list wise)	220	

The mean test table presents the average agreement on the market situation. As recognized there is a high agreement on all statements about the market situation as all items scored a



mean greater than 4.00. This means that most respondents agreed that: the political instability is greatly affecting the market, the economic situation is at its worst situation, the cost of production are greatly increasing, and the market is very volatile at this moment.

**Table 2:** HRM practices for crisis management

Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean
The Management changed the goals and objectives	220	3.8045
Employees productivity and effectiveness has been greatly controlled	220	4.0818
Employees with low productivity have been laid off	220	4.0818
Employees with high productivity have been promoted or raised	220	4.0636
Employees benefits have been decreased or removed	220	3.8045
Salaries have been reduced by a specific percentage	220	3.8045
Management allocated budget for incentives	220	3.8045
Budget on training and development have been greatly minimized	220	4.0818
New recruitment has not been done for a while	220	3.9000
Management tries its best to motivate employees in different ways	220	4.0818
Management always communicate and update employees with information	220	4.0636
Management interferes to prevent personal conflicts between employees	220	4.0818
Valid N (list wise)	220	

The results indicated the practices that have been applied by HR departments to streamline efforts, reduce costs and expenses from the burden of the organizations, manage performance, and stay in business. Mainly, most respondents agreed that their organizations are controlling productivity, have laid off its low productive employees, and promoting the productive ones. They have reduced training and development budget at the moment, and they are trying their best to motivate employees, communicate information, and interfere to prevent conflicts among employees (as results scored 4.06 - 4.08). Moreover, a sufficient majority of them agreed that their organizations have changed their goals and objectives, reduced the benefits and salaries of their employees but allocated budget for incentives, and stopped recruitment for a while (as results scored 3.80).

**Correlation Test**

Pearson correlation test will assess if a correlation exists between the independent and dependent variables, and will show the sign of this correlation. For a correlation to be approved significance or par value should score less than 0.05. Therefore, this test would indicate if a correlation exists between HRM practices for crisis management and employee performance on the one hand, and between each of employee performance and market situation and organizational performance on the other hand.

**Table 3:** Correlation of HRM practices with employee performance

		HRM practices for crisis management
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	.899**
	Sig. (2 - tailed)	.000
	N	220

Significance scored 0.000 which is less than 0.05, this means that the correlation between the two variables has been 100% approved. The correlation was positive.

**Table 4:** Correlation of each of employee performance and market situation with organizational performance

		Employee Performance	Market Situation
Organizational Performance	Pearson Correlation	-.791**	-.875**
	Sig. (2 - tailed)	.000	.000
	N	220	220

The correlations between each of employee performance and market situation on one side, and organizational performance on the other side, have been approved by 100% since the par value or significance scored 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Both correlations were negative.

**Regression Test**

Regression test is very essential in order to identify the strength of the correlations that have been approved, and the dependency of the dependent on the independent. Accordingly simple linear regression was conducted to test the strength of the three correlations subject of study and their dependencies.

(1) Regression of HRM practices and employee performance

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.799 <sup>a</sup>	.998	.998	.04571266

a. Predictors: (Constant), HRM practices for crisis management

R stands for the strength of the correlation, R scored 0.799 this means that the strength of the correlation between HRM practices for crisis management and employee performance is 79.9%.

Adjusted R square corresponds to the dependency of the dependent on the independent. Since it scored 0.998, this means that employee performance depended on HRM practices for crisis management by 99.8%.

(2) Regression of employee performance and organizational performance

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.791 <sup>a</sup>	.682	.6782	.13556391

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee Performance

R scored 0.791, this means that the strength of the correlation between employee performance and organizational performance is 79.1%. Adjusted R square scored 0.682, this means the organizational performance depended on employee performance by 68.2%.

(3) Regression of the market situation and organizational performance

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.875 <sup>a</sup>	.765	.764	.48578247
a. Predictors: (Constant), Market Situation				

R scored 0.875, this means that the strength of the correlation between organizational performance and the market situation is 87.5%.

Adjusted R square scored 0.764, this means that organizational performance depended on the market situation by 76.4%.

It is important to re - mention that the correlation test indicated a negative correlation between employee performance and organizational performance, and between market situation and organizational performance as well.

## 6. Discussion

First of all, the findings proved a positive correlation between HRM practices for crisis management and employee performance which is in agreement with the work of Buhner (2007) indicating that management practices increase employee performance. This proof reflects that these practices were effective to increase employee performance during crisis in Lebanon. Therefore the first hypothesis stating that HRM practices for crisis management are positively correlated with employee performance was approved.

Second, the findings declared a negative correlation between employee performance and organizational performance unlike what Buchner (2007) proposed. Buchner indicated that employee performance is positively correlated with organizational performance. By means of the theory, and based on literature, when employees' performance increases, organizational performance should always increase, however the findings of the research indicated a negative correlation, such that when their performance increased, organizational performance kept on decreasing. Thus, rejecting the second hypothesis that indicated that employee performance is positively correlated with organizational performance.

Finally, Önday (2016) indicated that external factors are always impactful on organizational performance. This explains the results obtained. Despite the increase in employees' performance, the overall performance of the organization kept decreasing due to the market situation. This means that the market situation impact was greater than the impact of the increase in employee's performance. This result approved the third hypothesis that indicates that the market situation is negatively correlated with organizational performance.

## 7. Conclusion

The research aimed at indicating the practices that HR managers have applied in managing the crisis in Lebanon, and assessing the impact of these practices on improving employee's performance and accordingly increasing the overall performance of the organization.

The findings of the study indicated that the HR practices were effective enough to increase the performance of employees during the crisis, however, this increase in employees' performance was not effective enough to increase the overall organizational performance. Macro - environmental forces had the greater impact on organizational performance.

## 8. Future Scope

This research was not free of some limitations like not differentiating among different markets as the nature of the market and the product type could affect the results as for example the performance of food industry would be totally different than the performance of the healthcare one, not paying attention to the psychological state of the employees in such a hectic financial situation which may provide biased responses and affect the results of the study, measuring both employee and organizational performance from an employee perspective which may also provide unreal assessment of productivity and hence unreal assessment of the effectiveness of the adopted practices, and not being able to collect a larger set of responses due to the situation. Therefore, it is advised to consider these limitations in future research as it may affect its results. Moreover, it is recommended to study the effect of each of the dimensions of the adopted practices on performance. For example, employee performance could be affected positively with motivating employees and solving their conflicts on one hand, and could be affected negatively with too much controlling or by the results of controlling like firing the least productive ones on the other hand, as individuals may find themselves in need to organizational support in such hectic situation where their psychological state is at stake.

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