

PRACTISING HR in a WAR ZONE

Exceptional Human Resources Management in crisis and war.



FROM THE GAZA STRIP

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Under the extraordinary circumstances imposed by wars, human resource management (HRM) becomes a challenging task that requires rapid adaptation and flexible strategies to respond to sudden and fast changes. HRM in wartime must address the needs of displaced individuals, providing care, psychological and social safety, which demands exceptional qualities and practical experience from HR Professionals that differ from normal conditions.

This requires specialists to innovate solutions and activate the use of tools and matrices to coordinate work and achieve goals in meeting the needs of displaced individuals and alleviating their suffering, as seen in places like Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen, and other affected areas.

HOW TO MANAGE HUMAN RESOURCES IN TIMES OF WAR

Human Resources Management during

war has unique characteristics, as it differs from management in normal circumstances. Wartime HRM requires raising readiness levels and maintaining high flexibility to adapt to all changes, which includes the following aspects:

- 1. RAPID PLANNING AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE:** Planning in wartime relies on full readiness to handle large influxes of displaced people. HR teams must have effective emergency plans to meet urgent humanitarian needs like food, shelter, medical care, and psychological support;
- 2. COORDINATION AMONG DIFFERENT SECTORS:** Managing displaced populations requires cooperation among various sectors, government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Therefore, HR teams must ensure effective coordination between these entities to maximize benefits;
- 3. EFFICIENT FINANCIAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:** Emergency budgets are often limited, which requires strict strategies to allocate financial resources and ensure they meet the essential needs of displaced individuals;
- 4. ADAPTATION TO RAPID CHANGES:** War environments are unstable, necessitating HR teams to adapt quickly to changes. Teams must be trained to handle fluctuating conditions and increased workloads; and
- 5. PROVIDING PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT:** Wars are among the most stressful and fearful situations, making psychological and social support a necessary service. HR teams must provide psychological and social support services to help displaced individuals overcome the negative effects of the crisis.

EXCEPTIONAL QUALITIES REQUIRED IN HR FOR DISPLACEMENT MANAGEMENT

HR personnel working with displaced populations must have several exceptional qualities, including:

- 1. EMPATHY AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:** Understanding and empathizing with the suffering of displaced

individuals is essential. HR professionals need excellent communication skills to assist and support individuals and groups respectfully;

- 2. QUICK DECISION-MAKING ABILITY:** HR Professionals in this field must make swift decisions and act flexibly to address immediate challenges, managing vital decisions under pressure with limited resources;
- 3. TEAMWORK AND PARTICIPATIVE LEADERSHIP:** Crisis management requires teamwork and participative leadership, allowing effective task distribution and the best possible outcomes;
- 4. PATIENCE AND RESILIENCE:** War conditions can be physically and psychologically challenging. Therefore, HR professionals must possess patience and resilience to deal with emotional pressures; and
- 5. CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING:** Displacement management needs innovative solutions, especially with limited resources. HR teams should be able to create alternative solutions to deliver services even in resource-scarce environments.

MODELS FOR HR MANAGEMENT DURING WARS AND CRISES

In wars and crises, HR faces complex challenges that require specific strategies to ensure continuity of operations and support for employees in difficult and unstable conditions. Here are some common models that can be used:

- 1. FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTATION MODEL:** This model focuses on enhancing the organization's and employees' ability to adapt quickly to emerging changes.
 - **Emergency Planning:** Preparing plans for unexpected circumstances;
 - **Rapid Recruitment:** Speeding up recruitment to address workforce shortages.
 - **Resource Reallocation:** Relocating employees or resources to safer areas or more critical tasks.
- 2. SAFETY AND SECURITY MODEL:** Physical and psychological safety of employees becomes a priority during wars and crises.
 - **Security Measures:** Providing protection and evacuation means and training employees in safety procedures;
 - **Psychological and Social Support:** Offering psychological services and monitoring the health of employees and

their families.

- 3. CONTINUITY AND SUSTAINABILITY MODEL:** This model focuses on maintaining business continuity and services provided by the organization during crises.
 - **Crisis Management Plans:** Clearly defining roles and responsibilities;
 - **Alternative Planning:** Developing remote work systems if movement in dangerous areas is impossible.
- 4. MOTIVATION AND MORALE SUPPORT MODEL:** Given the high psychological pressure, HR must work on motivating employees and maintaining their morale.
 - **Incentive Programs:** Offering exceptional rewards and moral recognition;
 - **Community Engagement:** Enhancing a sense of contribution to the crisis response.
- 5. RESTRUCTURING MODEL:** Wars and crises often require restructuring the workforce and operations.
 - **Employee Redistribution:** Relocating employees to new work sites or assigning different tasks;
 - **Cost Reduction:** Implementing strategies to reduce costs, such as reducing working hours or suspending some operations.
- 6. INNOVATION AND RAPID RESPONSE MODEL:** This model supports the ability to develop innovative solutions to respond to emerging needs.
 - **Data Analysis and Rapid Decision-Making:** Using analytics to assess situations and make swift decisions;
 - **Technology and Automation:** Applying technology and automation to ensure efficiency when resources are limited.

These models aim to balance business continuity, employee safety, and psychological support, positioning HR as a central element in organizational crisis response.

MATRICES FOR CRISIS AND WAR MANAGEMENT

Various matrices can help HR evaluate and guide operations in crises and wars, supporting strategic decision-making, prioritization, and efficient resource allocation. Here are some commonly used matrices:

- 1. SWOT MATRIX (STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS):** This matrix helps analyze the organization's current situation, identifying internal and external factors impacting its performance:

- **Strengths:** Internal advantages that can be leveraged;
 - **Weaknesses:** Internal challenges that need addressing;
 - **Opportunities:** External conditions that can be utilized to improve performance; and
 - **Threats:** External risks that should be mitigated.
2. **PRIORITY MATRIX:** This matrix helps in organizing priorities based on importance and urgency, also known as the Eisenhower Matrix:
 - **Urgent and Important:** Requires immediate action;
 - **Important but Not Urgent:** Should be planned and managed effectively;
 - **Urgent but Not Important:** Can be delegated to others; and
 - **Not Urgent and Not Important:** Can be postponed or avoided.
 3. **RISK MANAGEMENT MATRIX:** This matrix aids in analyzing and evaluating risks, determining the necessary actions to handle them:
 - **High Impact & High Probability:** Requires detailed contingency plans;
 - **High Impact & Low Probability:** Needs regular monitoring with limited preparation;
 - **Low Impact & High Probability:** Simple actions to mitigate effects;
 - **Low Impact & Low Probability:** Can be monitored casually or ignored.
 4. **BUSINESS CONTINUITY MATRIX:** Focuses on identifying essential activities and assessing their importance and flexibility to continue during crises:
 - **Highly Important & Flexible Activities:** Should have robust alternative plans;
 - **Important & Non-Flexible Activities:** Need constant resource allocation for continuity;
 - **Non-Important & Flexible Activities:** Can be reduced or postponed as needed;
 - **Non-Important & Non-Flexible Activities:** May be halted entirely in crises.
 5. **HR MATRIX:** Used to allocate personnel and define roles based on skills and operational needs:
 - **Key Employees with Rare Skills:** Highly valued and should be retained;
 - **Key Employees with General Skills:** Can be trained to handle multiple tasks;
 - **Non-Essential Employees with Rare Skills:** Employed as needed.
 - **Non-Essential Employees with General Skills:** May be assigned temporary tasks or reduced if necessary.
 6. **IMPACT-RESPONSE MATRIX:** This matrix assesses crises and urgent events based on the level of impact and the speed of response required:
 - **High Impact & Fast Response:** Requires immediate action and contingency plans;
 - **High Impact & Slow Response:** Needs long-term strategic planning;
 - **Low Impact & Fast Response:** Can be managed flexibly and quickly.
 - **Low Impact & Slow Response:** Can be followed up with minimal effort.
 7. **COMPETENCY MATRIX:** This matrix enables understanding of current employee capabilities, identifying gaps and training needs. It can be used to prioritize training and develop competencies based on crisis needs:
 - **Available Core Skills:** Employees' abilities in essential skills;
 - **Missing Core Skills:** Identifies employees needing further training;
 - **Available Additional Skills:** Extra skills that may be useful in a crisis;
 - **Missing Additional Skills:** Areas where more resources or training are required.

CONCLUSION

HR Management during war requires a combination of strategic planning, flexibility and collaboration with multiple entities, along with exceptional qualities in work teams, such as empathy, patience and quick decision-making. Managing displaced populations remains a complex and significant humanitarian challenge, yet HR efforts contribute to alleviating suffering and achieving relative stability, while matrices provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing situations and making effective crisis-specific decisions to maintain performance and continuity. ■

SHABAN SABBAAH has more than 14 years of experience in human resources, strategic and operational planning, and quality management. Based in the Gaza Strip, he is a researcher interested in critical human resource management topics and has rich experience in raising and discussing human resource management topics with professionals and those interested in the field. He is formerly the founder of the Palestinian Human Resources Forum in 2022.

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 Learn about racism,
 Talk about it,
 Speak out against it,
 and Act to stop it.

