

Bataan Peninsula State University Employees' Readiness Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic: Basis for Strategic Plan for the New Normal

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Abstract

All sectors worldwide, including the workplace have been devastated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a massive impact on the nature of work in the workplace. Schools all over the world have been forced into a rapid change of plan in terms of working habits, from face-to-face to working from home. This study explored employees work readiness among BPSU employees. Literature and studies were reviewed, and questionnaires related to employee readiness and respondents' profiles. Data from 207 university employees were used in the study. The self-made survey questionnaires were validated and reliable based on statistical tools used in this study. Dissemination and collection of data were collected through Google Forms. The study is a descriptive study to determine the employee's readiness and its correlation with a personal profile. The results showed that respondents' profile in terms of age, sex, and employment type has a significant relationship with employee readiness upon reopening the workplace. The literature cited herein develops a framework as to the necessary measures the school administration must take in the reopening of the workplace. The paper aims to measure the level of employee readiness amidst the COVID-19 pandemic upon reopening the workplace. The result of this study can be a basis for a strategic plan for the "new normal" through the prism of pillars that are key to ensuring a smooth recovery, and the attendant opportunities and challenges. The implications of the continuing crisis on the working conditions of employees are discussed. Aside from the lens of employee readiness, this paper recommends other aspects of working conditions in the workplace as the basis for a strategic plan for the new normal.

Keywords: Readiness, New Normal, COVID-19 Pandemic, Strategic Plan

Introduction

The world is changing and it is constantly changing. Some of these are technology, education, and health; there is hardly anything in life that is not changing, some changes we like, while others create fear, stress, and anxiety. One of the greatest changes that have taken place lies in the health sphere. The other great change that has taken place is that every human being, rich or poor is at health risk. The great change of all time was proven during the year 2020. It is because of the COVID-19 pandemic that changed the life of humanity around the world. The worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 is a source of unexpected stress and adversity for many people.

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world early year of 2020, strict measures of government around the world were implemented to avoid the pandemic going beyond control. In mid-March 2020, the Philippine Government decided to ban public gatherings by closing schools and businesses that catered to a large mass. Soon the country went into total lockdown.

This pandemic radically disrupted work environments, the first priority has been crisis response: emphasizing health and safety, essential services, and the virtualization of work and education. Whether you are going to work or working from home, the COVID-19 pandemic has probably changed the way you work. Fear and anxiety about this new disease and other strong emotions can be overwhelming, and workplace stress can lead to burnout external icon. How you cope with these emotions and stress can affect your well-being, the well-being of the people you care about, your workplace, and your community. During this pandemic, you must recognize what stress looks like, take steps to build your resilience and manage job stress, and know where to go if you need help.

However, to limit the spread of the virus, most countries have instituted varying degrees of social distancing measures (and in particular physical distancing measures), some that require large swaths of the population to stay home and restrict physical proximity to others. In Austria, nationwide lockdown and physical distancing measures were imposed between 14 March 2020 and 30 April 2020. Within a very short period, the population was required to largely withdraw from their normal lives and practice physical distancing, while the social-, financial-, and health-related consequences of COVID-19 were becoming rapidly apparent. This could increase the potential for negative emotional, physical, and mental health consequences (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Christiansen, Larsen, & Lasgaard, 2016; Cohen, Doyle, Skoner, Rabin, & Gwaltney, 1997; Crittenden et al., 2014; Helgeson & Cohen, 1996; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Sneed, Cohen, Turner, & Doyle, 2012).

Given the potentially significant downstream social and psychological effects of these lockdown measures, it is crucial to identify factors that might be associated with increased risk for negative health outcomes, and conversely, those that promote resilience during times of adversity (Vinkers et al., 2020).

After months of virtual education, state universities sooner or later will reopen their doors to employees and students. But with the ongoing risk of COVID-19, what does the average school day now look like? In the process of adapting to this changed reality, every process, function, and role will be re-imagined, fundamentally changing the future of work, workforce, and workspace.

The pandemic has reshuffled our needs, which are now based on a new order. Whether of short or medium duration, will it end in a return to the “normal” or move us into an unknown future? Žižek contends that “there is no return to normal, the new ‘normal’ will have to be constructed on the ruins of our old lives, or we will find ourselves in a new barbarism whose signs are already clearly discernible” (Žižek, 2020).

The government, businesses, and communities navigate this crisis; the focus is increasingly turning to recovery and reopening, and eventually returning to the “new normal.” It is now time for policymakers to consider actions that best help state universities reopen safely while protecting the employees and students helping restart the new normal in schools. With employees slowly returning to work, the world needs new policies as the current and virtual worlds collide and reshape both work and home. In the process of adapting to this changed reality, every process, function, and role will be re-imagined, fundamentally changing the future of work, workforce, and workspace.

The readiness of the employees upon opening the workplace can help us get through and overcome hardship. But readiness is not something we’re born with, it is built over time as the experiences we have interact with our unique, individual genetic makeup. That’s why we all respond to stress and adversity like that from the COVID-19 pandemic differently. In response to COVID-19, the priority is, first and

foremost, to protect the health and safety of employees and students. At the same time, it is essential to ensure the stability of the university operations and underlying systems. In this unfolding crisis, the systems readiness of employees will be tested like never before.

Amidst this worldwide pandemic, the key questions are - What are the top policy priorities that should be adopted amidst COVID-19? How do we improve the readiness of the employees and students to use online tools to move seamlessly to remote education? What will the future workforce look like? What will a workspace look like?

Bataan Peninsula State University is one of the state universities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. As a state university with over 1,000 employees, these are some key questions that the workforce has actively engaged with over the past few months. It has worked to leverage its resources, relationships, and services to help employees, students, and clientele navigate the crisis. Making decisions is fraught with risk because nobody has definitive answers about when the situation will improve or end. Even so, the workforce has built its response, keeping in mind its responsibility as a university to its employees. The playbook has been built on the foundation of BPSU core values of Excellence, Transparency, Honesty, Initiative, Creativity, Synergy, and Community Spirit.

This paper aims to measure the level of employee readiness amidst the COVID-19 pandemic upon reopening the workplace. The result of this study can be a basis for a strategic plan for the “new normal” through the prism of pillars that are key to ensuring a smooth recovery, and the attendant opportunities and challenges.

Objectives of the Study

To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, no research has been conducted on examining the employee’s readiness at the workplace amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in BPSU. Considering the adversities of the virus crisis, the researcher pursued this study with the primary goal of inquiring into the perceptions of BPSU employees during a pandemic. To achieve this goal, two aims the researcher will propose. First, since there is no existing measure of employee readiness at the workplace validated for use with the BPSU population, the researcher examined the psychometric properties of the employee’s readiness using the validated self-constructed questionnaire. Second, the researcher investigated a set of factors that can be associated with readiness, including demographic and psychological variables.

The study also aims to:

1. Determine the validity and reliability of the self-made questionnaire on employee readiness upon the reopening of the workplace amidst the COVID-19 pandemic
2. Analyze the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, employment type, and highest educational attainment
3. Describe the level of employee readiness upon the reopening of the workplace amidst COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Explain the significant relationship between the respondent’s profile and the employee’s readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 pandemic
5. Examine the implications of this study in the present condition of the workplace.

Methodology

The research employed a quantitative method. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate perceived work readiness among employees of the Bataan Peninsula State University. The researcher

searched for articles in Google Scholar, Web of Science, articles, literature, and semantic scholar using a combination of terms related to coronavirus or COVID-19 and the workplace; COVID-19 and employees' readiness at work and articles were chosen according to their relevance to research topic to form self-made questionnaires.

To test the reliability and validity of the self-constructed instrument, the researcher used the methodological design process. The self-constructed instrument was sent out to reviewers who identified, and briefly explained widely accepted techniques and ranked them by degree of new instrument risk as determined by the amount of time and effort it takes to design, implement, and extract learning data from the activity.

To establish the validity of the evaluation tool, the researcher consulted with expert reviewers who had expertise in the field of employee readiness at the workplace. The experts were asked to review the instrument used in this study and then comment on the use of terminology and descriptions, appropriateness of the specific activities included, overall validity of the assessment, ease of use, and generalizability to other employees' readiness and provide general comments. After the evaluation of the experts, the revised instrument will be tested for validity and reliability.

The target population for this study was all employees of Bataan Peninsula State University. This University serves diverse populations and its employees come from different demographic profiles. The accessible population was defined as employees of BPSU. A total sample of 207 employees with employment status of teaching (170) and non-teaching (37) was used for this study.

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson-r) was also used to measure the level of correlation between respondent's profiles in terms of age, sex, employment type, highest educational attainment, and the level of employee readiness at work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study assumes that the personal profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, employment type, and highest educational attainment affects the employee's readiness upon reopening the workplace and it can be measured. The hypothesis to test is, that there is no significant relationship between respondents' profiles and the level of employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results and Discussions

The discussions of the major findings in this study are presented by the objectives outlined in the study.

1. Validity and Reliability of the Self-Made Questionnaire on Employee's Readiness upon the Reopening of the Workplace Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

The self-made questionnaire regarding employee readiness at work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic was valid and reliable and can be conducted to measure the level of employee readiness at work upon reopening the workplace.

2. Profile of the Respondents in terms of age, sex, employment type, and highest educational attainment

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are, in terms of age 16% (56 - 54), 31% (47 – 55), 29% (38 – 46), 17% (29 – 37), and 7% (18 – 28). The respondents comprised of 41% male and 59%

female. The 170 of the respondents are in teaching status, 82%, and 18% of the respondents are non-teaching personnel. In terms of highest educational attainment, 26% [Ph.D./Ed. D. Degree], 21% [Master with Doctoral Units] and [Master Degree], 31% [Baccalaureate Degree], and 1% are High School Graduates.

3. Level of Employee's Readiness upon the Reopening of the Workplace amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

The level of readiness of BPSU employees at work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic based on personal profile is *ready* in terms of age, sex, employment type, and highest educational attainment.

4. Relationship between Respondent's Profile and Employee's Readiness upon reopening the Workplace amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

All of the statements on the self-made questionnaire have a corresponding level of readiness of *ready* except statement 14 with a corresponding level of readiness of *approaching readiness*. The overall weighted mean of 18 statements in Table 16 is 3.46 with the corresponding level of readiness of *ready*.

5. Implications of the study in the Present Condition of the Workplace

The Pearson correlation coefficient value of 0.404 confirms what was apparent from the table which appears to be a low positive correlation between the two variables (age and level of employee readiness at work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic). That there is no significant relationship between age and level of employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic was rejected. The age of the respondents is significant to employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic. Sex and employee's readiness have a correlation coefficient of 0.237, they have a negligible positive correlation, and have a correlation coefficient of 0.763, as having a strong positive correlation. The relationship between sex and the level of employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic was rejected.

There is a low positive correlation ($r = 0.323$) between the employment type (teaching and non-teaching) of the respondents. The findings rejected the H_0 . The employment type of the respondents is significant to the employee's readiness. The null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between the highest educational attainment and the level of employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic was accepted. The highest educational attainment has no significant effect on employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic. As shown in the table, $r = -0.111$ with corresponding negligible negative correlation.

The findings of this study have significant implications for research and practice. The researcher believes that readiness is like Kurt Lewin's concept of unfreezing, reflected in the organization's members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions including any matters dealing with the needed changes and the organization's capacity to make those changes successfully. The organization or the working people must be readied (get ready) for transformation.

Similarly, highlights the significance of readiness, since nothing may change without it; not to mention the efforts expended on rewarding, coaching, or punishing. Similarly, it is more than simply understanding the change and believing in the change, but is also a collection of thoughts and intentions towards the specific change efforts (Bernert 2004).

In addition, insufficient readiness could be the main reason change is unsuccessful and an organization's efforts are in vain (Armenakis et al. 1993). Having considered organization readiness globally, it is necessary to see the readiness of the employees as individuals and a part of the organization.

Employee readiness is defined as the extent to which employees are ready or willing to attend and participate in training (Baharim and Van Gramberg, 2005). It is also identified as a necessary element in training to influence employee learning and has become the subject to be studied. Noted by Noe (2002), employee readiness for training is whereby they have personal characteristics such as ability, attitudes, belief, and motivation. These characteristics are necessary for them to learn the content of the program and to apply it on the job, and the work environment that will enable learning and not interfere with performance.

The unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 global outbreak are indeed ushering strategic plan to a new normal period in the university. This paper attempted to rethink the strategic plan in the new normal from the perspective of employee readiness upon reopening the workplace.

Factors could probably be strengthened through the revision of items with lower primary loadings and possibly adding new items. To reduce (or change) the items in a questionnaire, use a scientific approach rather than relying on intuition or the most vocal stakeholder. Plan to use multiple techniques to prioritize items. Most techniques are based on a correlation (between items, to something external, or to a total score). Many techniques will lead to similar conclusions, including the simpler ones that rely on correlating the items together or to an item total score. More sophisticated techniques such as Rasch analysis, factor analysis, and multiple regression analysis may allow a better understanding of different dimensions in the data but require more sophisticated skills and software.

The model which is used in this research can be reused with the other additional statements. Then the question is whether it is necessary to have other elements to assess the employee's readiness at the workplace. Another possibility for future research is to look at the correlation between religion, economic status, civil status number of children of the respondents, and employee readiness score. This has the potential to provide information as to why some employees are stronger workers than others.

Since there is a significant relationship between respondents' profiles such as age, sex, employment type, and employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the school management should give more focus on the related factors. The BPSU administration should consider the age, sex, and employment type of the employee as the basis for making a strategic plan for the new normal.

The university management needs to monitor and improve workplace relationships among employees through programs or activities that promote employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper offers an insight into how a strategic plan for the new normal can be reshaped, considering the new normal post-COVID-19 era. Other researchers should look into other aspects of employee readiness at work from a wider perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic affects age, sex, and employment type dimensions of the employees. These dimensions continuously tackled in the emerging studies should be further examined to better prepare management systems in the new period in human history.

6. Proposed Strategic Plan

Rationale

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had huge disruptive effects on the education system in our university. For schools, employees impacted by closed schools are stuck at home with little or no access

to work, the effect has been devastating. According to ADB Knowledge Events, the crisis and the response to it has exposed weaknesses in educational systems, while creating opportunities to reshape school education to a new paradigm that is more resilient and robust. This pandemic is not the first, nor will it be the last, to impact countries and schools.

The pandemic outbreak has compelled many universities to immediately switch to the online delivery of lessons. Many school employees have found developing effective online work in a very short period of time very stressful and difficult. It also forced a massive shift in the way we work, learn and connect with others. There are a lot of pros to online working but it also comes with its own unique challenges. With this in mind, employees prepare for the new normal and find effective higher education learning strategies in the opening of the workplace. Faculty and Non-teaching personnel need to be the primary force driving this change and promoting engagement in the new normal education system.

Bataan Peninsula State University is one of the state universities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. As a state university with over 1,000 employees, these are some key questions that the workforce has actively engaged with over the past years. It has worked to leverage its resources, relationships, and services to help employees, students, and clientele navigate the crisis. Making decisions is fraught with risk because nobody has definitive answers about when the situation will improve or end. Even so, the workforce has built its response, keeping in mind its responsibility as a university to its own employees. The playbook has been built on the foundation of BPSU core values of Excellence, Transparency, Honesty, Initiative, Creativity, Synergy, and Community Spirit.

Objectives

This strategic plan works together as part of a holistic, multi-layered plan to reduce exposure to and limit transmission of COVID-19 in schools. Schools should adopt these recommendations to best fit their unique situation, depending on available personnel, resources, finances, school demographics, and building attributes. In addition, schools should frequently revisit their approach as the COVID-19 situation changes over time in each community.

When considering the reopening of schools, four key sanitary criteria should be considered to ensure that students and teachers alike are safe:

- a. Provide Thermal Scanner;
- b. Wearing Facemask;
- c. Ensure social distancing;
- d. Keep schools clean and disinfected; and
- e. Provide easy access to hand washing facilities.

Mandate

The Bataan Peninsula State University is a government non-sectarian institution of higher learning duly established by Republic Act 9403 and principally supported by state funds. The University shall primarily provide advanced instruction and professional training in education, engineering, science and technology, arts and humanities, computer, forestry, and other relevant fields of study. It shall also undertake research, extension services, and production activities in support of the socioeconomic development of Bataan and provide progressive leadership in its areas of specialization.

Vision

A leading university in the Philippines recognized for its proactive contribution to sustainable development through equitable and inclusive programs and services by 2030.

Mission

To develop competitive graduates and empower community members by providing relevant, innovative, and transformative knowledge, research, extension, and production programs and services through progressive enhancements of its human resources capabilities and institutional mechanisms.

Conclusions

The conclusions of the results were done in the wider context of the literature on employee readiness and in relation to the major findings in this study.

1. The self-made questionnaire for employee readiness at work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic was valid and reliable and can be conducted.
2. The level of readiness of BPSU employees amidst the COVID-19 pandemic based on personal profile is ready. All of the statements on the self-made questionnaire has corresponding level of readiness of *ready* except statement 14 with a corresponding level of readiness of approaching readiness.
3. There is a significant relationship between respondents' profiles such as age, sex, employment type, and employee's readiness at work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. There is no significant relationship between respondent's highest educational attainment and employee readiness at work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

The unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 global outbreak are indeed ushering strategic plan to a new normal period in the university. This paper attempted to rethink the strategic plan in the new normal from the perspective of employee readiness upon reopening the workplace.

The following are the recommendations of the researcher about the findings and conclusions of the study.

1. The model which is used in this research can be reused with the other additional statements. Then the question is whether it is necessary to have other elements to assess the employee's readiness at the workplace.
2. Another possibility for future research is to look at the correlation between religion, economic status, civil status number of children of the respondents, and employee readiness score. This has the potential to provide information as to why some employees are stronger workers than others.
3. Since there is a significant relationship between respondents' profiles such as age, sex, and employment type, and employee readiness at work amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the school management should give more focus on the related factors.

4. The university management needs to monitor and improve workplace relationships among employees through programs or activities that promote employee readiness upon reopening the workplace amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Other researchers should look into other aspects of employee readiness at work from a wider perspective.
6. This paper offers an insight into how a strategic plan for the new normal can be reshaped, considering the new normal post-COVID-19 era. The proposed strategic plan from this study may consider the administration as the basis for strategic plan for the new normal.

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