

Management Science Burdens in Bangladesh: A Case of Food-Services Organizations

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted global work environments, particularly in developing economies. This study investigates how a Bangladeshi food-services company managed talent during the early pandemic phase. A survey of 30 mid-to-senior-level managers assessed operational disruptions, remote work challenges, and financial pressures. Quantitative analysis using SPSS, including multiple regression, identified drivers of employee performance decline. Performance decline was significantly predicted by pandemic disruption and resistance to change, explaining 72% of the variance. Strategic practices such as cross-training and remote work planning mitigated performance risks. The findings establish a valuable baseline for longitudinal research. Organizations in developing economies must institutionalize agile, digitally enabled workforce strategies to enhance resilience against future crises.

1. Introduction

The global outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 caused severe disruptions across economic and operational systems. In Bangladesh, these disruptions manifested in the form of halted production, supply chain breakdowns, and an urgent need to restructure workforce operations. Firms had to rapidly adapt talent acquisition, development, and retention strategies to cope with the evolving crisis. Talent management refers to a company's approach to recruiting, developing, and retaining employees aligned with strategic business objectives. During times of crisis, effective talent management plays a critical role in maintaining workflow continuity and staff morale. Yet, little research has addressed how organizations in developing economies like Bangladesh responded to pandemic-related challenges. This study addresses that gap through a case analysis of one national food-services company. Bangladesh, like many developing nations, faces unique socio-economic challenges that exacerbate the impact of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses.

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These challenges include:

- i. *Limited digital infrastructure* – While internet penetration has increased, access to reliable and high-speed internet remains unevenly distributed, hindering the adoption of remote work.
- ii. *Income inequality* – A significant portion of the workforce relies on daily wages and lacks the financial cushion to withstand prolonged lockdowns or economic downturns.
- iii. *Weak social safety nets* – The absence of robust unemployment benefits or government support programs increases the vulnerability of both employees and employers to economic shocks.
- iv. *Traditional management practices* – Many organizations in Bangladesh still adhere to hierarchical structures and traditional management practices, which can impede adaptability and innovation in times of crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and amplified these vulnerabilities. The pandemic has had a multifaceted impact on the Bangladeshi economy and labor market. Garment manufacturing, a key export sector, experienced a sharp decline in demand, leading to widespread job losses. The service sector, including hospitality and tourism, also faced severe disruptions due to lockdowns and travel restrictions [1]. The pandemic has also accelerated the need for digital transformation in Bangladesh. Organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of investing in digital technologies to facilitate remote work, enhance communication, and improve operational efficiency. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for talent management. On the one hand, digital tools can enable greater flexibility and access to a wider talent pool. On the other hand, they also require employees to acquire new skills and adapt to new ways of working [2].

This study aims to address the research gap by examining the specific talent management challenges faced by a food-services company in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. The food-services industry was particularly vulnerable due to its reliance on in-person interactions and the perishable nature of its products. By analyzing the experiences of this company, the study seeks to provide insights into how organizations in similar contexts can better manage their talent during crises. This research provides a valuable baseline understanding of the initial impact of the pandemic on talent management practices in Bangladesh. It also highlights the need for more current research to examine how these practices have evolved since 2021. The findings of this study can also be compared with more recent research to identify changes.

Although the primary data were collected in 2021, this research serves as a vital reference point for analyzing how HR practices have evolved over time. As the global business environment continues to adapt post-pandemic, longitudinal insights like those presented here are increasingly valuable for benchmarking and policy evaluation. Therefore, this study aligns with current scholarly interest in time-based, comparative perspectives on organizational resilience and workforce management.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Dynamic capabilities theory provides a robust framework to understand how organizations adapt and sustain competitive advantage amid rapid environmental changes. The theory posits that firms must develop dynamic capabilities — defined as the ability to sense opportunities and threats, seize

them through timely strategic actions, and reconfigure resources and processes accordingly. Within talent management, this implies the necessity for organizations to rapidly realign workforce strategies, skills development, and HR practices to respond effectively to unprecedented disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Dynamic capabilities emphasize organizational agility and innovation as critical to crisis resilience, particularly in volatile contexts.

Institutional theory complements this by emphasizing the role of broader social, cultural, and regulatory systems in shaping organizational behavior. Firms operate within institutional environments that exert pressures toward conformity via norms, rules, and shared beliefs — a process termed institutional isomorphism. In developing economies, institutional constraints often manifest as rigid hierarchical structures, deeply ingrained cultural practices, and resistance to change, which impede agile decision-making and innovation. These pressures create a tension where organizations must balance external legitimacy demands with internal adaptive needs, often leading to inertia that undermines effective crisis response.

Together, these theories provide a dual lens: dynamic capabilities explain how organizations can respond strategically to disruptions, while institutional theory explains why organizations may struggle to change due to embedded contextual constraints. This interplay is crucial for understanding talent management challenges during COVID-19 in developing economies.

2.2 Empirical Insights on Talent Management During COVID-19

Prior studies have documented a range of talent management challenges faced by organizations globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular emphasis on the unique vulnerabilities of low- and middle-income countries.

Caligiuri et al. [3] highlighted the imperative for organizations to adopt agile international HRM practices to manage workforce disruptions caused by global crises. This aligns with dynamic capabilities by underscoring the need to sense changing environments and seize emerging opportunities such as remote work arrangements. Wang et al. [4] further emphasized effective work design and digital infrastructure as foundational enablers of remote productivity, especially for sectors previously unfamiliar with digital transformation.

Contrastingly, studies from developed economies reveal adaptive strategies linked to enhanced dynamic capabilities. Bissola et al. [5] reported that Italian firms implementing flexible work and employee empowerment exhibited higher resilience during lockdowns. Chung [2] highlighted the complex interplay between flexible work policies, work-life balance, and employee satisfaction — all crucial elements in sustaining performance in crisis conditions. These findings emphasize the strategic agility central to dynamic capabilities and inform the post-pandemic hybrid workforce models increasingly relevant for developing countries.

Literature on digital adaptation reinforces this perspective. Bednarska-Wnuk & Grobelna [6] identified remote-work training and digital infrastructure as critical to maintaining employee engagement. However, Chowdhury *et al.* [7] documented slower digital HRM adoption in South Asian SMEs, attributing this lag to institutional deficiencies including lack of training, infrastructural investment, and managerial inertia, thus constraining capability development.

In the South Asian context, Bangladesh's garment sector provides a salient example. Hossain [8] documented worsening employee vulnerability due to income inequality and a large informal workforce, factors rooted in institutional fragility. Similar patterns of unstructured HR practices and operational unpreparedness were observed in India and Pakistan, illustrating pervasive institutional constraints limiting dynamic capability development.

Khan et al. [9] directly linked these institutional factors to talent management challenges in Bangladesh, noting how rigid hierarchical cultures obstruct agile decision-making and responsiveness. This observation is consistent with institutional theory's assertion that normative and cultural pressures hinder innovation and change, often intensifying during crises.

Scholars such as Allen et al. [10] and Singh & Misra [11] advocate proactive change management interventions — including upskilling and emotional support — as necessary to overcome resistance and mitigate burnout. These interventions represent strategic responses that build dynamic capabilities while addressing institutional barriers, underscoring their relevance in crisis HRM.

Recent research further identifies digital HRM acceleration and hybrid work institutionalization as key post-pandemic trends [12-13]. These studies emphasize strategic agility, psychological contract management, and employee resilience as critical capabilities for organizational crisis-readiness, reinforcing the importance of an integrated theoretical approach.

2.3 Synthesis and Research Gaps

Together, these empirical and theoretical contributions establish a foundational understanding of talent management challenges amid COVID-19. However, significant gaps remain:

- i. While dynamic capabilities and institutional theory are widely applied in organizational studies, their combined explanatory power in the context of developing economies' HRM during crises is underexplored.
- ii. Existing studies often lack contextualized, longitudinal case analyses that reveal how institutional pressures specifically interact with capability-building over time.
- iii. South Asia—and Bangladesh in particular—remains underrepresented in theory-driven research linking pandemic disruption, resistance to change, and performance outcomes in talent management.

This paper addresses these gaps by empirically investigating how Bangladeshi firms negotiate the tensions between dynamic capability demands and institutional constraints during the COVID-19 crisis. It focuses on three key variables informed by the theoretical framework: pandemic disruption as environmental turbulence; resistance to change as institutional inertia; and performance decline as the outcome of the interaction between these forces.

By developing nuanced insights into this interplay, the study aims to contribute a more robust framework for crisis-responsive talent management in developing economies, with practical implications for policymakers and organizational leaders seeking to enhance workforce resilience in turbulent environments.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

This research employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design involving 30 mid- to senior-level managerial professionals from a leading food-services firm in Bangladesh. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their supervisory roles and a minimum of two years of experience. This approach allowed for in-depth insight pertinent to the study's focus on talent management during the pandemic.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

A 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire, developed from a thorough review of the literature and validated via a pretest, was distributed online in August 2021. The instrument assessed ten key dimensions: operational disruption, remote work challenges, internal communication, financial impact, cross-training, resource escalation, layoffs due to market loss, employee diligence decline, strategic remote-work planning, and budgetary constraints. Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Despite demonstrating acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha to be reported), we acknowledge limitations owing to the simplified questionnaire structure. Complex constructs, such as financial strain and operational disruption, may require multi-item subscales to improve construct validity in future research. The application of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is recommended to validate dimensional constructs.

The sample's homogeneity (single company, managerial roles) restricts generalizability. Inclusion of non-managerial employees or participants from multiple firms in future research would help reduce selection bias and enhance representativeness.

Given the reliance on self-reported data, there is a risk of common method bias. Future triangulation with objective organizational metrics—such as turnover rates, absenteeism, or digital engagement logs—would improve data robustness.

Sector-specific characteristics of the food-services industry—such as perishability of goods, customer-facing roles, and stringent regulatory hygiene requirements—were factored into interpreting pandemic responses and underscore the sector's heightened sensitivity in HRM during health crises [14].

3.3 Analytical Methods and Sampling Rationale

SPSS version 20 was used to compute descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) and perform multiple regression analysis, assessing the impact of pandemic-related disruptions and resistance to change on employee performance.

The purposive sampling selection was guided by the following considerations:

- i. *Access to participants* – The researcher had established contacts within the selected food-services firm, which facilitated data collection.
- ii. *Relevance to research questions* – Managers were chosen because they are directly involved in talent management decisions and possess firsthand knowledge of the challenges and organizational responses to the pandemic.
- iii. *Homogeneity of the sample* – Focusing on a single company allowed for a detailed analysis of the specific context, minimizing the influence of inter-organizational variation.

3.4 Questionnaire Content

The 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire was designed to capture key dimensions of talent management challenges during the pandemic. Items were developed based on a literature review and consultation with industry experts, covering:

- i. *Operational disruptions* – The extent to which the pandemic disrupted day-to-day operations, including production, supply chain, and delivery.
- ii. *Remote work challenges* – Difficulties managers and employees faced in adapting to remote work, including technical problems, communication barriers, and work-life balance issues.
- iii. *Internal communication* – Effectiveness of communication between management and employees during the crisis, including clarity, frequency, and transparency.
- iv. *Financial impact* – The financial consequences of the pandemic on the company, such as revenue loss, increased costs, and budget reductions.
- v. *Cross-training presence* – Availability and use of cross-training programs to enhance employee flexibility and resilience.
- vi. *Resource escalation* – Challenges in managing and allocating staff, equipment, and materials during the crisis.
- vii. *Layoffs due to market loss* – Degree to which the company reduced workforce due to decreased demand.
- viii. *Employee diligence decline* – Perceived decreases in employee productivity and motivation as a result of the pandemic.
- ix. *Strategic remote-work planning* – Extent to which the company had a strategic plan in place for managing remote work.
- x. *Budgetary constraints* – Limitations imposed by budget cuts and financial pressures on the company's crisis response capabilities.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics (Table 1). Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were used to summarize the key characteristics of the sample and the responses to the questionnaire items. Multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between various disruptions and employee performance decline.

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and response frequencies, were computed to summarize participant demographics and item responses. Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesized relationships, specifically assessing the effects of pandemic disruption and resistance to change on performance decline. The following regression model was used:

$$\text{Performance decline} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Pandemic disruption}) + \beta_2(\text{Resistance to change}) + \epsilon, \quad (1)$$

where *performance decline* is the extent to which employee productivity and motivation declined during the pandemic, pandemic disruption is a composite variable that captures the overall level of disruption caused by the pandemic, including operational disruptions, remote work challenges, and financial impact; *resistance to change* is the degree to which employees resisted changes in work practices and routines; β_0 , β_1 , and β_2 are regression coefficients that represent the intercept and the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	27	90
	Female	3	10
Age	Under 25	6	20
	25–34	8	26.7
	35–44	7	23.3
	45–54	7	23.3
	55+	2	6.7
	Executive	1	3.3
Role	CEO	6	20
	Production manager	12	40
	Marketing manager	8	26.7
	Sales officer	3	10

We acknowledge the limitation of aggregating diverse disruptions—such as operational halts, financial strain, and remote work difficulties—into a single "pandemic disruption" index. Future research should apply EFA to assess the underlying dimensionality of these constructs and consider modeling each disruption category independently for clearer attribution of effects.

While the model accounted for a substantial portion of variance in performance decline ($R^2=0.72$), the modest sample size ($n = 30$) increases the likelihood of overfitting. We recommend using cross-validation, bootstrapping, or holdout samples in future studies to strengthen model stability and generalizability.

Additionally, incorporating control variables—such as firm size, sector maturity, digital infrastructure, and pre-pandemic performance baselines—would enhance explanatory robustness and reduce omitted variable bias in organizational-level HR analyses.

4. Limitations

The findings of this study are limited by its small sample size and focus on a single organization. While this approach allows for an in-depth case analysis, it may restrict the generalizability of the results. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, including cross-sectoral and cross-regional comparisons, to validate and expand upon the findings presented here.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on both dynamic capabilities theory and institutional theory to analyze talent management during crises. Dynamic capabilities theory emphasizes an organization's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal competencies in response to external change. In this case, cross-training and remote-work strategies reflect a firm's ability to dynamically reallocate human resources in uncertain conditions. Institutional theory, on the other hand, helps explain resistance to change because of deeply embedded norms, routines, and hierarchical culture prevalent in many Bangladeshi firms. By using these complementary lenses, the study offers a richer explanation of how internal practices were shaped not only by strategic imperatives but also by contextual constraints.

This study integrates:

- i. *Dynamic capabilities theory* – Organizations' ability to adapt and reconfigure internal resources.
- ii. *Institutional theory* – Cultural norms (e.g. hierarchy) shape responses to external shocks.
- iii. *Contingency theory* – Effectiveness hinges on alignment between internal processes and external demands.
- iv. *Psychological contract theory* – Unmet employee expectations during crises lead to disengagement [15].
- v. *Change management theory* – Organizational transformation occurs through unfreezing, change, and refreezing stages.

Building on these foundations, the findings also suggest potential applications of contingency theory, which posits that organizational effectiveness depends on the fit between internal processes and external environmental demands. The disruption caused by COVID-19 required firms to abandon standardized models in favor of customized talent solutions. From this perspective, the company's success in mitigating disruptions through adaptive HR practices reinforces the relevance of contingent, context-sensitive management approaches in times of systemic upheaval.

Future studies could also explore how psychological contract theory applies during health crises. Many employees entered the pandemic with certain expectations about employer support, flexibility, and communication. When these expectations were unmet, it often led to frustration and disengagement [15-16]. This breach in the psychological contract may explain part of the observed decline in employee diligence and motivation.

6. Policy Implications

The outcomes of this study have important implications for both practitioners and policymakers in Bangladesh and similar economies. At the organizational level, firms must prioritize strategic workforce planning, employee engagement, and change management training to better prepare for future crises. HR departments should be empowered with data-driven tools to assess risk and deploy flexible staffing strategies.

From a policy standpoint, the government can play a more active role in incentivizing digital transformation through tax breaks, grants, or public-private partnerships. Investment in national digital infrastructure would help reduce inequalities in remote work access and increase labor market resilience. Furthermore, labor laws may need to be revised to support hybrid work arrangements and ensure employee protections in evolving workplace models.

A national framework for crisis-ready HRM practices could also be developed, particularly for key sectors like food, healthcare, and logistics. Such a framework should include readiness assessments, remote-work protocols, and employee well-being strategies. Collaboration between government agencies, industry leaders, and academic institutions would ensure that the framework is evidence-based and context-specific.

7. Results and Discussion

A significant portion of respondents reported facing serious challenges during the pandemic. Operational disruption was confirmed by 83% of respondents, while remote-work difficulties affected 87%. Financial strain was equally severe (87%), and half the respondents cited poor employee performance while working from home. The results of the multiple regression analysis

indicate that both pandemic disruption ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$) and resistance to change ($\beta = 0.85$, $p < 0.001$) had a significant positive effect on performance decline (Table 2).

Table 2

Regression results predicting performance decline

Predictor	β	SE	t	p -value
Pandemic disruption	0.64	0.055	11.61	<0.001
Resistance to change	0.85	0.038	22.61	<0.001
Model summary				
R^2	0.72			<0.001

The model explained a substantial portion of the variance in performance decline ($R^2 = 0.72$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that these two factors were key drivers of the decline in employee productivity and motivation (Figure 1).

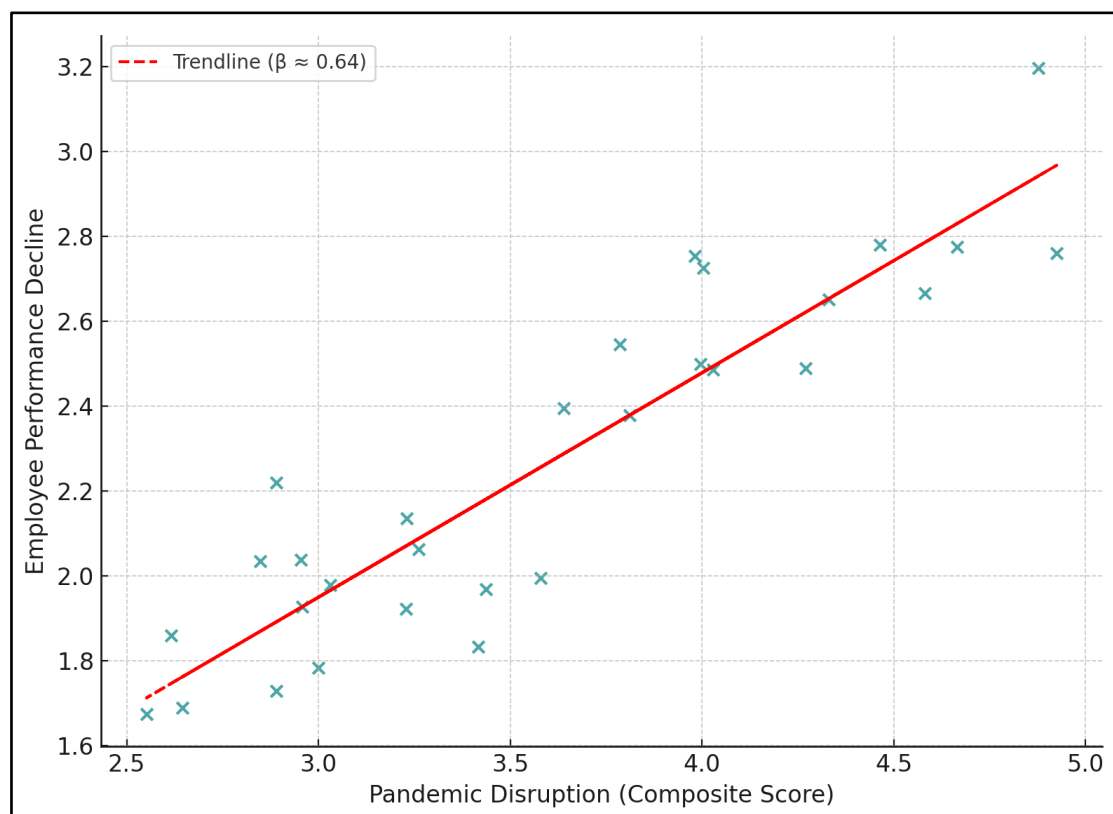


Fig. 1. Relationship between pandemic-induced disruption and employee performance decline

The high level of operational disruption reported by the respondents is consistent with the findings of previous studies that have documented the widespread impact of the pandemic on businesses across various sectors [17-18]. Lockdowns, supply chain disruptions, and reduced demand forced companies to adapt quickly or face severe consequences. The food-services industry, in particular, was heavily affected due to its reliance on in-person dining and the perishable nature of its products. The challenges associated with remote work also played a significant role in hindering employee performance. Many managers and employees in Bangladesh were not accustomed to working remotely, and they faced difficulties in adapting to new technologies, maintaining communication, and managing work-life balance [19-20]. These findings are in line with the research

by Wang et al. [4], which highlighted the importance of work design and organizational support for successful remote work. Financial strain was another major challenge for the surveyed company. The pandemic led to a sharp decline in revenue, increased costs, and the need for budget cuts. These financial pressures not only affected the company's ability to invest in talent management but also created stress and uncertainty among employees, which may have contributed to the decline in their performance. The finding that resistance to change was a significant predictor of performance decline underscores the importance of change management in times of crisis. Employees who were resistant to new work practices, such as remote work or new technologies, were more likely to experience a decline in their productivity and motivation.

This highlights the need for organizations to invest in training, communication, and support to help employees adapt to change. The study also found that certain talent management practices were seen as particularly effective in mitigating the negative impact of the pandemic. Cross-training and strategic remote-work planning were identified as key strategies for enhancing organizational resilience and maintaining employee performance. Cross-training, which involves training employees to perform multiple tasks or roles, can increase organizational flexibility and reduce the impact of disruptions caused by employee absences or turnover. The finding that 63.4% of respondents agreed with the presence of cross-training suggests that the surveyed company had taken some steps to enhance employee versatility. Strategic remote-work planning, which involves developing policies, procedures, and guidelines for remote work, can help organizations to ensure business continuity and maintain employee productivity during lockdowns or other disruptions. The fact that 70% of respondents agreed with the presence of strategic remote-work planning indicates that the company had recognized the importance of providing structure and support for remote work. However, the study also revealed some areas where the company could improve its talent management practices (Table 3).

Table 3

Key talent management challenges during COVID-19

Challenge	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Operational disruption	83.3	10.0	6.7
Remote-work challenges	86.7	10.0	3.3
Communication quality	53.3	33.3	13.3
Revenue decline	76.7	13.3	10.0
Cross-training presence	63.4	13.3	23.3
Resource escalation	60.0	20.0	20.0
Layoffs due to market loss	43.3	36.7	20.0
Employee diligence decline	50.0	33.3	26.7
Strategic remote-work planning	70.0	20.0	10.0
Budgetary constraints	86.7	6.7	6.6

Communication quality was identified as a challenge by 53.3% of respondents, suggesting that there may have been gaps in the flow of information between management and employees. Layoffs due to market loss were reported by 43.3% of respondents, indicating that the company had to reduce its workforce in response to the economic downturn. Employee diligence decline was cited by 50% of respondents, highlighting the challenges of maintaining employee motivation and productivity during the crisis. These findings have several important implications for organizations in Bangladesh and other developing economies. First, they underscore the vulnerability of these organizations to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, they highlight the importance of

proactive talent management practices, such as cross-training and strategic remote-work planning, in enhancing organizational resilience. Third, they suggest that organizations need to invest in change management, communication, and employee support to help their workforce adapt to change.

Descriptive findings (Figure 2):

- i. 83% reported operational disruption,
- ii. 87% faced remote work difficulties,
- iii. 87% experienced financial strain.

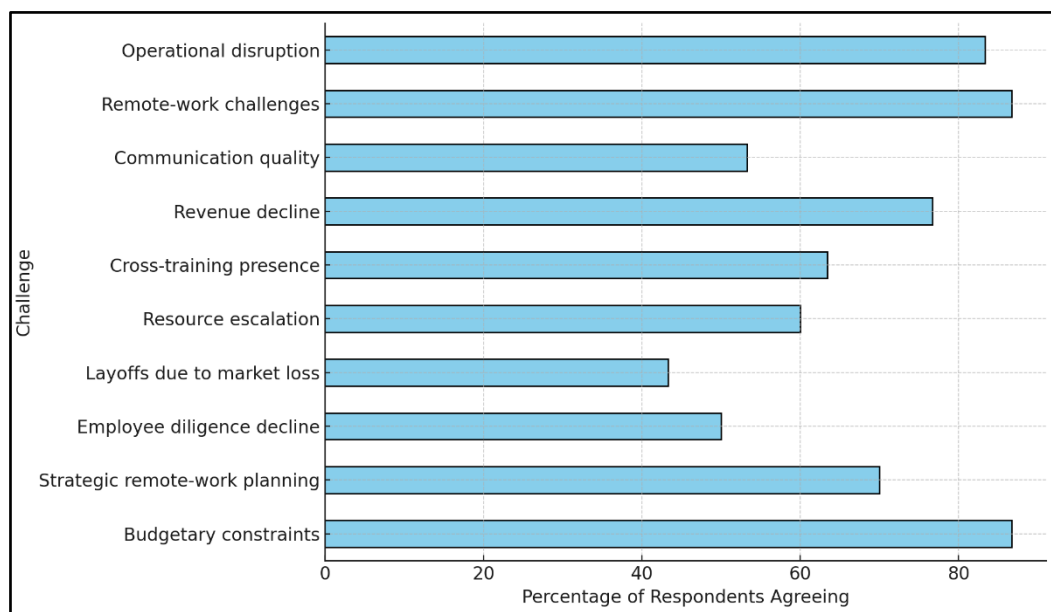


Fig. 2. Levels of agreement on talent management challenges during COVID-19

Effective mitigators included:

- i. Cross-training (63.4% reported),
- i. Strategic remote-work planning (70% reported).

Regression results suggested that pandemic disruption and resistance to change significantly predicted performance decline. Also, challenges included communication gaps (53.3%), layoffs (43.3%), and employee diligence decline (50%).

Cultural dynamics—especially Bangladesh’s high power distance—were key in understanding resistance to decentralized decision-making and autonomy in remote work. This aligns with Hofstede’s model and supports the use of institutional theory. The findings emphasize the need for:

- i. Digital upskilling and inclusion policies,
- ii. Flexible organizational design,
- iii. Crisis playbooks and HR readiness assessments.

While cross-training and remote work planning were present, the study suggests they may not have been consistently formalized or scaled. Future interventions should focus on operationalizing these strategies through structured SOPs, skill-mapping databases, and digitally supported workflows to ensure organizational resilience.

8. Conclusions and Implications

This study confirms that the COVID-19 pandemic severely tested the talent management systems of businesses in Bangladesh. Operational disruption, remote work challenges, and financial strain emerged as critical contributors to declines in employee performance and organizational effectiveness. Nonetheless, organizations that proactively adopted strategies such as cross-training, investment in digital communication infrastructure, and strategic remote-work planning demonstrated greater resilience in coping with these disruptions. Institutionalizing these practices is essential to enhance organizational preparedness and agility in the face of future crises.

8.1 Implications for Research

- i. Longitudinal investigations are necessary to examine the sustained impacts of pandemic-induced disruptions on human resource management in developing economies, moving beyond snapshot analyses to capture evolving dynamics over time.
- ii. Future studies should employ larger and more heterogeneous samples, spanning multiple industries, organizational sizes, and employee levels to strengthen the generalizability and applicability of findings.
- iii. Incorporating additional control variables such as firm size, digital maturity, and organizational culture into empirical models will improve explanatory power. Techniques like factor analysis can aid in validating complex constructs such as disruption and resistance.
- iv. There is a compelling need for deeper theoretical development regarding the role of cultural and institutional dynamics, including hierarchical power structures and digital readiness, through the lens of context-specific HRM frameworks tailored for developing country settings.

8.2 Implications for Practice

- i. Organizations should prioritize investment in digital infrastructure and comprehensive remote work training programs to build workforce capabilities aligned with contemporary demands.
- ii. Expansion and formalization of cross-training initiatives and flexible HRM practices will bolster organizational agility and employee versatility.
- iii. The institutionalization of strategic contingency planning and well-designed internal communication playbooks is critical for ensuring coordinated and timely responses during crises.
- iv. Introduction of change management frameworks and psychological contract support mechanisms is essential to effectively mitigate employee resistance, maintain motivation, and reduce burnout during periods of rapid transformation.

8.3 Proposed Four-Step Implementation Roadmap

- i. *Digital readiness assessment* – Conduct comprehensive evaluations of current digital capabilities to identify gaps and prioritize areas for investment.

- ii. *Low-cost modular cross-training* – Develop scalable training modules that enhance employee multi-skilling without imposing excessive resource burdens.
- iii. *Toolkits for internal communication and remote supervision* – Equip managers and teams with practical resources to maintain engagement and oversight in virtual environments.
- iv. *Sector-specific HR contingency plans* – Design tailored crisis response frameworks that reflect the unique operational and cultural characteristics of different industries.

8.4 Future Research Directions

This research provides a valuable historical baseline for tracking the evolution of talent management practices in developing economies. Although based on data collected in 2021, the insights remain pertinent in 2025 and beyond, offering a comparative framework to assess HR adaptation maturity over time.

Future research should expand the scope by incorporating multi-year longitudinal data, multi-industry perspectives, and regional comparisons to identify emerging best practices in workforce resilience and strategic HR management. Such efforts will contribute to the development of more robust, theory-driven models that integrate dynamic capabilities and institutional theory within the specific challenges of developing country contexts.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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