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E-learning: A Temporary ‘By-Product’ of Covid-19 Pandemic or a Contemporary Solution to Workplace Training and Learning?

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7.1 Introduction

The outbreak of Coronavirus (Covid-19) metamorphosed society in enduring ways. Commentators and organisations across the globe describe the pandemic as a new global financial and societal crisis with detrimental aftermath to communities, organisations and people (Bachman 2020; ILO 2020; PwC 2020). The pandemic, as an ongoing crisis, has already transformed national and global economies as well as national and international labour markets. All businesses, despite of their size and crisis preparedness, face unforeseen challenges which threaten

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their viability. People are also suffering from the pandemic’s aftermath as many are laid off, further struggling to financially support themselves and their families. Employment deteriorates rapidly in terms of its quality (e.g. social and health protection, wages, working hours) and quantity (e.g. employment, underemployment and unemployment rates) (ILO 2020). With many people having lost their jobs, or at least a considerable amount of their income due to wage cuts, it translates into lower consumption of goods and services which could eventually prove detrimental to businesses and national economies resilience.

Many governments proceeded to make changes within their fiscal policies to protect their people (e.g. income and employment) and stabilise their economies. From an organisational point of view, human resource (HR)/human resource development (HRD) is expected to play a crucial role in securing the well-being of all employees in these difficult times. Following Knight’s (2011, p. 155) definition of a crisis as ‘a signifying period of social change or instability that evokes feelings of fear, panic and danger amongst organisational members’, HR/HRD has the potential to outline its significance through designing and implementing strategic initiatives to ameliorate feelings of anxiety as well as to lead individual and organisational change (Mitsakis 2014a).

Like in other crisis circumstances, the recent pandemic has questioned the value proposition of HR/HRD in organisations and, in many cases, the latter has failed to meaningfully and significantly contribute to securing the well-being of employees as well as the success of organisations (Hughes and Gosney 2016). Paramount in enhancing HRD value proposition is the design and delivery of agile and effective training and learning initiatives which are aligned with business and environmental imperatives (Mitsakis 2016). Therefore, e-learning appears as an agile training and learning approach which also offers greater customisation (Johnson et al. 2008). Thus, amongst other learning outcomes, the chapter offers a perspective on whether e-learning is a temporary by-product of the Covid-19 pandemic or a contemporary solution to workplace training and learning. It considers the impact of external context (e.g. Covid-19) to discuss the role of e-learning in relation to workplace training and learning innovation. Thus, it offers an overview of the interrelation between crisis events and workplace learning reinvention, more
precisely, it discusses e-learning as an alternative human resource development (HRD) intervention in times of business uncertainty. This chapter also identifies the implications of moving to online learning to inform HRD professionals and organisational policy makers on future actions concerning progressive learning practices in relation to employees’ learning and development and organisational creativity and growth. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic is an ongoing crisis, all perspectives offered here might be rapidly out-of-date.

### 7.2 Socio-economic Implications of Covid-19 Pandemic to Organisations, People and Societies, and the Role of HR/HRD Professionals

The coronavirus’ pandemic is a contemporary crisis story with an unclear ending and continuous socio-economic implications for businesses across the globe (Craven et al. 2020). Travel restrictions, business lockdowns and remote working all are expected to accelerate the evolution of work by changing established ways of working, as well as updating HR and employment relations to meet today’s needs.

Following many governments’ decision to proceed to large-scale quarantines, this could relate to a sharp fall in the consumption of goods and services, thus having a direct impact on business viability. Many businesses suspend their production and operational service processes with that impacting upon their short- and long-term financial viability (Singh 2020). In addition, the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic associates with corporate bankruptcies, actions which also put significant distress on the financial and banking systems across the globe owing to organisational financial illiquidity to remit loans, salaries and other operational expenses (e.g. Value Added Tax [VAT]) (Murray et al. 2020). HR/HRD professionals could implement strategies which are environmentally integrated to secure a better evaluation of all endogenous and exogenous challenges and thus to contribute to organisational resilience through
people empowerment and HRD’s alignment with business imperatives (Mitsakis 2019a).

Furthermore, Covid-19-related demand and supply fluctuations result in two major changes. Firstly, demand drops due to considerable spending cuts on behalf of consumers and, secondly, e-commerce grows due to consumers’ changed behaviours towards online ordering to avoid social interaction as well as to remain in line with governmental lockdown restrictions. Especially for the latter, whatever demand and supply chain will look like after the pandemic, it will be considerably different and mainly more digitalised in nature. HRD professionals will be called to familiarise their employees with the new ways of doing business through training and learning initiatives.

Additionally, business and market lockdowns resulted in extensive layoffs and thus in a sharp rise in the unemployment rate (Craven et al. 2020). HR/HRD practice is also a casualty of this pandemic outbreak, having resulted in additional pressure on HR/HRD professionals to successfully handle new labour market conditions and employment regimes owing to remote working. Well-established HR/HRD practices are now called to adapt to new circumstances through digitalising their services as well as by revising employment relations (e.g. contracts, rewards, benefits, annual leave) to align with working from home labour market’s requirements (Dignan 2020). Yet, rather than going with layoffs, HR should consider alternative options such as allowing employees to work part-time, offering them sabbaticals (unpaid leave) and wage reductions instead. Such options will secure people’s employment during those difficult times and will not contribute to economic and social inequalities (Tarki et al. 2020).

Employees’ health and safety was also brought forward to business agendas resulting, except in remote work opportunities, in changes within the health and safety and risk management policies of all organisations (Segal and Gerstel 2020). Yet, working from home has also impacted the re-organisation of annual leaves, special days off (e.g. childcare to support working parents due to school closures), compensation policies and employment relations in general. Therefore, HR professionals should constantly co-ordinate communication efforts to ensure that consistent, clear and timely information is circulated within the organisation (Reeves
et al. 2020; Tarki et al. 2020). In addition, HR/HRD professionals should revise their strategies, plans and policies to ensure these could survive and develop under crisis circumstances through agile, flexible and adaptive initiatives that could lead to identifying emerging opportunities relating to all of the above (Mitsakis 2019b).

For many sectors, the economic impact of the Covid-19 outbreak further associates with a drop of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) relating with the direct impact of consumers’ changed behaviours. For specific industries (e.g. tourism, leisure and food), social distancing and business lockdowns would prove detrimental, with all associated outcomes to follow for people working in those (Segal and Gerstel 2020). For other industries (e.g. agriculture and information technology jobs) where social interaction is minimal, the outcomes are expected to be comparatively less vulnerable but will still face challenges owing to demand and supply fluctuations. Eventually, employment regimes in all sectors are expected to alter to some extent. Yet, alternatives are also available such as reallocating employees to different activities like organisational recovery planning or even transfer employees to other businesses not being hit hard from the pandemic (Reeves et al. 2020).

The social impact of Covid-19 further associates with the crash of many national health systems due to patient overload, people’s social isolation owing to social distancing and, of course, to society’s re-ordering following the numerous deaths of many elderly people contaminated by the virus (Pieri 2020). Social inequality and disparity were also strengthened since much of the burdens shift to people within lower socio-economic strata which usually suffer from income or health losses owing to business lockdowns and other measures to tackle the virus outbreak (Fisher and Bubola 2020). For those working in childcare, retail, as well as low-income roles and the gig economy, jobs can neither go remotely nor to secure health insurance and paid sick leave (Human Rights Watch 2020). The role of HR is to constantly support employees who are made redundant through re-employment in different roles, assistance during job search and financial and health care while being unemployed. In addition, HRD could offer practical support to those employees by enhancing their transferrable skills through e-learning initiatives (Smollan 2017; Armstrong-Stassen 2002).
Evidently, the Covid-19 outbreak has, and will have, a far-reaching socio-economic impact on society, individuals, organisations and the relationship amongst all. The nature of work (quality and quantity) has already altered, including the provision of training and learning from organisations. As the key objective these days is to keep people healthy and safe, e-learning appears to be an alternative solution to workplace training and learning. Despite some negative employment-related aftermath of the pandemic (e.g. layoffs, wage reductions, business closures, training retrenchment), the provision of e-learning training features as a known, yet contemporary, solution to inform people of key developments relating to the pandemic as well as a key tool to equip them with the necessary skills to cope with the aftermath of this global challenge. In addition, against those arguing that traditional (e.g. face-to-face) learning is preferred to online provision, a growing body of research outlines positive perceptions of digital technologies and of their impact on the learning provision suggesting learning enhancement through online provision (Linjawi and Alfadda 2018; Popovici and Mironov 2014; Al-Dosari 2011; Keller and Cernerud 2002; Wheeler 2001). Having the pandemic transformed labours markets across the globe, as well as national economies, business practices were also heavily affected. Amongst others, workplace training and learning shifted to online provision. Thus, e-learning could prove a powerful tool at the hands of HRD professionals to ensure that workplace training and learning does not put people’s health and safety at risk.

7.3 E-learning: A Powerful Tool at the Hands of HRD Professionals

The recent Covid-19 pandemic pushed governments across the globe to force restrictions on people’s movement in an effort to cope with the virus spread leading to new working arrangements for the majority of the workforce, mostly resulting in remote working (Joseph 2020). Accordingly, education and workplace training and learning have increasingly moved to e-learning platforms to meet new emerging requirements
(Lau et al. 2020). In UK universities, e-learning makes up 8% of all online provision of UK Higher Education institutions with 65% being offered by the Open University and the remaining 35% from all other UK universities across the country (Universities UK 2018). Additionally, there was an increase in HE institutions going online with 117 universities offering online learning programmes/courses compared to 102 in 2010. With the vast majority of e-learners being in their 30s, e-learning programmes appear as the best alternative to meet their needs (e.g. working and studying at the same time, setting their own pace of studying). Yet, a growing body of the relevant literature favours classroom interaction over online provision suggesting that activities that are completed face-to-face have a greater impact on learners’ understanding of the topics examined (Samperio 2017; Mkonto 2015; Tatar 2005). Bearing this in mind, one might suggest that turning to online provision could have an impact on students’ enrolments, especially for those who prefer social interaction with educators and fellow students. Indeed, The Guardian (2020) reports the economic impact online provision might have in relation to international students’ enrolments suggesting that a 10% fall in enrolments, due to a shift to online provision, could cost £200 m or more to higher education institutions. However, considering the difficult times people are living in, e-learning presents as the best alternative to ensure the health and safety of all parties involved.

### 7.3.1 E-learning: Stay Safe While You Learn

E-learning is, without a doubt, the safest method of training in times of global health crises. This is because it allows both the trainers and the trainees to isolate themselves from the physical dangers of a class-based interaction since digital e-learning platforms are accessible from the comfort and safety of one’s home (Grant-Clement et al. 2017). Yet, despite the recent constraints, e-learning is not something new to professionals who work in this field, as well as to HRD professionals being responsible for designing and implementing training and learning initiatives (Johnson et al. 2008; Salas et al. 2005; MacPherson et al. 2004).
7.3.2 The ‘Economics’ of E-learning

According to Statistics Market Research Consulting Pvt Ltd (2018), the size of the global market of e-learning is estimated to be at $176.12 billion with prospects growing to a stunning $396.15 billion by 2026, thus putting e-learning on the frontline of education and training despite having those estimations made before the Covid-19 outbreak. The potential value of e-learning is further supported by the European Commission, since two of its strategic goals are to unlock online opportunities for everyone and to also create a ‘single digital market’ (European Commission 2018). The idea of a single digital market could lead to global financial growth, improve employability, boost investments and bring forward innovative projects that may be worth as much as €415 billion (European Commission 2020). What is most important though is to check whether this idea could be implemented and work under the pandemic context.

7.3.3 Generation Z: The E-learners

Further to this proposition, the opportunities for e-learning training are vast. There is a substantial demand for online training and learning courses mainly because of the transformation that society is going through (Pangerc Pahernik 2019). People who currently study in academic institutions, and will form the future global workforce, belong to the so-called Generation Z comprising of individuals who were born between 1995 and 2010 (Francis and Hoefel 2018). This group spends 10.6 hours on average daily in front of a screen watching online videos, with 85% of them using YouTube and other online platforms to learn a new skill (The Centre of Generational Kinetics 2017). Realising such preferences, modern e-learning instructional designers transform their courses to suit their learners’ needs, mainly through implementing multimedia (e.g. videos) and getting rid of old-fashioned approaches to learning (e.g. text and images). Indeed, Zhu et al. (2020) argue that online video content is becoming widely used on e-learning programmes, further suggesting that video information could convert into text and keywords through morphological analysis (i.e. a problem-solving method to multi-dimensional
problems—Heine and Narrog 2009) to create a word cloud (e.g. key-
words) which could facilitate learners’ understanding of key themes being
taught. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the needs and demands of
learners, further prompting HRD professionals to realise that e-learning
is becoming an accepted and, in many cases, a preferred way of delivering
new content compared to old-fashioned training. Another interesting
fact about Generation Z learners is that they have a low attention span,
approximately 8 seconds, making them less focused on instructional
material, leading to an emerged need of constant stimulation (Mohr and
Mohr 2017). Contrasting with traditional learning, e-learning can over-
come this drawback since it can assist learners to focus more on learning
content using gamification methods (Tsay et al. 2018; Landers and
Armstrong 2017).

7.3.4 E-learning Through Gamification

Gamification is the application of the mechanisms found in video games
into non-game settings and scenarios (Şahin et al. 2017; Stott and
Neustaedter 2013). This approach could improve trainees’ engagement
and motivation through virtual awards such as badges, progress bars and
leader boards (Furdu et al. 2017; Wu 2016). Trainees’ motivation to learn
is necessary because without it educators will face the problem of teach-
ing uninterested trainees which will, in turn, lead to the failure of the
programme in most cases (Huang and Jao 2016; Bauer et al. 2016).
Unlike conventional (e.g. old fashioned) training, gamification tech-
niques can be implemented into Digital Learning Management Systems
(DLMS) and boost user experiences (Ramirez-Correa et al. 2017). Using
such systems could increase both cognitive load and achievement levels
(Signori et al. 2018; Oliver 2017; Turan et al. 2016). E-learning, com-
pared to conventional training, offers a learner-centric experience through
multiple-formed content (e.g. text, video, stories and games, Kahoot
quizzes) thus matching individual learning desires through its media
richness (Pandey 2016).
7.3.5 Micro-learning: An Alternative Approach

Acknowledging their learners’ needs and limitations is important for HRD professionals (e.g. Generation Z’s short attention span) while designing training and learning initiatives as sometimes lengthy regular courses, or even webinars that last a long time, may not provide the expected outcomes (Giurgiu 2017). Therefore, an alternative approach to overcome this problem is micro-learning. Micro-learning splits huge chunks of information into smaller, more manageable content pieces that offer multiple discrete objectives (Dolasinski and Reynolds 2020; Jomah et al. 2016). The main goal of micro-learning is to provide learners the capability to access the training material as soon as they wish to do so (e.g. to fill a certain knowledge gap) without having to spend hours in front of a screen but rather a few minutes instead (Karageorgakis 2018). Unlike traditional training, this can only take place in digital form as the training material can easily be divided into different parts that, if put together, constitute a regular training programme.

7.3.6 The Pros of Going Online

Doubtable, there are more advantages that e-learning could offer. A regular training programme demands the simultaneous presence of the trainer and the trainee at the same location which can prove difficult in some cases (e.g. in health crisis such as Covid-19). On the other hand, an online programme can overcome any geographical constraints since it can be easily accessible by everyone whenever he/she deems fit provided that an Internet connection is present. Compared to regular training, e-learning can happen at one’s own pace (thus overcome time constraints) further suggesting that it will be hard for a trainee to fall behind or run ahead of the rest of the class since the learning material is always present and can be fully accessible (Srivastava 2018). One of the key advantages of e-learning is the liberty that is given to the learner to work as he/she considers best in order to achieve his/her goals. Furthermore, an online programme which is available to learners all the time could enable them to return and review the material at any time and, most importantly, to
interact with the rest of the learning group even after the formal part of the training has been completed (Gon and Rawekar 2017). Indeed, the literature suggests e-learning as a powerful tool in the hands of HRD professionals when creating virtual classrooms and learning systems to support students’ learning experience as well as for enhancing internationalisation processes (Abuatiq 2019; Marchisio et al. 2017).

According to the theory of social constructivism, interactivity is crucial because knowledge is established and occurs when students interact and collaborate regardless of being physically or virtually present in a class (Wei et al. 2015). Most DLMS include tools (e.g. forums, chats) that provide users the chance to discuss and reflect by taking part in discussions that contribute to continuous knowledge acquisition (Pappas 2014). Being accessed asynchronously, forums can create the sense of community since trainers and trainees can connect in their own free time, replying to each other’s inquiries, providing support and giving feedback. In a well-organised e-learning programme, the immediate feedback that the trainee receives from the DLMS, the teacher or the rest of the class can prove extremely beneficial in terms of knowledge establishment. Online feedback is vital in enhancing learning experience as it not only assists the user to understand the subject of interest but also provides guidance on how to improve one’s behaviour and actions, thus creating a better learning curve (Giokas 2018).

7.3.7 The Cons of Online Provision

However, others suggest that e-learning could lead to social isolation due to the lack of in-class interaction as well as identifying compatibility issues (e.g. material prepared for one system not compatible with an e-system), reliability issues (e.g. internet data not always reliable) and generational issues (e.g. older employees not fully competent on using technology) (Lin et al. 2019; Sanchez-Mena and Marti-Parreno 2017). Cheng et al. (2012) further argued that another well-known problem of most online programmes is that trainees perceive them to be short term and lacking in continuity. A possible solution could include offering follow-up conventional methods that require the physical presence of
trainees but this, in some cases, appears to be costly or unfeasible (e.g. due to health crisis). Thus, e-learning offers the possibility of repeating a course whenever this is deemed necessary, based on the needs of the learners and with limited costs as the training material has already been developed and, in most cases, is good to go or only in need of minor alternations. Instead, it is argued here that workplace training and learning should be proactive and/or adapt to internal and external circumstances to offer the optimum solution to all parties being involved.

7.3.8 Organisational Response to Lockdowns

Covid-19 has rapidly transformed into a labour market and economic shock for most organisations across the globe. No matter their size and their level of preparedness, all faced unprecedented challenges associated with business viability, employment relationships (e.g. wages, health and safety), new forms of work (e.g. remote work) and workplace training.

One of the very first measures most national governments imposed was the lockdown of all businesses and commercial stores to cope with the spread of the virus. Such decisions highly questioned most organisations’ preparedness in crisis situations with most responding reactively to new conditions with minimal effort to mitigate the impact of the pandemic/crisis (Fadel et al. 2020). As such, extensive layoffs, wage reductions and ceasing business operations were mostly introduced as a response to the unforeseen circumstances. Although financial incentives were provided in many cases by the state, these did not prove to be able to ameliorate the negative socio-economic implications of the pandemic. Therefore, in such difficult times, one argues that organisations should be integrated with governments and global health organisations to work together in building contingency plans for forthcoming crises events as well as to cope with existing ones. For instance, companies can work with the state to protect employees in the workplace (e.g. remote work, paid sick leave, childcare support, avoid stigmatisation of contaminated employees, training relating to occupational health and safety). In addition, they should support employment relationships together through various initiatives such as redeployment, social assistance and
unemployment benefits, part-time work instead of layoffs, individual and organisational tax relief and financial support. Lastly, interest rates could be cut, as well as providing financial support to key industries to ensure continuity of their operations and the employment of their people.

For such integration to happen, companies, as well as national governments and other organisations, should develop contingency plans that could help them return stronger. Since remote working emerged as an alternative, sometimes as the only option, to ensure business continuity, organisations need to reconsider their respective strategies by also including options for employees to relocate if necessary and thus to continue working full time (redemption) and/or to temporarily terminate employment until things turn better. For many businesses, workplace training and learning is a systematic process to ensure individual and organisational competitiveness due to ongoing technological advancements, e-learning re-emerged as a contemporary option rather than as a by-product of the pandemic. However, organisations need to assess their current communication and information technology infrastructures to ensure that online provisions of workplace training could be an option. This could also help in facilitating remote working for their employees. Considering e-learning though presumes that individuals and organisations are digitally equipped to do so. Therefore, organisations should continuously explore opportunities not only to become more flexible through remote working but to also digitally upskilling their workforce to ensure that they can meet the increasing and unprecedented demands of current and future business landscapes and labour markets (PwC 2020).

Montgomerie et al. (2016) argue that e-learning has gained momentum in the last 20 years with more and more companies turning to online provision of their workplace training programmes due to the flexibility, cost effectiveness and convenience online learning could offer. The authors further argued that due to globalisation and the fast-paced business environments, traditional approaches to workplace training are considered out-of-date. Finally, they have identified the factors which could either facilitate or hinder online provision of workplace training, namely the individual and organisational developmental readiness (e.g. motivation to learn and engage, identification of a learning gap); personal and organisational attributes (e.g. individual and organisational capabilities);
top management and peer support (e.g. social connections, emotional and technical support); and a supportive organisational culture. Overall, organisations are open to a shift towards an online provision of their training initiatives for the aforementioned reasons. This is also evident through the work of Derouin et al. (2005) arguing that ‘e-learning is an instructional strategy for imparting needed knowledge, skills and attitudes in organisations, and it is here to stay. Its viability, effectiveness and potential to return tangible benefits to organisations depend largely on how it is designed, delivered and evaluated’ (p. 920). The authors further suggested that organisations welcome e-learning as an effective training medium which could offer learners information in various formats (e.g. graphics, text, video)—thus to enhancing their understanding, as well as meeting their diverse learning styles—as learners could access this information whenever and from anywhere, thus also securing their occupational health and safety in crises circumstances. Fine examples include The Open University in the United Kingdom, Google, Apple and many others. The former offers a wide range of online courses to people who cannot physically attend a programme either because they are also in full-time employment or due to any other personal reasons. Google and Apple also extensively use online e-learning to digitally upskill their employees as well as to train their customers on new product and service developments. Apparently, online provision of workplace training is an option likely to remain. Despite its pros and cons, it seems to be a contemporary option for HRD professionals to use either if this is seen as unnecessary or a necessity in the challenging times in which one lives.

7.3.9 E-learning: A ‘What If?’ or ‘So What?’ Inquiry

Evidently, e-learning solutions come with pros and cons. Considering the challenging times in which people are living, e-learning could prove a powerful tool at the hands of the HRD professionals to ensure that, despite business and social uncertainty, they still invest in their people’s development. This might not be the case for all organisations, yet it cannot limit the importance of continuous individual and organisational development. This chapter argues that e-learning could prove
advantageous as it offers greater flexibility, it can be customised according to the unique needs of learners and it can be enacted as a cost-efficient learning tool which could ensure alignment with internal and external priorities. Therefore, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, e-learning could be seen as a contemporary solution to workplace training and learning rather than a ‘by-product’ of the health crisis itself.

7.4 Conclusion

Despite having e-learning featured as a learning solution for many years, the Covid-19 outbreak necessitated its reinvention, along with the need for HRD professionals to step up in designing and implementing innovative learning initiatives. In times of crisis (e.g. health, economic, disasters) remaining competent and resilient requires flexible, consistent and cost-effective solutions which are integrated to organisational crisis preparedness programmes (Spota 2020); thereafter, e-learning could prove an effective learning tool to prepare people and organisations in relation to crisis resilience (Ayebi-Arthur 2017).

In light of the recent global circumstances, HRD professionals should be opportunity- and capability-driven to ensure their organisational value proposition regardless of the internal and/or external circumstances (Mitsakis 2014b). With regard to the former, the author argues that opportunity-driven organisations align their business and HR/HRD strategies by emphasising the learning potential of their people. Indeed, they argue that e-learning tools, which are offered free by many companies these days, could assist people in learning new skills to use when things return to previous states, and thus making good use of their isolated at home time. Similarly, capability-driven HR/HRD aims to constantly build strategic capabilities to enhance individual and organisational resilience, further reducing organisational risk (Garavan et al. 2016). Alike, offering continuous developmental opportunities to people through e-learning initiatives could pay both individuals and organisations forward through established communities of learning (Cain 2020; Morrison 2020).
In light of the current situation, the Covid-19 pandemic is expected to change the world of work drastically. Global employment rates are expected to fall resulting in the rise of unemployment rates. Reporting on previous crisis conditions, ILO (2020) suggests the current health crisis will cause the sharp decline of employment rates as well as downward adjustments of working hours and wages. This, consequently, is expected to foster social inequality through restricted access to under-resourced health systems, limited nutrition and food security, education and human rights (UNDP 2020). As an additional aftermath, a global economic decline is also expected owing to working poverty (ILO, p. 5). Employment contracts are also expected to change to meet new requirements such as of remote working, paid or unpaid sick leave and annual leave. As to that, HR/HRD professionals need to constantly keep themselves aware and ahead of these developments to ensure the design and implementation of the most appropriate strategies, plans and policies to address them.

Individual and social isolation could also have an impact on people’s mental health and well-being. Singh and Adhikari (2020) argue that social distancing could help in fighting the virus spread yet it will also have a detrimental impact on people’s mental health and well-being, regardless of the age group they belong to. Indeed, this chapter’s authors argue that humankind’s happiness was always dependant on the social interaction which is now under scrutiny. Salt (2020) further reports that everyone’s experience of working from home is diverse due to the different circumstances people live in. Eventually, the impact of being self-isolated and continued working from home could be different to each one. For instance, those people who have family, friends and/or even a pet are expected to find the situation easier (Public Health England 2020). In contrast, for those being alone or having mental health issues, feelings of social isolation and loneliness are expected to be higher (Mental Health Foundation 2020). They further argue that a prolonged self-isolation period could even cause mental health conditions for those who have not experienced any before. Therefore, it is HRD professionals who should ensure that people’s mental health and well-being is continuously supported through respective learning initiatives. It is also posited that it is all stakeholders’ responsibility to ensure that business practices
safeguard individuals’ mental health and well-being by taking into account the seriousness of the pandemic.

To conclude, many commentators across the globe suggest that these are unprecedented and difficult times; indeed, the times are difficult but it is not as though these have never happened or been known before. Thus, this assessment calls to learn from one’s history (e.g. HIV, the 2005–2012 and 1968 Flu pandemics, Asian flu between 1956 and 1958, the Flu pandemic in 1918 and the Cholera pandemic of 1910–1911 amongst others) to fight the pandemic as has been done in the past; thereafter to also apply e-learning initiatives implemented before (although maybe slightly revised) to meet new needs. From a social point of view, humankind has survived worse states while, from an organisational standpoint, HRD professionals have also lived through challenging conditions (e.g. global economic crisis) that affected their practices. This chapter concludes with Moons’ (2020) suggestion that it is the beginning of a rapidly changing health crisis, having the author further wondering what will happen to learning as a result of global lockdowns. One’s answer to the author’s query is that everything can be learned online today, thus learning as usual is an option of the past; thereupon, e-learning presents a well-established and contemporary solution to workplace training and learning.

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