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Analysis of Employee Welfare Measures Taken by Industries in Covid-19 Epidemic

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ABSTRACT

Since last year, covid has had a significant impact on industrial practices and standards. There are now additional aspects to consider. Over a hundred medium and large Indian business houses and multinational corporations (MNCs) from a variety of industries participated in this study, which was performed from June to December 2021. In order to ensure the well-being of employees, organisations have implemented a variety of initiatives, such as vaccinating their employees, creating a special task force, providing support to COVID-19-infected employees, and supporting the families of employees who have died due to COVID-19.

Keywords: Covid, Welfare, Participation, Economy, Lockdown, Benefits, Medical, Vaccination, Reimbursement, Health

I. INTRODUCTION

Last year, covid has done a major impact on industrial norms and procedures. New dimensions have been introduced wrt working and compensation of employees by employers. A study on the role of HR during COVID -19 has been conducted and we found that the HR role has significantly increased with additional responsibility to sync the business continuity, manage remote working, drive employee engagement, manage the culture, take care of employee's mental health & wellbeing and dealing with the uncertainties caused by this pandemic.

Over the year, companies have moved back and forth between working online and offline as and when lockdowns were announced and ended respectively. These lockdowns have also played havoc with people's mental health, sense of well being and belonging. People have lost friends, family, colleagues. There has been a lot of fear, and people are struggling with how to return to normalcy, or what will normalcy even mean going forward.

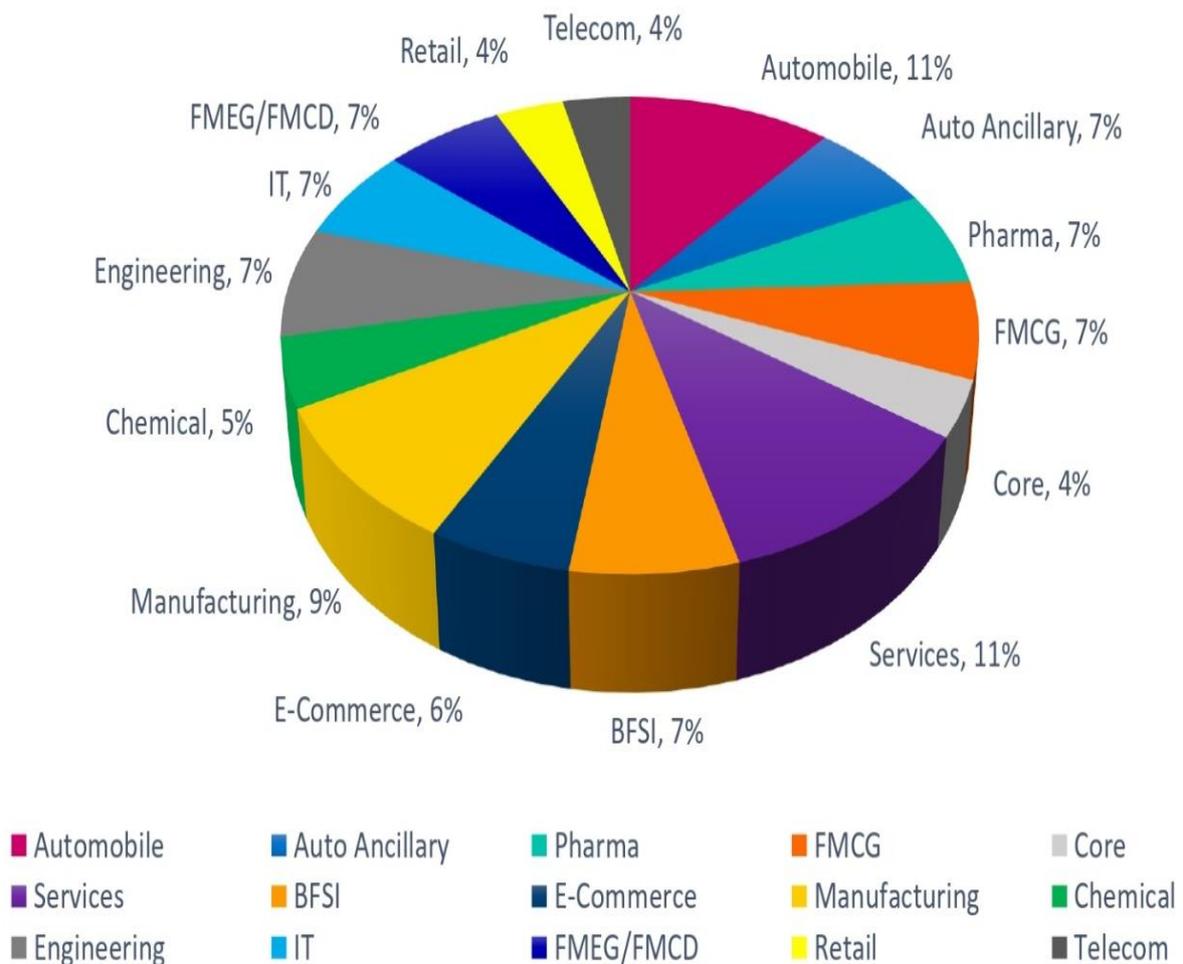
Now that people are getting vaccinated at a rapid pace and scale, with cities being gradually unlocked, organizations across India are figuring out how to reopen their doors, set up different hybrid models, and bring people back to work. We spoke to industry leaders and businesses to understand the various initiatives taken by their organizations to address these concerns, provide

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stability, security, mental health and other support as they prepare to open up and return to work. This survey covers initiatives facilitated by organizations to ensure well-being initiatives, impact on – leave policy, business and increments, priorities of employee benefits, creating special task force, vaccinate employees, support provided to COVID-19 infected employees, support provided to family members of deceased employee (due to COVID-19), etc. This survey was conducted during the month of June ~Dec 2021 covering over a 100 medium & large Indian Business Houses & MNCs across various sectors. Inputs were taken from HR leaders across the country and the findings are compiled and presented in the following.

Survey Participation Percentage (Industry-wise)

Fig.- 1



Employee Benefits – Focus Areas/ Top Priorities

The second wave of COVID-19 was quite traumatic as compared to the year 2020 for employees. Industries were just recovering from the first wave, economy was improving, but then due to the sudden stormy second wave of COVID-19 , lockdown was declared again

bringing lives to a standstill. More than business, impact was devastating on lives. With the right intel, companies started investing more in the initiatives their employees really wanted and tried to boost employee engagement and loyalty for the long term. The key focus areas in terms of Employee Benefits and steps taken are as follows:

Health & Safety Measures

Health, Safety and Vaccination remains primary goal - for 100% of the companies surveyed.

- Keeping in mind the health of workers in factories, health & safety kits including PPE's, washable masks were provided as per govt. norms.
- Announcement & posters were used as a reminder to maintain social distance.
- Videos were shown regularly of all hand & respiratory hygiene measures

Support in Work From Home(WFH)

- Companies not having work from home policy are trying to make work from home prevalent and convenient.
- Work from home allowance, wi-fi to facilitate work from home and workstation set-up expenses are given as operational expenses.
- Focus on educating people, awareness, mobile application developed for internal communication and prevention measures

Average Participation Percentage of Industry wrt Welfare Measures

Table- 1

S. No.	Head of Welfare Measures	Average Participation Percentage
1	Administration of Vaccines at office premises/plants	85%
2	Subsidizing the vaccination cost for employees & dependents	61%
3	Reserving appointment slots at nearby vaccination center	11%
4	Reimbursement of expenses towards paid Vaccines	59%
5	Out of pocket expenses to vaccination sites	12%
6	Leave for vaccination	23%

7	Treatment of Sick Leave post Vaccination	35%
8	Up gradation of Leave	32%
9	Additional sick Leave for Vaccinationrelated infection	15%
10	Increase in the numberof QuarantineLeaves	21.5%
11	Encashmentof Leaves	9%
12	Special Leave for Child Care, Family Care	30%
13	Fully paid leaves	66%
14	Support with homequarantinefacility	53%
15	Reimbursement of expenses towards COVID-19 treatment	80%
16	Interest free salary advances	38%
17	Funding of education for the children of the deceased	18%
18	Health insurance coverage for employees' dependents	22%
19	Provided Housing facilities	1%
20	Continuation of salary to family members	38%
21	Virtual exercise/Fitness sessions	57%
22	Hosting of online Q/A session by health specialists about the consequences of second strain	47%
23	Learning & Development sessions	50%
24	Buddy session/ One on one conversation to address loneliness/ anxiety	23%
25	Employee engagement activities	36%
26	Holding town hall & expert sessions to share information	19%
27	Train managers to take care of remote work	16%
28	Counseling session to deal with financial stress	7%

Monitoring by Special Taskforce

97% of companies surveyed have created a special taskforce to look into Employee Safety, Engagement and Wellbeing.

1. 80% have formed , COVID-19 Emergency Response Team to Monitor cases in the company & direct vendors, fixing doctor's appointments, providing information about precautionary measure
2. 60% have formed Cross Functional Team (CFT of Senior Leadership + HR) to Monitor COVID-19 situation and manage employee safety & engagement
3. 58% employers created Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – for free counseling and referral service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for employees & their family members free of charge for any assistance.
4. 35% have formed , Central Taskforce Team (Doctor + Health & Safety Head + Head HR) – address queries related to insurance, home care treatments, hospital beds, oxygen supplies, a repository of plasma donors, ambulance amongst others, workplace sanitation, food assistance and create programs to help other people.
5. 25% have constituted, COVID-19 warrior team – a voluntary initiative that connects employees and associates to donors among employees who have fully recovered from COVID-19 and are willing to donate their blood plasma.

Other welfare measures taken by companies are following:

- Wellness Survey – to check the health status.
- Weekly webinar with doctors & psychologists.
- Wellness sessions - Zumba, Yoga and Meditation.
- HR Head + Team – in constant touch with employees to engage and motivate them.
- Launched Health App.
- Doctor's contact shared.
- Employees engaged through various write-ups.

Facilitating & Tracking of Vaccination

100% of companies covered in the study are tracking the vaccination status of employees.

Major initiative taken by the companies for tracking vaccination status are following:

- Regular updates on Vaccine shared with employees through WhatsApp, Telegram App

and Weekly meetings.

- Webinar organized wherein a medical expert explained the need for Vaccine and answered FAQs on the same.
- 24/7 Helpline – to answer COVID-19 and Vaccine related queries.
- Links and forms shared across the company so that employees can register and update their vaccination status.
- Support on registration, sensitizing & arranging vaccination camps for employees & their families Employees have to register in COWIN app and in EIS portal.
- Integrated systems, Dashboard and Spreadsheet – to track status.

Initiatives Facilitated by Companies to Vaccinate Employees

Most of the companies conducted vaccination drives in company premises for their - permanent & contractual workforce.

- Companies partnered with hospitals to conduct drives and doctors were available on campus to explain the post vaccine consequences & medication.
- 65% of the companies provided free vaccines to employees + 3 dependents.
- Companies also provided reimbursements to employees who got themselves inoculated before the commencement of the vaccination drive.
- Reimbursements provided ranged from Rs 500/- to Rs 2000/-
- 65% of the companies conducted the drive on a Friday so that employees get to rest over the weekend.
- Companies across industries provided Unlimited Sick Leave/ 1 day leave without deduction for vaccination.
- Other benefits – Surgical mask (6 sets) + Sanitizer bottle every month, 1 day off, providing transportation in remote areas to reach vaccination center.

Impact of COVID-19 on Leave Policy

1. Almost all the companies surveyed have given Special COVID-19 Leave ranging from 14 ~ 21 days.
2. All the companies followed the government norms of quarantine days.
3. 10% of the companies also provided Hospitalization Leave of 27~28 days.

Some of the key initiatives across industries are:

1. Some companies gave Care Giver Leave or Family Care Leave range from 5 ~ 15 days (in case family/ neighbor gets infected).
2. ‘Gift-a-Leave,’ policy i.e. transferring the personal leave of an employee to other employee who has exhausted his/her leave. It helped employees who had exhausted their leave credits seek a leave from their colleagues.
3. Extension of COVID leave – 3 ~4 weeks Additional leave for hospitalization
4. Bereavement Leave in case of death of family member

Benefits To Employees Infected With COVID-19

For ~85% of the companies surveyed, the medical expenses incurred towards COVID-19 treatment is covered under Health insurance with an additional COVID-19 coverage. Most Companies negotiated with insurance companies for top-up policy.

Some of the key initiatives across industries are:

1. Reimbursement of medical expenses for COVID-19 range from Rs 15,000/- to Rs 30,000/-.
2. Home cure packages including sanitizer, masks, oximeter, meal etc. delivered to employees in case of home quarantine Companies partnered with hotels for COVID-19 positive mild symptoms/ symptomatic employees who wanted to maintain distance from family.
3. Some companies set-up a contact point for ambulance, cylinder & counseling, and tele consultation post hospitalization.
4. Tied-up with medical agencies - to provide support in case of home quarantine and support in moving to the hospital.
5. Some companies paid salary advance/ loan ranging from 1 month to 12 month’ s salary.
6. Companies also partnered with NGO’s to help identify fully recovered donors across India

Benefits To Family Members In Case Of Death Of An Employee Infected With COVID-

19

Around 38% of the companies surveyed have moved an extra mile to support family members of employees in case of death of an employee by providing Health insurance coverage, continuation of salary and funding of education for the children of the deceased

Some of the key initiatives across industries are:

1. Extended Medical insurance – for next 3 ~ 5 years.
2. Few companies surveyed – indicated that they will continue to pay salary from 1~ 3 years or up to superannuation.
3. Some companies – will pay one-time lump sum amount equivalent to five times the CTC (Minimum Rs 20~25 Lakhs) of the deceased employee.
4. Bereavement Policy of 8 months - full monthly salary + Term insurance applicable for 3 years of yearly salary.
5. Some companies have also offered jobs to eligible family members, or they will train them and make them eligible.
6. Some companies will be funding education of two children up to Std 12 or graduation
7. Other Benefits – Term life insurance coverage, Funeral expenses, Financial assistance to workmen/ contract workforce, Bereavement one time amount to pay immediate bills, EDLI, Group Insurance, Death Relief Fund & Compensation on compassionate ground

Well-Being Initiatives

1. Organized sessions on Yoga/ Homeopathy/ Zumba/ Mental well-being/ COVID-19 related resilience/ Nutrition/ Diet/ Ergonomic class and Sanitization.
2. Organized online sessions by doctors on vaccination, mental aspect of working from home, diabetes and cardiology etc.
3. Toll free numbers shared to connect with psychologists (employee + family) to get counseling, discuss work pressure and post marriage issues etc.
4. Links shared with employees wherein they can register and discuss about stress and work life balance.
5. Leadership training for young leaders who are there for 4 to 5 years to deal with subordinates to change the mindset from that of a despair to growth mindset.
6. Tie-up with fitness apps for all activities on – wellness, counselling, diet and learning & development.
7. Videos shared for COVID-19 talks by specialist doctors. Talks by Covid-19 infected employees to share their experiences.
8. Buddy, HRBPs and COVID-19 Marshals placed in plants & project sites. Employee

engagement activities such as poster making, virtual tea/ coffee/ lunch session, thanksgiving & gratitude etc.

9. Synchronous Virtual Learning (SVL) sessions

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