

Chapter 11

New Challenges for Leading the Change for the Psychological Consequences of Pandemics: Workplace Loneliness, Work Alienation, and Spiritual Well-Being in the Post-COVID-19 Era

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ABSTRACT

With the needs for change and adaptation brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, management of the concerns regarding workplace loneliness, work alienation, and spiritual well-being stands as a critical challenge for the organizations. Although these concepts are not new and have increasingly been a focus of attention in recent decades, contemporary radical changes in work methods and work concept such as increased use of technology, digitalization, social distancing at work, and virtual working make them much more crucial for the success of organizations. The purpose of this chapter is to address adverse psychological work-related outcomes of the pandemic and provide practical implications and recommendations for leaders for effective management of the processes regarding these outcomes during and after the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

In addition to the economic, social, psychological and health related adverse effects of the pandemic that spillover to work life; individuals also directly face various changes regarding the work itself. Pandemic has been affecting every aspect of life, as well, it reshapes the work domain. Compulsory changes in the methods and conditions of work formed by the Covid-19 Pandemic, such as distance working, increased use of technology and social distancing bring new challenges for leaders regarding the human side of the

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organization. Psychological consequences of the drastic changes brought by the pandemic necessitate special concern and leadership effort addressing employee well-being. With the new normal and new order of work, employees are more prone to loneliness, alienation and spiritual wellbeing related problems and the need for effective management of such concerns is crucial during and after the pandemic.

To cope with the fast spread of the virus and increasing numbers of cases, policymakers all around the world had to implement strict psychical distancing interventions. Although social distancing policies such as stay at home orders are one of the most popular and effective ways for combating the fast spread of the virus, they have adverse effects on psychological wellbeing as they significantly boost worries, anxiety and loneliness (Tull et al., 2020). Even when the lockdown is not coercive (mild lockdown) it causes high levels of loneliness, poor interpersonal relationships, psychological distress and depression (Morin & Carrier, 2020; Yamamoto et al., 2020). Some professionals suggest that the pandemic is creating a 'parallel pandemic' of psychological disorders regarding stress, sleep, depression and even suicide (Mucci, Mucci & Diolaiuti, 2020, p.63).

New conditions brought by the pandemic threatens the spiritual wellbeing of employees and elevate their alienation levels which in turn cause psychological adversities and negative performance outcomes at individual and organizational levels. This chapter aims to analyze the antecedents and consequences of contemporary organizational behavior concepts related to the possible consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Specifically, concerns regarding workplace loneliness, work alienation and spiritual well-being are addressed. Although these concepts are relatively new and the contemporary conditions paving the way for them are unique, they have been a central concern for leaders to sustain healthy organizations. Another purpose of the study is to provide practical recommendations and insights for leaders for effective management of the change and necessary processes regarding these variables during and after the pandemic.

BACKGROUND

Although there are numerous studies addressing the psychological effects of the pandemic (e.g. Akat & Karataş, 2020; Cullen, Gulati & Kelly, 2020; Sood, 2020; Zheng, Miao & Gan, 2020) few specifically address the reflections of them in the workplace (e.g. Kaushik & Guleria, 2020). In addition, the scopes of most of these studies are more specific such as health care professionals (as they are in the frontline in the combat with the pandemic). Understanding the effects of the pandemic on the work domain is very crucial. Work has always been a central theme in human's life. Most of the quality time in daily life is spent in the workplace or while doing work related activities. What we do, what we know, what we become are mostly linked with and grounded on work. Changes in work spillover to other life domains and radical changes in other life domains affect work related variables (Kirchmeyer, 1992; Leiter & Durup, 1996; Sirgy et al., 2001).

Work stands as a major resource to attain and answer human needs. It serves as a source for basic survival needs in the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) as well as higher order needs such as affiliation, esteem and self-actualization. For food, for health, for rent, we earn through work. Work provides safety and security not only through providing money for accommodation, but also through the sense of having a role and place in society; identifying with a group, organization or institution and having a sustainable order in life. Workplace also serves as a foundation where employees socialize with their colleagues. For many individuals, after a certain age and as the career pressure and workload

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