



International
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▶ Good employee relation practices in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learnt:

India

▶ **Good employee relation practices in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learnt:**

India

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► Foreword

India reported its first case of COVID-19 in January 2020, with a more devastating second wave in March 2021. The pandemic has created enormous difficulties and challenges for both workers and employers. In order to successfully overcome the impacts of the pandemic, it has been essential for employers to build stronger partnerships with workers, and to demonstrate a duty of care towards them.

This research report clearly illustrates the value of good labour relations practices in effectively responding to crises and links to different pillars of the India Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP), 2018-22. The report is based on a survey of 21 enterprises, that was undertaken by the Employers' Federation of India (EFI) and the All India Organisation of Employers (AIOE), in partnership with the ILO. We are grateful to EFI and AIOE for collaborating with us and undertaking this initiative, and for the participation of their members in the survey.

Surveyed enterprises clearly faced a number of challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These included supply chain disruptions, revenue losses, liquidity challenges, reduced staff morale, and a shortage of labour. The pressures on these enterprises is therefore plainly evident.

It is however very encouraging to note that the vast majority of the surveyed enterprises reported COVID-19 mitigation measures that emphasized worker wellbeing. These included mechanisms to promote two-way communication, the use of workplace cooperation mechanisms to jointly address the enterprise-level impacts of the pandemic, and steps to facilitate the rapid resolution of disputes.

Based on the feedback received from surveyed enterprises, these practices were crucial in helping them weather the impacts of the pandemic, and to maintain production under very challenging circumstances. The importance of maintaining strong labour relations, particularly when faced with crises, is clearly evident.

The practices adopted by surveyed enterprises to maintain and strengthen labour relations during the pandemic therefore provide valuable lessons that all enterprises may consider adopting.

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Director,

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and Country Office for India

▶ Contents

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	1
Profile of the enterprises surveyed	2
Sectors of operation and membership	2
Workforce composition	3
High rate of unionization	4
Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic	5
Measures to maintain constructive employee relations	6
Impact of mitigation measures and key lessons learnt	9
Conclusion	11
Annex 1: EFI report	13
Annex 2: AIOE report	55

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This report was made possible with the invaluable support of Ms Dagmar Walter, Director, DWT/CO-New Delhi and Mr Satoshi Sasaki, Deputy Director, DWT/CO-New Delhi. We are especially grateful for the support provided by Mr Vijay Padate (EFI), Mr Uday Ghadge (EFI), Mr Arvind Francis (AIOE) and Ms Parisha Singh (AIOE) in administering the survey and providing an initial documentation of the survey results. Much appreciation is also owed to the entire team and members of EFI and AIOE, who so actively and willingly participated in the survey. We are appreciative of efforts of Prof. Vijayan Pankajakshan and Ms Astha Yadav for compiling results from EFI and AIOE respectively during an exceptionally difficult times of COVID-19.

Special thanks are due to Mr Mayank Dias from Michael Dias & Associates for so readily agreeing to review the report, and for his constructive feedback, which has served to greatly enrich the contents.

We are very grateful for Ms Poonam Sahi and her team from FACET for rigorous editing of the draft report. Our thanks are due to Mr Nilesh Nikade, Ms Akriti Paracer and Ms Vanita Manchanda for facilitating the publication of this report.

We hope that this report will serve to promote, inform and guide efforts to strengthen good employee relation practices in the country and outside.

► Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic first made its appearance in India in early 2020 with a subsequent and more widespread second wave in March 2021. This report is based on the research conducted immediately prior to the second wave.

The ILO (International Labour Organization) appointed both the Employers' Federation of India (EFI) and the All India Organisation of Employers (AIOE) to conduct this research, which focused mainly on identifying good employee relation practices that were implemented in response to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India.

A questionnaire formed the basis of the research and was jointly administered by both the EFI and the AIOE. The reports of the EFI and AIOE, on which this report is based, are attached as annex 1 and 2, respectively.

► Profile of enterprises surveyed

This section provides an overview of the 21 enterprises that participated in the study. In total, 11 participating enterprises were members of the EFI, and 10 were members of the AIOE.

These enterprises are briefly profiled below with regard to sectors of operation, workforce and unionization status.

Sectors of operation and membership

The majority of the surveyed enterprises were involved in manufacturing activities. The remainder came from sectors as diverse as agriculture, chemicals, mining and fast-moving consumer goods, among others.

The sectors of operation are provided in Table 1 below. This table additionally provides a breakdown in respect of either the EFI or the AIOE membership among the sampled enterprises.

► Table 1. Participating enterprises – Sectors of operation

Name of enterprise	Sector	EFI/AIOE Membership
Bennett Coleman & Company Limited	Media and entertainment	EFI
Britannia Industries Limited	FMCG – food	EFI
Ceat Limited	Manufacturing – tyres	EFI
Earth Care Equipments Private Limited	Manufacturing – engineering	EFI
Godrej Agrovet Limited	Agriculture and allied industries	EFI
Gujarat State Fertilizers & Chemicals Limited	Manufacturing – fertilizers and industrial chemicals	EFI
Larsen & Toubro Limited (Powai)	Manufacturing – heavy engineering and defence	EFI
Piramal Glass Private Limited	Glass container packaging solutions	EFI
L&T Electrical & Automation	Manufacturing – electrical equipment	EFI
Tata Chemicals Limited	Chemicals	EFI
Unique Diecasting Products Private Limited	Manufacturing	EFI
FCC Clutch India Pvt. Ltd	Auto components	AIOE
Greaves Cotton Ltd	Engineering & capital goods	AIOE
Hindalco Industries Ltd	Metal & mining	AIOE
JK Lakshmi Cement	Cement	AIOE
Lucas TVS Ltd	Auto components	AIOE
Minda Group	Auto components	AIOE
NLC India Ltd	Others – coal	AIOE
Orient Electric Ltd	Consumer durables	AIOE
Simpson & Co. Ltd	Auto components	AIOE
Windsor Machine Ltd	Engineering and capital goods	AIOE

Workforce composition

The workforces of the surveyed enterprises predominantly comprise permanent and contract workers, with permanent workers making up a large proportion of the workforce. Temporary workers comprise a smaller proportion of those employed.

► Table 2. Workforce composition

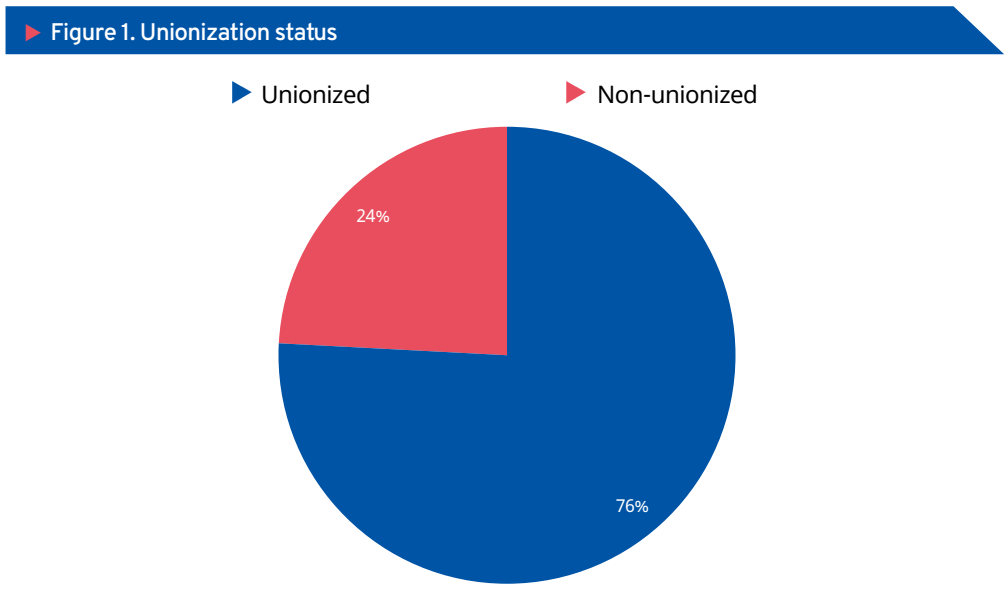
Name of enterprise	Workforce composition		
	Permanent	Contract	Temporary (i.e. apprentice, etc.)
Bennett Coleman & Company Limited	5 500+	2 500+	50+
Britannia Industries Limited	3 513	11 428	486 Apprentices (NEEM ¹ and NAPS ²)
Ceat Limited	5 000+	2 000+	500+
Earth Care Equipments Private Limited	75	0	0
Godrej Agrovet Limited	2 700	0	75
Gujarat State Fertilizers & Chemicals Limited	3 666	1 803	7
Larsen & Toubro Limited (Powai)	425	205	0
Piramal Glass Private Limited	1 707	1 350	44
L&T Electrical & Automation	300	50	75
Tata Chemicals Limited	1 358	3 556	120
Unique Diecasting Products Private Limited	85	10	0
FCC Clutch India Pvt. Ltd	400	250	0
Greaves Cotton Ltd	500	800	200
Hindalco Industries Ltd	7 349	5 600	362
JK Lakshmi Cement	300	1 000	12
Lucas TVS Ltd	362	550	1 963
Minda Group	300	150	25
NLC India Ltd	11 487	16 778	0
Orient Electric Ltd	24	1 500	40
Simpson & Co. Ltd	1 009	600	400
Windsor Machine Ltd	180	240	50

¹ The National Employability Enhancement Mission (NEEM) Scheme is an initiative of the Government of India. The Scheme aims to provide on-the-job training to beneficiaries.

² The National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS) is a scheme of the Government of India which supports apprenticeship training at the workplace.

High rate of unionization

The unionization status of each of the surveyed enterprises is illustrated in Figure 1 below. The majority of the enterprises (16 out of 21) were unionized.



The larger enterprises that were sampled also had more than one plant which was unionized. The presence of unions provided enterprise management with partners with whom to jointly develop and implement measures to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. They also provided a more trusted communication conduit with workers, particularly in respect of health and safety protections.

► Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

This research attempted to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the surveyed enterprises. In this regard, the surveyed enterprises identified various challenges experienced by them on account of the pandemic. These included the following:

- i. Dealing with a shortage of contract labour (including migrant labour), which appears to have been experienced particularly by enterprises involved in manufacturing and construction.
- ii. Facing revenue losses and liquidity challenges because of reduced market demand, the additional costs of COVID-19 preventative measures, increased inventory costs, inability to meet delivery schedules, limited product shelf life and an increase in bad debts.
- iii. Managing fixed costs, alongside lower revenues, particularly given that most respondents reported that they had not reduced wages and/or salary of their respective workforces.
- iv. Dealing with supply chain disruptions resulting in the impeded movement of goods and services.
- v. Incorporating the government's COVID-19 pandemic-mitigation measures, including in respect of working hours, which impacted on the operations of enterprises.
- vi. Handling lowered staff morale and higher levels of stress among them.

The study also identified circumstances that offset the full impact of the pandemic on many of the surveyed enterprises. These included:

- i. Those enterprises that were engaged in producing goods classified as essential services³ did not experience that severe an impact.
- ii. Those enterprises that catered to the increased demand for specific items, such as biscuits and sanitizers.
- iii. Some enterprises that were benefitted by the changes in government policy, particularly measures to restrict imports.
- iv. Enterprises with diversified product portfolios tended to fare better.
- v. Some enterprises that adopted some pandemic response measures received support from stakeholders, including the government. Pertaining to the surveyed enterprises, the existing labour regulatory framework did not impede the implementation of the response measures. Given the unique, deep and widespread nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the different stakeholders developed a more collaborative and unified approach to combat its impacts.

Generally, however, the majority of enterprises surveyed reported that they had implemented measures to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic, and were therefore able to avoid retrenchments, wage cuts and lay-offs. These mitigation measures are described in the section below.

³ Essential services/products include bread, biscuits, newspaper and magazines, animal feed and fertilizers, under the Essential Commodities Act, 1995.

▶ Measures to maintain constructive employee relations

This section provides a description of measures, that the surveyed enterprises reported they had implemented, in order to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and maintain good relations with employees.

These measures assisted the surveyed enterprises to emerge largely unscathed from the first wave of the pandemic, and included the following:

i. Measures to facilitate communication in order to maintain worker morale, keep workers informed, and facilitate business operations, were as follows:

- a.** Multi-level telephonic conference calls and Zoom (a cloud-based video conferencing platform) calls to keep all workers updated. These included:
 - ▶ Calls between the managing director and leadership teams with lower-level managers.
 - ▶ Calls between functional heads and their respective departments.
 - ▶ Calls between plant heads with permanent and contractual workers.
- b.** The use of social media by top management to assure workers that no jobs would be lost, and that workers would be supported during the pandemic.
- c.** The use of electronic platforms and apps (online software programmes) to facilitate two-way communication, including Red book/Bol Bindas (online apps for communication) for shop floor workers, an online chat-bot (an online software programme for online chatting) 'Sherlock' for other categories of workers.
- d.** Investment in and adoption of online platforms; including, Zoom, MS Teams, WebEx, and Tele-Presence. In addition, surveyed enterprises reported increased transitioning to a virtual workspace, and procurement of laptops and/or desktops.

ii. Measures to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic through bipartite social dialogue mechanisms, included the following:

- a.** Establishment of plant-level task forces, such as the COVID-19 Inspection and Adherence Teams, consisting of all heads of department and worker representatives from the different departments; and task force teams consisting of management representatives and union representatives. Other bipartite mechanisms⁴ that were established included the COVID-19 pandemic Response Teams and the Emergency Response Teams. Senior management generally chaired these mechanisms.

The activities of these mechanisms included analysing the COVID-19 pandemic situation, monitoring government regulations/circulars, framing company COVID-19 protocol guidelines (related to travel, quarantine, testing, work rules and so on) and implementing decisions through stakeholder collaboration.

- b.** The use of bipartite mechanisms, such as works committees was also prevalent, with the majority of enterprises reporting that they had established such mechanisms prior to the pandemic. They had done so to facilitate occupational safety and health, and be compliant with environmental regulations, among other things. These mechanisms appear to have played a key role in managing the impact of the pandemic.

⁴ The AIOE reported that non-unionized enterprises that it had surveyed had established a COVID-19 pandemic response mechanism that comprised only of management representatives. There were three non-unionized enterprises sampled by the AIOE.

- c. In a small percentage of the surveyed enterprises (approximately 30 per cent) the use of collective bargaining was observed, as a mechanism to address the impacts of the pandemic.

iii. Measures in respect of the payment of wages and allowances included:

- a. Payment of salaries on time and granting advance salaries in some cases. Approximately 100 apprentices were paid stipends, without being required to report to work.
- b. Payment of hardship allowances to those who were required to work for longer hours. In this regard, some state governments had granted permission for certain companies to schedule two extended shifts, instead of three-shifts in their operations. A hardship allowance was paid in addition to the payment for overtime worked. The hardship allowance was a voluntary gesture, by the respondent enterprises to incentivize workers to report for work.
- c. Payment of a daily special attendance bonus, by some enterprises in addition to their wages, to the daily wage earners.
- d. Increase in insurance policy monetary limits, as a risk mitigation tool. This was voluntarily provided by the enterprises.
- e. Increase in the hospital health insurance cover amounts through top-up schemes and the addition of the Corona Kavach⁵ scheme.

iv. Measures to avoid retrenchments, and manage cash flow constraints were as follows:

- a. Deferment of the annual increment cycles by six months to a year.
- b. A reduction in the annual increment for management; with top management choosing not to accept the annual increment.
- c. Freezing or deferment of discretionary expenditure.

Despite these measures, 30 per cent of the enterprises surveyed by the AIOE reported that they had laid off temporary workers, as well as a low percentage of supervisory or management cadre employees. These enterprises also reported that their businesses had been particularly severely impacted by the pandemic.

v. Measures to support worker well-being included:

- a. Leveraging online training through special computer rooms set up in the technical-training centres and kiosks on the shop floor. These mechanisms provided workers help in training in the language of their choice. This also provided workers with the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the use of technology.
- b. Providing virtual platforms to provide online access to counsellors, online motivational talks by managers and/or external trainers, YouTube (online video sharing website) videos to build staff motivation, online yoga classes, sessions on 'busting COVID-19 myths', and sessions with workers who had recovered from COVID-19.
- c. Extending free dining facilities to all employees in their canteens.
- d. Introducing hygiene and social distancing protocols in factories.
- e. Staggering of shifts to ensure social distancing in canteens. This necessitated that only one-third of the workforce was present at any point of time.
- f. Providing end-to-end transport facilities for commuting to work.
- g. Providing food and stay facility on the factory premises.

⁵ The Corona Kavach Policy, as mandated by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), covers hospitalisation expenses if the insured is diagnosed with COVID-19.

- h.** Providing COVID-19 disease's awareness and prevention training.
- i.** Introducing "Chai Chaska" during worker's tea breaks, during which:
 - ▶ The company's chief fitness officer spoke periodically with the employees and their spouses in order to address the fears and myths. They also provided nutritional advice intended to boost immunity, among other things.
 - ▶ YouTube (online video sharing website) videos on physical fitness were shown.
 - ▶ Introduction of online programmes including some on exercises (Zumba), meditation, COVID-19 awareness, and emotional well-being.

vi. Measures to ensure the resolution of grievances:

In this regard, the vast majority of surveyed enterprises reported that grievance-handling procedures were already in place. These procedures followed a defined process, and allowed for the escalation of grievances to senior management, if unresolved at a particular level. These procedures provided an additional channel for more effective communication. It is interesting to note that enterprises also reported the use of online platforms to resolve disputes during lockdown.

vii. Measures to involve unions in the COVID-19 pandemic response included:

- a.** Support by unions to promote COVID-19 prevention measures including encouraging workers to avoid crowds, use masks regularly, and ensuring handwashing and sanitizing. Union leaders became role models in the use of masks and sanitizing measures.
- b.** Working with unions to stagger lunch breaks and change canteen menus.
- c.** Active participation of unions in the planning and execution of the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures, and in some cases even initiation of such measures. In this regard, for example, one enterprise planned to establish a transportation facility for its workforce. Prior to the pandemic, workers at this enterprise were using public transport. Union members supported its implementation by advising on steps to ensure worker safety, route planning and cost optimization. In addition, unions supported the development and implementation of safety protocols, plans for continuing day-to-day plant operations, steps to curb fear among the workers, quarantine and testing instructions, travel advisories, contact tracing and suchlike. Management provided unions with tools such as pamphlets, company guidelines in local languages, and government circulars.
- d.** Support by unions in the formation of cohorts for alternate-week working, and counselled workers on undertaking RAPID and RT PCR tests.
- e.** Outside the enterprise, support from the unions, which played an important role in supporting management to reach out to housing societies in order to facilitate unlocking them for business continuity purposes.

These measures described above indicate the adoption of an empathetic approach by managements of the surveyed enterprises. This approach is likely to have stemmed from the fact that the pandemic affected both managers and workers, and consequently highlighted the need to place "human life above profitability".⁶ This approach was given further impetus by the Government of India's invocation of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 in response to the pandemic.

⁶ Good employee relation practices in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learnt: India, EFI, May 2021

► Impact of mitigation measures and key lessons learnt

The vast majority of surveyed enterprises (approximately 90 per cent) reported minimal negative impact arising from the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. This may be ascribed to the mitigation measures implemented by the surveyed enterprises, as described in the previous sections.

In this regard, it is also important to note that senior management championed the mitigation measures, and were strongly involved in the implementation of these measures.

The surveyed enterprises reported the following benefits accruing from the mitigation measures that they had implemented:

- a. The adoption of a much more human-centred approach. This served to expand and modify the approach to labour relations adopted by the surveyed enterprises; to include a focus on mental health, improved nutrition and physical fitness; among others.
- b. Maintenance of production, which facilitated continued supply to the market.
- c. Avoidance of work stoppages and efficient ramp-up of production.
- d. Satisfaction of the workers as demonstrated by pulse surveys conducted during the pandemic, showing that workers were highly satisfied with the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures put in place by the surveyed enterprises.
- e. Maintenance of low infection rates among the workers.
- f. Achievement of improvements, including in respect of healthier canteen menus, more effective reporting mechanisms in the case of illness, standard operating procedures to continue operations while preventing the spread of infections, and improved flexibility to redeploy workers to critical operations. These are also important measures for dealing with future health crises.

The effectiveness of a proactive and human-centred response to the pandemic is further emphasized through the key lessons learnt by the surveyed enterprises in the implementation of the mitigation measures.

In this regard, lessons learnt included the following:

- a. A prompt response to the crisis, that was based on clear and timely communication was vital to addressing fears, maintaining morale and facilitating the ongoing operations of the enterprise.
- b. An empathetic and collaborative response through dedicated mechanisms, which was inclusive of unions, contributed to building a “one united force”, to combat the challenges posed by the pandemic. It also assisted in building stronger management-worker trust and partnerships.
- c. The strong focus on worker wellness supported by unions, contributed to worker compliance with occupational safety and health guidelines, and strengthened a safety and health compliance culture within the enterprise. It also assisted in improving health and hygiene awareness among workers and their families.
- d. A visible and strong central leadership of the top management assisted in building support for pandemic-mitigation measures, and contributed to building staff morale and worker commitment.

- e. The usage of online platforms have proven themselves to be an important element for the future operations of the surveyed enterprises. They facilitated continued business functioning, training, and maintaining communications between management and workers. A hybrid work model, particularly for non-manufacturing enterprises, is therefore more widely accepted.
- f. Inclusion of surrounding communities was important, given their links with workers; and the related need to reduce transmissions. In this regard, for example, a factory campus school was converted into a hospital for the COVID-19 affected cases, and disinfectant was distributed to 41 villages and 3 district centres that were located close to the surveyed enterprises. This assisted in building goodwill with the local communities.

► Conclusion

Based on the finding of the surveys conducted by the EFI and the AIOE respectively, it is clear that a proactive, human-centred approach to the pandemic contributed to minimizing its impact on the surveyed enterprises.

The majority of these enterprises were able to avoid retrenchments and to reduce the impact of the pandemic on their operations. The surveyed enterprises attributed this achievement to ensuring a duty of care to workers; establishing strong partnerships with unions through bipartite social dialogue mechanisms to both develop and implement pandemic response measures; establishing effective and regular communication tools as well as the use of online platforms to support continued business operations; and effective dispute resolution mechanisms.

While relying on, and leveraging existing systems and resources, it is important to note that the enterprises also innovated new ways of working and collaborating. Working in physical workplaces has been a conventional practice in workplaces in India. However, during the pandemic, remote working and the use of digital platforms for collaboration, redefined work practices in each of the enterprises surveyed.

It is also expected that the focus of management in India will shift from skilling to multi-skilling in the near future. Given factors such as the increasingly dynamic nature of work, the fast-paced innovation in production technologies, and changing business needs; a multi-skilled workforce in enterprises is likely to be a key requirement in the future.

The practices adopted by the surveyed enterprises have therefore assisted these enterprises in establishing more resilient processes and systems, which could be drawn upon to respond to future business challenges. These pandemic-based responses also provide valuable lessons for all enterprises wishing to proactively prepare for, and respond to future crises.

Annex 1

▶ **Good employee relation practices in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learnt:**

India

**A research report submitted to
International Labour Organization
by Employers' Federation of India
with support from ILO India**

▶ Contents

1	Introduction	19
2	Research methodology	20
3	Participation and nature of interaction	21
4	Analysis and insights	23
	Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic	23
	Measures taken to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic	35
	Impact assessment of measures against the COVID-19 outbreak	43
5	Closing and concluding remarks	48
6	Appendix: Blank questionnaire	49
7	Acknowledgments	54

▶ Glossary

AEC	Apex Environment Council
AIOE	All India Organisation of Employers
AQC	Apex Quality Council
ASC	Apex Safety Council
BU	Business Unit
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
CHRO	Chief Human Resource Officer
CIAT	COVID-19 Inspection and Adherence Team
CMC	Career Management Centre
CMD	Chairman and Managing Director
COO	Chief Operation Officer
CXO	Chief Experiences Officer
ED	Executive Director
EFI	Employers' Federation of India
ER	Employee Relations
FMCG	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods
GAD	General Administration Department
GMP	Good Manufacturing Practice
GoI	Government of India
HOD	Head of Department
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
HRBP	Human Resource Business Partner
ICC	Internal Complaint Committee
ILO	International Labour Organization
ID Act	Industrial Dispute Act
IMS	Integrated Management System
IR	Industrial Relations
IT	Information Technology
IT and ITES	Information Technology and Information Technology Enabled Services
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LTS	Long Term Settlement
MD	Managing Director

MNC	Multinational Company/Corporation
MRM	Management Review
NAPS	National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme
NEEM	National Employability Enhancement Mission
OJT	On-the-Job Training
PA	Public Address
POSH	Prevention of Sexual Harassment
PSRM	Process Safety Risk Management
PSU	Public Sector Unit
RAPID	Rescue And Preparedness In Disasters
RT PCR	Reverse Transcriptase Polymerase Chain Reaction
SBU	Strategic Business Unit
SDM	System Design and Management
SHE	Safety Health and Environment
SKOCH	SKOCH Group Award
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SVP	Senior Vice-President
TF	Task Force

▶ Introduction

The world and India have had a challenging crisis, since March 2020, caused by the sudden emergence of the pandemic of COVID-19. The unprecedented challenges our country has had to face include loss of jobs and livelihood, negative economic growth and overall disruption in the way we work and live.

The ILO, headquartered in Geneva and with its India HQ being Delhi, proposed to conduct a primary research-based study of organizations in India, as to how they responded to the pandemic challenges.

The EFI is one of two employers' organizations in India engaged by the ILO, for conducting different types of research work, over the years. For this project, the ILO has mandated two employers' organizations (EFI being one), to conduct the research-based study and submit a report. ILO would then integrate the reports submitted by the EFI with that submitted by the other Employer organization, for finalizing its India report.

Prof. Vijayan Pankajakshan (Dean-HR Academics, CHRO and Head-CMC: Welingkar Institute of Management, Mumbai), was appointed as a consultant, by the EFI, for the execution of the intended research study. He is an academician of repute for the last 12 years and in addition has more than two and a half decades of HR and IR experience in the Industry.

This study was launched on 31 January 2021 and hence it covers the period of the coronavirus pandemic breakout around March 2020 and the subsequent lockdowns and suchlike. The period of the study was up to January 2021 and does not cover the time period between March 2021 to the present date, which has seen a reduction in cases, followed by an unimagined resurgence.

▶ Research methodology

The EFI and the ILO jointly developed a questionnaire, for obtaining responses from the chosen organizations and to guide the interview process, which was to be conducted via a virtual conference.

The draft questionnaire was submitted to the ILO and once approval was obtained, the process of formally inviting participant organizations was initiated, by communication of an invitation and the approved questionnaire to the respondent company. This was completed by 22 February 2021.

The EFI obtained a very positive response from a large range of organizations. The EFI decided to restrict the response to 11 companies. These companies ranged from large to medium to small in size.

While deciding the names of potential respondents, EFI had to follow ILO's guidelines, such as: must not be a Global MNC of non-Indian parentage, must have a union, must be a large-, medium- or small- scale enterprise.

► Participation and nature of interaction

Each of the participating organizations was sent the approved questionnaire for obtaining their responses. The questionnaire had some questions that were close-ended and some were left open-ended, to be completed with free text.

Once the questionnaires were received by the respondents, with the contents, the EFI scheduled a one-hour virtual interaction with the head of ER/IR or corresponding senior most functionary.

The objective of this step was to listen to the company's voice, and also provide an opportunity for the EFI research team to clarify doubts, ask questions and seek more information on the significance of certain steps adopted.

► Participating organizations

Sr. No.	Organization name	Sector	Total employee strength		
			Permanent	Contract	Temporary (Apprentice, etc.)
1	Bennett Coleman & Company Limited	Media and entertainment	5500+	2500+	50+
2	Britannia Industries Limited	FMCG – food	3513	11428	486 Apprentice (NEEM and NAPS)
3	Ceat Limited	Manufacturing – tyres	5000+	2000+	500+
4	Earth Care Equipments Private Limited	Manufacturing – engineering	75	0	0
5	Godrej Agrovet Limited	Agriculture and allied industries	2700	0	75
6	Gujarat State Fertilizers & Chemicals Limited	Manufacturing - fertilizers and industrial chemicals	3666	1803	7
7	Larsen & Toubro Limited (Powai)	Manufacturing - heavy engineering and defence	425	205	0
8	Piramal Glass Private Limited	Glass container packaging solutions	1707	1350	44
9	L&T Electrical & Automation	Manufacturing - electrical equipment	300	50	75
10	Tata Chemicals Limited	Chemicals	1358	3556	120
11	Unique Diecasting Products Private Limited	Manufacturing	85	10	0

▶ Participating organizations

Sr. No.	Organization Name	Recognized trade union
1	Bennett Coleman & Company Limited	Company has registered unions at three of its locations. Whilst the issues related to workers are led by internal union leadership, issues related to the industry is taken up by external leadership at the national level.
2	Britannia Industries Limited	Of the 16 factories, 9 have single or multiple workers unions. Wherever there are multiple unions, management is in discussions with all the unions.
3	Ceat Limited	An externally-led registered and recognized union represents the workers' interest.
4	Earth Care Equipments Private Limited	An SME enterprise without any union.
5	Godrej Agrovet Limited	At Godrej, the right of workers to get associated and be represented by a union, is recognized. Since, there are multiple factories, workers are represented by both, internally and externally led unions.
6	Gujarat State Fertilizers & Chemicals Limited	There are five unions at GSFC. They are all internally led.
7	Larsen & Toubro Limited (Powai, Mumbai, Maharashtra)	Establishment has a registered union, recognized under the MRTU and PULP Act.
8	Piramal Glass Private Limited	There are two registered unions in PGPL (Piramal Glass Pvt Ltd). In the Kosamba, Gujarat plant, there is the Bharitya Karmchhari Sangh affiliated to an external union — Bharitya Majdhur Sangh. In the Jambusar, Gujarat plant, there is the Baroda Glass Works Kamdar Mandal. Both the unions are led by internal committees.
9	L&T Electrical & Automation	Bhartiya Kamgar Sena, a registered and recognized union with external affiliation.
10	Tata Chemicals Limited	Tata Chemicals Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), is a registered and recognized union with external affiliation. TCL recently signed up a wage settlement with this union in September 2019, (April, 2019 to March 2023) which is effective for four years. The union has also signed up an LFA agreement with the company. To resolve the day-to-day issues TCL union has a committee with union representatives, which meets once in a month wherein labour/services related issues are discussed and resolved.
11	Unique Diecasting Products Private Limited	An SME enterprise without any union.

▶ Analysis and insights

▶ Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Q.1.A: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your business(es)?

The eight* most common reasons cited by the respondent companies, to support how and why there was a negative impact on the organization.

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| <p>1. Delivery schedules, as per customer/client requirements could not be met.</p> | <p>2. Due to the nature of the business model of some of the respondent organizations, the daily loss of revenue could not automatically be recovered later, (e.g. bread, daily newspapers), loss of man days could not be recovered, in terms of lost revenue. In the case of other respondent companies, lost revenue was able to be retrieved to a great extent, over the subsequent three- to six-month period of time, (e.g. in the biscuit industry). The loss of revenue/deferred revenue realization had no link to reducing the wages payable to workers/workmen.</p> |
| <p>3. Lowered morale of employees and higher levels of stress.</p> | <p>4. Reduction in the orders for business from clients/customers.</p> |
| <p>5. Challenge of managing fixed costs, alongside lower revenues.

(Most respondents did not alter the wages and/or salary of the workforce.)</p> | <p>6. Challenge of losing revenue, because of limited shelf-life of the product on the shelf at the retail outlet (5 a.m. – 8 a.m.). This challenge was faced by the respondent companies whose products and/or services, were items of daily consumption. (Example: FMCG (biscuits, bread) and publishing (printed newspapers and magazines)).</p> |
| <p>7. Reverse migration.</p> | <p>8. While revenue loss could not be avoided, profitability was maintained/enhanced through strict control on discretionary costs (non-essential expenditures, i.e. business travel, hotel stay, meetings, advertisements, fixtures and furniture, sponsorships and general training programmes.</p> |
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*This is not a ranking of 'most important' to 'least important'.

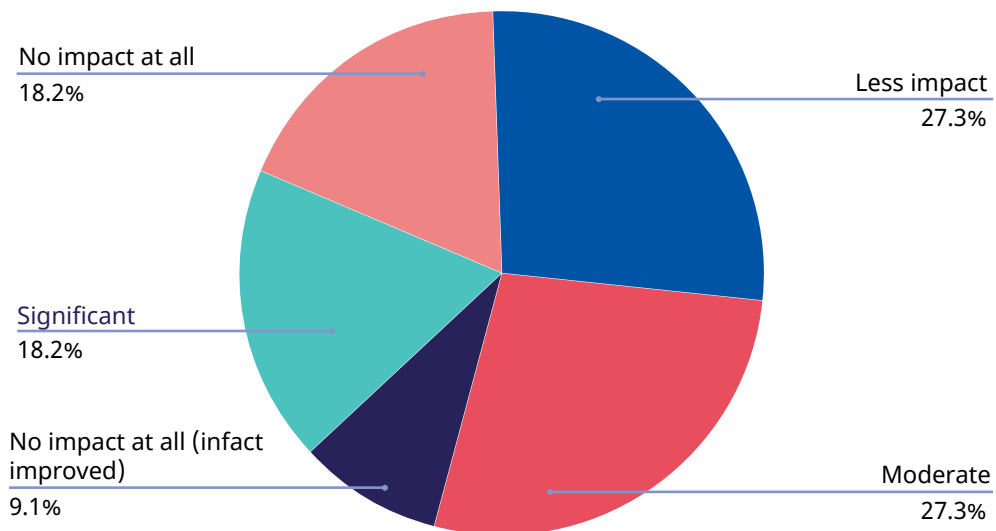
The six* most commonly cited reasons, by respondent organizations, to support the assessment that the pandemic generated a positive impact/ or a minimal negative impact.

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| <p>1. High demand for packaged foods.</p> | <p>2. In some of the respondent companies, which had a wider business portfolio, the drop in revenues of individual business verticals/products/services were compensated through 'better than expected' revenue from other business verticals/products/services.</p> <p>(Example: While bread sales were disrupted, the sale of biscuits shot through the roof.)</p> <p>(Another example: While sales of sanitizers rocketed upwards, that of other personal care and beauty products went down.)</p> |
| <p>3. In a majority of the respondent companies, the supply chain was significantly impacted, during the early lockdown phase (March-May, 2020), but most recovered faster than later (post September, 2020).</p> | <p>4. Positive changes in government policy, e.g. restriction of imports.</p> |
| <p>5. Being classified as essential services/products, i.e. bread, biscuits, newspaper and magazines, animal feed, fertilizers, etc. under the Essential Commodities Act, 1995.</p> | <p>6. Diversified business portfolios.</p> |
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GSFC set up disinfectant tunnels at all entry points overnight, ready for the plants to restart next day. Such necessary parameters of safety standards instilled confidence and faith in the employees who were scared to join back in such times of chaos when plants restarted on 15 April 2020 during the first lockdown.

Q.1.B: In your considered opinion, what was the level of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your business(es)?



An equal ratio of the respondents opined that they experienced ‘little impact’ and ‘moderate impact’. A similar ratio of respondents felt that there was ‘no impact at all’. 18 per cent of the respondents expressed that they experienced ‘significant impact.’

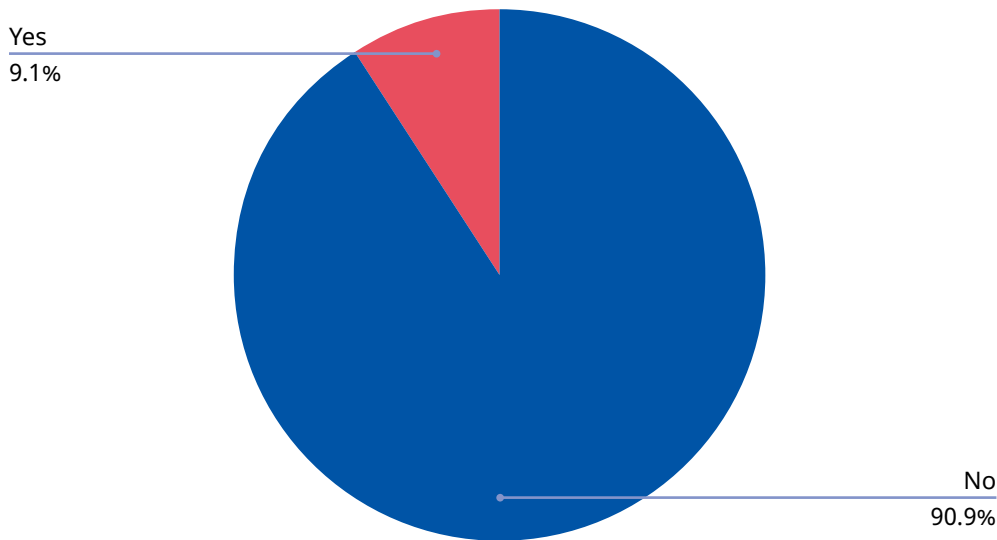
The following could be some of the plausible factors, for the above ‘contrarian’** assessment:

- a. The resilience and ethos of most Indians
- b. Scale of the organization and ability to take shocks
- c. Classification as essential services/products
- d. Philosophy of the owners and/or senior managers, their citizen leader behaviour, towards all stake holders.

The above pie-chart also indicates that businesses, which involved an ‘engineering-project-construction management model’, experienced the most negative impact. This could be ascribed to the challenges of mobilising adequate contract workforce (some migrant), restoring broken road-based supply chains and possible no-growth of their clients’ businesses.

**The sample of respondent companies, ranged from the small to the very large. This reduces any skew that could be ascribed to sampling choices.

Q.2.A: Did the pandemic necessitate your company, to implement any workforce restructuring (including lay-offs, retrenchments, closures, wage reductions, freezing of increments, and/or other similar measures)? Specify details.



Notably, an overwhelming 90 per cent plus of the surveyed organizations reported that they did not have to implement any workforce restructuring (including lay-offs, retrenchments, closures, wage reductions, freezing of increments, and/or other similar measures).

This could possibly be ascribed to the senior stakeholders of the organization, choosing to demonstrate a higher level of empathy and understanding of the challenges being faced by individual employees. The pandemic was not a creation of unhealthy IR/ER and/or by workers/workmen. The latter were 'victims' of the COVID-19 breakout, alongside their white collar/non-unionized colleagues and managers as well.

The invocation of The Disaster Management Act, 2005*** by the Government of India, probably also was a signal to the corporate sector, that the latter should prioritize human life above profitability.

The respondent companies also had to factor in the 'leading indicator' of reverse migration challenges.

Respondent organizations were possibly also sensitive about the fact that their employer brand may get negatively impacted, (if they resorted to measures of cutting employee investments) and hurt the company, even more, when the business climate eased, post the brunt of the pandemic.

*** The Disaster Management Act 2005: The Act of the government of India, **aims to manage disasters**, including preparation of mitigation strategies, capacity-building and a lot more.

The six most common reasons, cited by the respondent organizations, to illustrate how they attempted to minimize the fallout of the pandemic, on their employees:

- | | |
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| <p>1. Deferment of the annual increment cycle, by three to six months.
Increments to permanent and contractual employees were implemented effective 1 Jan., 2021.</p> | <p>2. Upholding the organization’s core values, which stated the principle of how to implement the tie breaker for ‘not invoking’ the ‘no work-no pay, despite losses in output and revenues.</p> |
| <p>3. ‘Default decision’ of having to pay 50 per cent wages/salaries (during the early part of lockdown), when the Government authorities did not permit 100 per cent workforce to work at one time.</p> | <p>4. Freezing all hiring (replacement and new positions). Hiring approval only for green field projects.</p> |
| <p>5. Moderation of annual increment, for the white-collar employees. Top management chose not to take any increment.

Granular data on the above, falls under the realm of ‘confidential information’ and hence the Research Team did not have access.</p> | <p>6. All discretionary, avoidable expenses were frozen and/or deferred.</p> |

The eight most common reasons, cited by the respondent organizations, to illustrate how they attempted to maximize the positive impact for employees that involved financial expenditure.

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|---|--|
| <p>1. Paying salaries on time and granting advance salaries in some cases. 100+ apprentices who were on the rolls, were paid their stipend, without being called to the office.</p> | <p>2. A respondent company released a large sum of money (arising out of arrears payment, pursuant to a long-term wage agreement) in April 2020 when the pandemic was raging.</p> |
| <p>3. Procurement of COVID-19 tests, with medicines, masks/sanitizers, awareness sessions, sanitization of the facilities.</p> | <p>4. Paying salaries, on time, for contingent/contractual workforce.</p> |
| <p>5. Hiring 200+ employees during lockdown.

This choice, by a respondent company, highlights that the top management did not want to give any negative signal (which could have been the fallout, if recruitment was halted/deferred). This organization wanted to send a message (downside of the pandemic notwithstanding) that it was ‘business as usual.’

Other respondent companies that participated in this study maintained their workforce strength, including protecting all permanent and contract employees.

It is therefore difficult to generalize and aver whether these individual companies’ practices were also reflected by other companies in their sectors/industry verticals.</p> | <p>6. “Hardship Allowance” for shop floor employees, who worked for longer hours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Some state governments had granted permission to some companies, to schedule two extended shifts instead of having three shift operations. Over time (OT) was paid for the extra hours logged in. ▶ The hardship allowance was a voluntary gesture, by the respondent organizations, to defray expenses that the workers/workmen may have to/had to incur at home (including Wi-Fi connection etc.), travelling to place of work. ▶ Such hardship allowances were paid by a few respondent companies, on a daily basis in addition to the normal wages. This was also to incentivize the workmen/workers to report for work. |

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7. Focus on enhancing employee wellness, leveraging virtual platforms.
- A few examples include:
- a. Online access to a counsellor.
 - b. Online motivational talks by managers and/or external trainer.
 - c. YouTube (online video sharing website) videos used for extending employee engagement, to their family members.
8. Enhanced engagement with the contract/contingent workforce of the organization's supply chain, including higher insurance protection.
- Repeated assurances by the senior management to lower-level management and workers about job security
- The increase in monetary limits, provided under the insurance policy provided, was to address the risk that may arise, with respect to the probability of any worker/workmen passing away due to COVID-19. The insurance cover was a risk-mitigation tool for the employee's family, voluntarily and generously offered by a few employers. The organizations paid 100 per cent premium, on behalf of the workers/workman. This was an additional facility beyond the provisions of the union wage agreements.
- Extending dining facilities to all employees, on a non-payment basis.
-

Q.2.B: If the answer to Q.2.A (Did the pandemic necessitate your company, to implement any workforce restructuring (including lay-offs, retrenchment, closure, wage reductions, freezing of increments, and/or other similar measures? specify details.) is yes, how did the company/business communicate such decisions to the involved workers/workmen?

As 90 per cent of the respondent organizations opined 'No' to Q.2.A, the researchers focused on the inputs provided by the companies, in terms of the nature of communication platforms used by companies to the workforce, be it a positive and/or a belt-tightening decision.

The four most common reasons, cited by the respondent organizations, to illustrate how they enhanced coverage, intensity and platforms of communication with different sections of the workforce (including workers, workmen):

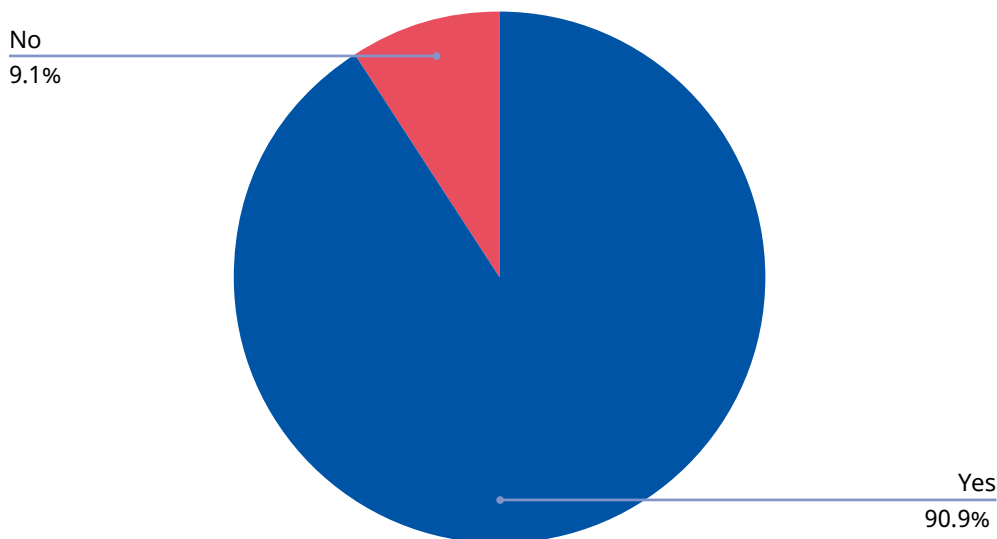
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1. Multilevel telephonic conference calls and Zoom (a cloud-based video conferencing platform) calls to keep all employees aware of what was happening in the industry as well as within the organization.
 - ▶ MD (managing director) and leadership team with management employees.
 - ▶ Functional heads, with their departments.
 - ▶ Plant heads with all management, as well as permanent and contractual workers.
 2. Chairperson and managing director (CMD), using social media in the beginning of the lockdown itself, assuring the workforce that no jobs would be lost and that the company would fully support its employees in such times.
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3. Employees who resided close to the work location were informed on their mobile phones.
4. The rationale/logic for the multiple-employee communication initiatives were:
- a. Clear and consistent messaging.
 - b. Quick, meaningful and timely engagement.
 - c. Ensuring that the dipping morale of the workforce (caused by the disease striking their family and/or neighbourhood) is arrested and lifted up.

The rationale for the multiple channels, (shared below) was to ensure effectiveness and reduce any 'content loss' in transmission: emails, Whatsapp calls, Zoom calls, WebEx meetings (all web-based communication portals) for one-on-one sessions, one-to-many town halls, management to union, etc.

- ▶ Formal communication channels were supplemented with informal methods as well.

Q.3.A: Does your company/business have an effective grievance-redressal system that enables, captures, measures, tracks and resolves the same? Could you specify the existing systems for the same



An overwhelming 90 per cent plus answered in the affirmative.

This is an indication that, most of the respondent organizations, over the years, have embedded the fundamental building blocks for an effective grievance-handling and resolution process.

The most common design features of the Grievance Handling (GH) systems are:

- i. Grievance Handling (GH) committees meet regularly, once a month and these meetings are calendared.
- ii. At such meetings, the management, union and/or workers' representatives listen, understand the yet to be resolved issues/grievances, and take affirmative actions to correct and/or prevent the same.

- iii. The stage-wise escalation process is the most commonly adopted system. The first and best step is to ensure that the grievance is resolved at the workers' immediate supervisor's level. If this does not happen satisfactorily, the aggrieved worker can escalate to higher levels of management. Normally, three to four levels of escalation, are provided for addressing such unresolved grievances. The head of manufacturing, or the head of the plant chair(s) is the highest level of escalation.
- iv. Post the outbreak of COVID-19, the GH meetings mentioned before moved to a virtual mode, using digital mobile platforms.
- v. Some organizations have a mechanism for their employees to raise their concerns, on an anonymous basis.

The one organization which responded in the negative, is a relatively small-scale organization and during the one-on-one conversation with its director, the researchers sensed their preference for a more informal and loosely structured process. Three respondent companies did not have a formal grievance-redressal system. However, these organizations have explicitly stated that their work values/managerial orientation is to leverage an open-door communication policy.

While the pandemic cast a gloom across the country, individual companies took extra care to keep vibrant and engaging conversations with all their employees, including the unionized and contract workers. The end result of such initiatives (and others) was to identify early pockets of low morale, anxiety, fear and suchlike, and take appropriate steps.

Over the years, the 'reactionary mind-set of grievance-redressal systems' of companies, is steadily being replaced with that of a pro-active one; by meeting regularly and listening to all employees (including in groups) through a broader employee engagement-led philosophy. This has the potential of reducing the number of grievances, being escalated too early, to the highest authority in the escalation chain. It is hence, fair to state that in all the respondent organizations, there is a combination of a formal and an informal mode of grievance capturing, handling and resolution.

Eight most commonly cited examples, from the respondent organizations, on their 'orientation/mind-set' towards grievances of the workers/workmen and all employees.

These examples demonstrate how many organizations seem to be moving away from a 'collect, discuss and resolve'; towards one of 'an employee engagement mind-set'; that believes in anticipating and/or quickly responding/resolving employee grievances, by regular two-way engagement platforms and events.

Such companies have, during the COVID-19 pandemic period, broadened the coverage, intensity, and frequency as well as platform choices, for employee communication, that is tuned to the different sections of the workforce (including workers, workmen and even the contract workforce).

Most respondent companies do have similar mechanisms, but they are not necessarily identical.

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1. Wherever there was no legal compulsion for the plant/unit, to have a works committee, informal as well as formal platforms were set up.
Workers and managers could discuss common issues of interest or concern and endeavour to resolve any material difference of opinion in respect of such matters.
Meetings of union representatives with plant management and local HR teams were held, to discuss daily production plans, work requirements, safety awareness, etc.
 2. Wherever 'works committees' were in place; they played the role of an effective grievance-capturing, grievance-handling and grievance-redressal system.
 - ▶ An open-door policy allowed any employee to approach the leadership or fellow officers with their concerns.
 - ▶ Generally, works committees/union-management committees, focused on grievances/issues that concerned a larger number of workers/workmen.
 - ▶ In a minority of the organizations, workers had direct access to top management, if their grievances were not resolved by the supervisor.
 - ▶ Individual grievances were expected to be captured and responded to, by the immediate supervisor.
 - ▶ In the absence of a 'works committee', the 'union management committee' played a similar role. 73 per cent respondent companies had a formal works committee.
 - ▶ On not getting the grievance adequately resolved, such grievances would be routed through the escalation process to the works/union-management committees.
 3. The following is an example from one of the respondent organizations which had multiple platforms and coordinating mechanisms, to ensure that there was a high level of participation and involvement of the workers/workmen and others.
 - a. AQC- Apex Quality Council: Site performance: (projects/SDM/customer-related/operational performance/IMS/functional issues.
 - b. ASC- Apex Safety Council: Focus on safety-related performance.
 - c. AEC- Apex Environment Council: Focus on environment KPI (key performance indicator)/legal-environment compliance, etc.
 - d. MRM- Management review: Focus on functional performance — individual function-wise.
 - e. Diversity Council
 - f. Ethics Council
 - g. POSH Committee: Internal Complaint Committee (ICC under POSH) across all units in India.
 4. A steering committee, was constituted at the executive office level and task force committees at each manufacturing level, to deal with COVID-19 pandemic-related preventive and curative measures.
 - ▶ One respondent organization put in place a team, whose acronym is CIAT (COVID-19 Inspection and Adherence Team). This Team consisted of senior management (SVP to CMD).
 - ▶ The team was responsible for ensuring adherence to COVID-19 protocols in work locations, where there was the highest concentration of workers/workmen.
 - ▶ Other respondent organizations had some form of structure and processes (not the same, but similar) to ensure vigil of any potential risk was kept, due to the COVID-19 exposure, and to initiate preventive and/corrective actions.

(POSH: Prevention of Sexual Harassment).

It is a central legislation, enacted by the Government of India, applicable to the country that addresses the entire gamut of harassment of (largely) women employees (at the work place) and the remedies, besides the governance compliance to be followed by the organizations.

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- 5. In factories, where a formal grievance-redressal system was not in place, the human resources business partner worked closely with senior management, line managers, union representatives, and corporate HR (when it was required), to ensure that grievances were promptly captured, recorded, discussed resolved and escalated, whenever necessary. In large factories, formal GH-redressal mechanisms are in place.
 - 6. Red book/Bol Bindas (accessible through an App or physical register) for shop floor employees and an online chat-bot 'Sherlock' for other categories of workforce. Launch of the suggestion scheme, to address and implement improvements, contributed by the workers/workmen, (once the manufacturing sites/units were reopened).
 - ▶ The Apps, described above, demonstrate how digital tools helped accelerate the increase in the width and depth of communication deployment.
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- 7. Most of the respondent companies focused on reinforcing the Company values (mutual respect, open door mind-set, transparency and trust), which was then demonstrated in the actions and behaviour of the workforce.

Issue-based/project-specific committees were put in place (canteen, uniform, innovation forum, safety vigilante, etc.)

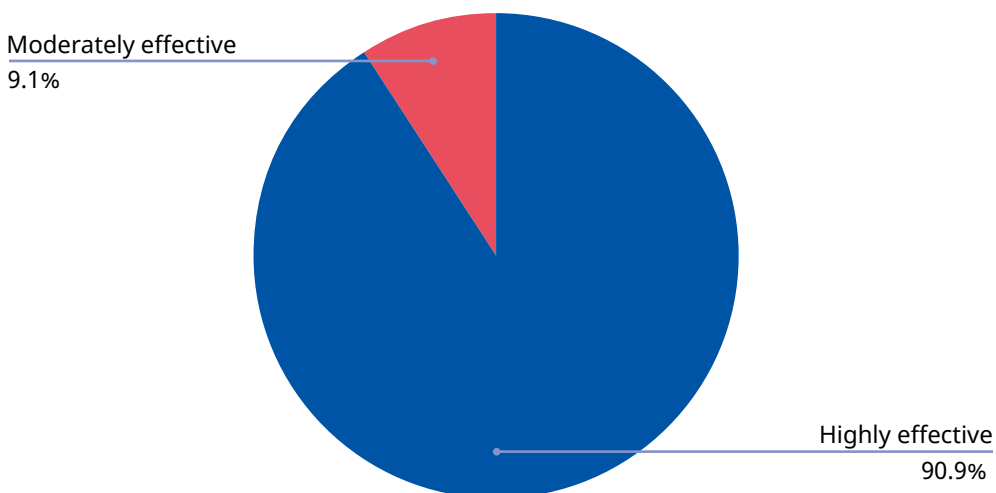
The IR/ER, involvement of the workforce in decision making is an important building block for generating commitment and responsibility.

The above theme/subject-specific committees provided many opportunities, for the workers/workmen to make a contribution.

 - ▶ The alignment of multiple committees, in most of the respondent organizations, was through plant-level, and/or SBU-level and/or corporate-level task forces (constituted for managing the pandemic).
 - 8. Grievance-handling committees met with the workers to understand their concerns and grievances and take affirmative actions for the benefit of the employees. The date was set for the last Thursday or Friday of the month depending on the SBU leadership. After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic these meetings moved to a virtual mode, through the use of the digital platforms.

In addition to the above, this organization had an electronic platform for their employees to raise any concerns, on an anonymous basis, branded as "Meri Awaz Peti".
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Q.3.B: In your considered opinion, how effective was the grievance-redressal system, during the COVID-19 pandemic?

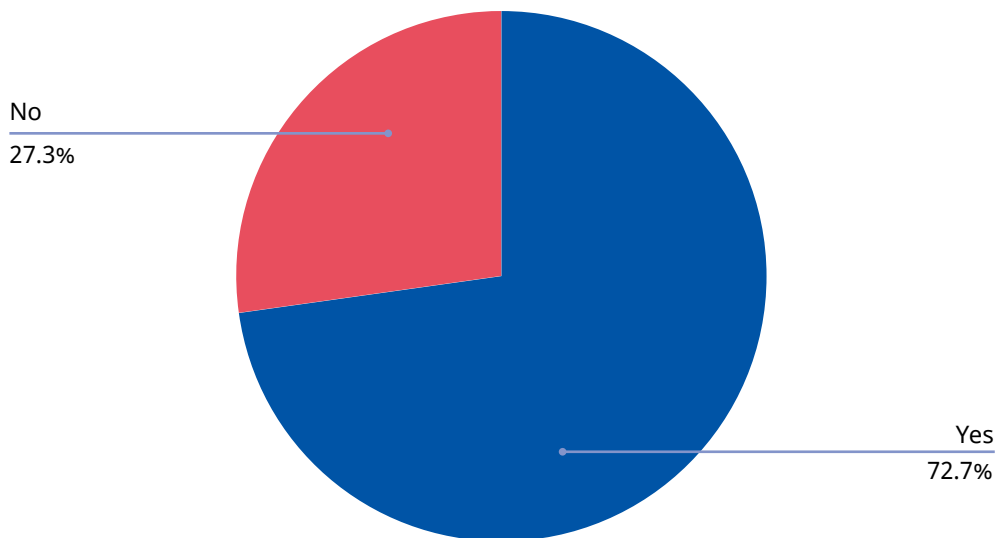


An overwhelming 90 per cent plus of the respondent organizations opined that their grievance-handling and resolution processes were 'highly effective'; while one organization chose a 'moderately effective' opinion.

The following could be the learning insights from the above responses:

- i. In response to an earlier question, 90 per cent of the respondent organizations, had mentioned that they had a formal grievance-handling and resolution process already in place. This then meant that this set of respondent organizations perceived that the GH process that had met their objectives in the pre-COVID-19 pandemic times, and was equally effective during the time period, post March 2020.
- ii. One organization, which had responded positively to Q.3.A, however, responded 'moderately effective, when asked to assess the effectiveness of the GH process, post the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020.
- iii. As the pandemic had a global and a pan-India impact, with most stakeholders (government being one of the them) being on alert, the respondent organizations stepped up their proactive stance in scanning, receiving and responding to the unfolding situation(s), both at the consumer/market end, and the employees' personal- and home-situation end.

Q.4: Do you have an operational works committee in place as per the Industrial Disputes Act (ID Act), 1947?



Seventy-three per cent respondent companies answered this question in the affirmative, while 27 per cent responded negatively.

The insights from the above could be the following:

- ▶ The works committee (as mentioned in the ID Act) and/or any variant, is most likely to have already been in place in the majority of the companies, many years prior to the pandemic time period.
- ▶ The above obviously could have morphed into a situational 'operation-works committee', in the context of involving the workforce representatives, for handling the pandemic and its after-effects.
- ▶ It may be possible that 27 per cent of the respondent companies may not have as yet felt the need to set up a 'works committee', which had its birth in the ID Act.

Q.5: Is there a registered union operating in your company/business? Is there a recognized union or are there more than one? Is the union externally led or is it internally led?

Seventy three per cent of the respondent companies answered in the affirmative on this question. One of the respondent companies had registered unions at three of its locations. Whilst the issues related to workers/workmen at the plant/unit level, were agitated for, and led by, the internal union leadership; bigger issues concerning the 'industry' as a whole, were engaged in by the external leadership at the national level. Based on the responses to the questionnaire and the voice call engagement with each organization, it was highlighted more than once, with multiple examples, that the union and/or workers/workmen groups were extremely collaborative and partnered in problem solving, along with the appropriate level of management.

In addition, multiple respondent organizations had also highlighted extremely proactive initiatives taken by the union/group of workers, to support the management' initiatives.

The five most common context(s) and/or union structures, cited by respondent organizations, to illustrate the structure of the management-workforce relationship, including union(s) and the tripartite engagement:

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1. In a multiple union reality, the management was engaged in discussion with all the unions. Workers unions are generally led internally, except in two units, where one of the office bearers was an outsider.
 2. There is a 'mixed bag' with respect to internal union leadership and/or external union leadership.

To resolve the day-to-day issues, some respondent organizations had a committee (along with union representatives), which met once in a month.

During the period under review, for this report, the frequency of such meetings increased exponentially.
 3. Most respondent organizations engaged with registered unions and with the recognized unions (in states where there is related labour legislation). In a few instances, the organization had an explicit philosophy that it recognized the right of workers to get associated with, and be represented by, a union.
 4. Some respondent organizations were comfortable in engaging with different types of unions/nature of leadership; in a multi-manufacturing context.
 5. The organizations from the small-scale business segment did not have either registered or recognized trade unions. Such organizations however relied on intense day-to-day communication with the owner and/or senior most manager. This included all topics and issues, including manufacturing, supply chain operations and workers-/workmen-related issues.
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► **Measures taken to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic**

Q.6.A. What specific measures (short term: 0–1 year, medium term: 1-3 years and long term: 3 years and above) did your company/business put in place to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to safeguard your workers/workmen and their jobs?

Eight most commonly cited measures were:

Short term	Mid to long term
<p>Necessary and strict protocols of hygiene and social distancing, established and followed at the manufacturing sites/factories.</p>	<p>Hospital Health Insurance cover amount increased with top up schemes and the Corona Kavach scheme added. In addition, life insurance cover was introduced for the entire workforce and the appointment of a special team of doctors was made, to attend to the health needs of the employees and their families.</p>
<p>Staggered shifts were incorporated, to ensure social distancing and preventing crowding for attendance and in the canteen. Hence only one-third of the workforce was present at any given point of time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Twin shifts to ensure social distancing. ► Disaggregation of one large canteen, into smaller and dispersed canteens, to ensure social distancing and increased canteen space. ► In the context of the workforce, which was expected to attend office (even during lockdown) to carry out shutdown and subsequent resume operations, because of the ‘essential services’ tag (after a week of quarantine). The employees were branded as ‘Corona Warriors’ and to address the anxiety of the involved families, this organization raised the challenge as a National Mission, i.e. ‘Our Mantra Country Lockdown, Company: Non-stop was ever on.’ 	<p>A liberal view on income/wages of workers was adopted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Special attendance bonus per day in addition to his/her, daily wage was given during the lockdown period. ► In the unfortunate event of any workers falling sick due to COVID-19, one company announced its decision to bear the entire medical expenses and grant special paid sick leave during the hospitalization or quarantine period. ► Deductions for the food provided in the canteen and for transportation for all workers were waived off. ► Assurances made that in case of the unfortunate death of an employee, the organization would hire another family member.
<p>Creation of the concept of ‘Chai Chaska’ which was a unique initiative for energising workers during their tea breaks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Arranging talks with the company’s chief fitness officer who spoke with employees and their spouses periodically, alleviating fears, suggesting nutritional aspects to boost immunity, etc. ► Establishment of the services of a physical-fitness trainer which were made available, to employees, for viewing through You-tube, on a daily basis during the lockdown. 	<p>The focus on learning, of employees was enhanced, away from the in-person format to that of the online mode.</p> <p>Specific programmes included:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exercises (Zumba) 2. Meditation 3. COVID-19 pandemic awareness 4. Technical subjects 5. Emotional well-being

Provision of complete support to the employees for stretching themselves during the lockdown by:

1. End to end transport facility for commuting to work.
2. Food and stay facility in the factory premises.
3. Giving incentives – ‘hardship allowance’ for working during the lockdown.

As a mid to long term action point, in some organizations the COVID-19 pandemic experience was leveraged by building some of its elements into the “Organization Transformation” road-map for building a “Fit for Future” organization. Some of the above directional steps included:

Investment and adoption of technology.

- ▶ Collaboration tools, using IT, were extensively used by many respondent organizations. This enabled the organizations to respond more effectively to the sudden announcement of the National lockdown, in March 2020. This includes enhanced use of Zoom, WhatsApp call, MS Teams, WebEx, Tele-Presence (various online websites and apps for online conferences and communications).
- ▶ Transitioning to a virtual workspace, using higher speed Wi-Fi (wireless technology to connect devices to the internet).
- ▶ Provision of laptops and/or desktops.

Q.6.B: In your considered opinion, how effective were the above measures, on the scale provided below?

All respondent companies (100 per cent) answered in the affirmative and opined that the measures were highly effective. This indicated a tremendous resilience within the participating companies of devising, designing and deploying business-sustainability measures despite the lack of any experience in dealing with such a catastrophic epidemic.



Department head explaining covid appropriate behaviour on the first day of resuming duty post lockdown.

Q.6.C: Share examples, to support your response of Q.6.A and Q.6.B.

Some of the responses gathered are:

- ▶ One of the respondent organizations has been presented with the prestigious “SKOCH Order of Merit”, on 28 November 2020, at the 67th Virtual Summit. Project: “Managing emotions, enhancing motivation in times of COVID-19”. This award was in recognition (as their business is in essential commodities), of how the company effectively managed its workforce and production, ensuring safety and reliability during the pandemic challenge.
- ▶ Another respondent organization, shared that, by Quarter 3 (financial year 2020-21), they achieved 70 per cent of pre-COVID-19 outbreak top line revenue levels, with another ‘nil COVID-19 cases’ among its workforce.
- ▶ One organization was able to operate its factories during the pandemic period, from an early date/month.
- ▶ One company reported that the levels of employee morale remained high, despite rising COVID-19 cases (in the vicinity of the plant locations), and even after a few employees contracted the virus, there were no work stoppages or shut downs.

Respondent companies, quite naturally, found it challenging to let the whole world know that there would be no job losses. The pandemic was a crisis challenge, as its duration and when it would come to a manageable end, was still anyone’s call.

However it does mean, based on the Research Team’s conversations with the respondent organizations, that most of them chose not to trigger job losses.

Q.7: In ensuring that the workers/workforce were provided necessary training and skill development, what are the three most important initiatives that your company/business has taken/is taking? (Please specify the initiatives taken, from March 2020 to date):

The three most commonly cited initiatives, by the respondent organizations were:

-
1. Training for COVID-19 pandemic’s protocol, including ‘good manufacturing practices’ and ‘on-the-job training’ of the entire existing workforce (including contract workers) and newly appointed contract workers.
 - ▶ Increasing awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic among the workforce, prior to lockdown, as a proactive step. Attendees included the chairperson and managing director.
 - ▶ The COVID-19 prevention oath broadcast daily in the local language (PA System).
 2. Leveraging online training:
 - ▶ Digital training on the COVID-19 pandemic protocol to avoid infection.
 - ▶ Setting up of special computer rooms set in the technical training centres and kiosks on the shop floor (to enable workers/workmen to complete the training in the language of their choice).
 3. Focusing on emotional and holistic well-being of employees and families:
 - ▶ Encouraging positive habits for quarantine life (email series: From the very next day of lockdown).
 - ▶ Using online platform sessions to energize employees on a monthly basis: (“Role of different stakeholders in times of COVID”, “Kaun Rahega Corona Free?”, “Movement therapy”, etc.)
 - ▶ City round up: Sharing information of 200 + online talks on diverse topics (across India) with emphasis on health and well-being.
-

Q.8: In your assessment, what is/was the role that the union(s) – or worker groups, in the absence of the union – play in the planning of such measures? Specify three measures.

The three most commonly cited initiatives, by the respondent organizations were:

1. Active support of the union(s) in ensuring:

- ▶ No gathering of crowds
- ▶ Regular use of masks
- ▶ Regular hand wash and sanitization
- ▶ Changes made in lunch timing and menus in the canteen
- ▶ Cohorts formed for alternate week working
- ▶ Employees counselled for doing RAPID test and RT PCR test.
- ▶ Personal role modelling by union workers and workers in agreeing to wear masks in the bus and use sanitizers.

2. Active participation in the planning, execution of the COVID-19 pandemic response measures, and in some cases even initiation, e.g. when an organization wanted to set up a transportation facility for its workforce (pre-COVID-19 pandemic, all employees used public transport), the union members played a key role in ensuring employee safety, route planning and cost optimization, etc.

3. Beyond the boundaries of the organization:

- ▶ Support to the management to reach out to housing societies and unlock them for ensuring business continuity.
 - ▶ Contribution of suggestions, as to how to maintain a fine balance between employee health and business continuity.
-

Q.9: In your assessment, what is the role that the union(s) – or worker groups, in absence of the union – play in implementing/ supporting the measures, taken by the company/business? Specify with three examples.

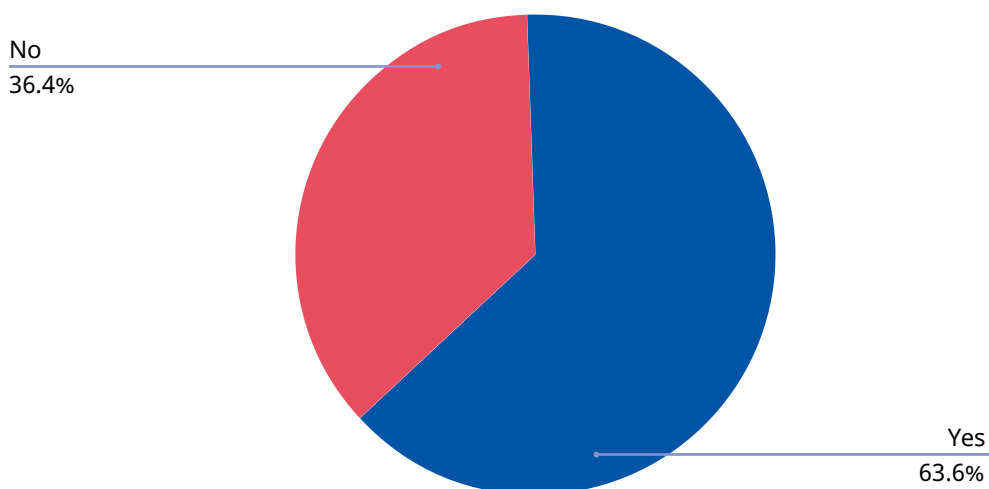
1. Proactive behaviour, e.g.: identifying if any co-workers attended any social gathering to avoid the spread of COVID-19.
2. New behaviour/practice during the COVID-19 pandemic:
 - ▶ Differently-abled workforce granted full time leave.
 - ▶ Union elections were conducted on an online platform for the first time in the history of the company.
3. Participation in the COVID-19 prevention initiatives and their implementations:
 - ▶ Key driver as a mediator for effective implementation at the shop floor level.
 - ▶ Facilitating regular attendance by workers, to ensure smooth plant operations.



Indigenous disinfectant spraying and fumigation was carried out across the entire GSFCL premises including the Township on a frequent basis.

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Q.10: Did your company/business set-up any special management-worker collaborative platforms/mechanisms (or the like) to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?



Sixty-four per cent of the respondent companies answered affirmatively to the above.

Earlier in the report, (Q.4), about 27 per cent respondent organizations had mentioned that they did not have an operational works committee (as under the ID Act).

If the above is true, then 9 per cent (36 per cent minus 27 per cent) respondent organizations had neither an operational works committee nor a special management-worker collaborative platform, put together for dealing with the pandemic or its impacts.

Q.11: If response to Q.10 is yes, please provide details of the same (including its mandate, composition, process to appoint worker representatives, support provided by management to ensure the effective functioning of the mechanisms and so on)

1. Prior to implementing any measures, office bearers of all the unions or groups of the workers (in the absence of union) were taken into confidence and suggestions invited. If any COVID-19 case was identified, the above-mentioned groups were well informed.
2. Plant-wise task forces, comprising workers and management, formed.
 - ▶ COVID-19 Inspection and Adherence Team (CIAT), consisting of all HODs and representatives from different departments.
 - ▶ A COVID-19 pandemic response task force, and a daily COVID-19 update report tracker.
 - ▶ Task force team consisting of management representatives and union representatives for working together to combat the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Targeted measures based on job function and 'risk profile' instead of a blanket shutdown taken.
 - ▶ Installation of artificial intelligence-based systems within the plant for maintaining social distance and mask compliance.
 - ▶ The COVID-19 task forces closely monitored by the MD, ED, COO and CHRO.

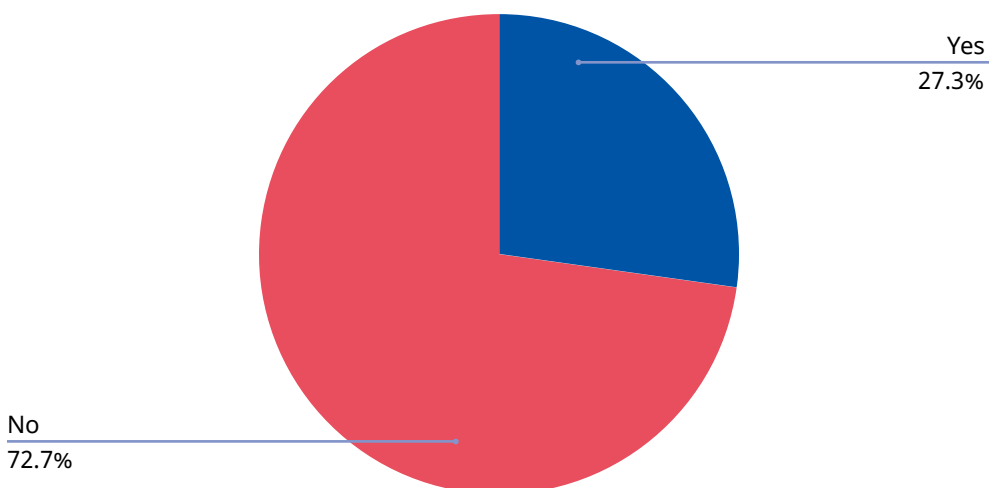


Members from the safety team visited each department/plant area and conducted an Awareness Talk with employees, emphasizing the importance of personal immunity and usage of masks and sanitizers.

Q.12: Who (if applicable, more than one person), from the management group, led the development and implementation of the above measures, as a response to the pandemic outbreak?

1. Core committee at the corporate office and the local committee led by the respective factory managers, including union committee members.
 - ▶ Plant heads, HR heads and the mfg. head (senior vice-president).
 - ▶ Team of BU head, chief human resources officer, plant head,
 - ▶ Location HR head, maintenance manager and production head.
2. CMD, head of safety, security, medical services, general administration department (GAD), canteen and head of operations.
3. The COVID-19 task force (TF) headed by the IR head. This task force was given certain financial authority as well.
 - ▶ The TF consisted of a representation from the medical team, security and safety, HR, administration, production, and finance teams, including union committee members.
 - ▶ The task force was led by the HR services head.
4. The executive committee, led by the vice-chairperson and supported by the respective COOs, plant heads, CHROs, site HR managers, and plant operation teams and SHE teams.

Q.13: Did your company engage in a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) as part of its COVID-19 pandemic response?



A total of 27.3 per cent of the respondent companies answered affirmatively to the above.

The insight from the above, is that India Inc. is maturing, over the last many decades, when collective bargaining is not viewed through the lens of a 'once in three/four years, long term settlement (LTS) event'. The workforce representatives were able to: 'participate, own the challenges (due to the pandemic) and contribute to problem resolution'. It means that the union and/or its worker representatives, chose not to adopt we versus they approach, while engaging with management, for addressing and resolving different issues concerning workers and ensuring business continuity. (72 per cent of the respondent organizations opined that they did not have to use 'bargaining', while discussing challenges and finding solutions that involved/affected workers/workmen.)

Q.14: Did any of the counter-pandemic measures taken by the company get hindered by the existing/‘then existing’ regulatory environment?

The entire 100 per cent of the respondent companies answered in the negative.

As observed earlier in our report, the unique context of the pandemic, mirrored a ‘warlike catastrophe’ befalling not only India, but the globe. Hence, the wellspring of ideas from different stakeholders: industry, employees, government, medical forces, unions; seemed to have been driven by ‘collaborative structures’, keeping aside other matters of dispute/ conflict.



Head of HR providing COVID-19 awareness guidance on the factory shop floor.

© L&T Electrical & Automation

► Impact assessment of measures against the COVID-19 pandemic

Q.15: In your considered judgment, how effective have been your company's COVID-19 pandemic response measures?

In line with the trend of responses to the earlier questions, 100 per cent of the respondent companies affirmed that their respective company's COVID-19 pandemic responses were 'highly effective'.

The top six reasons, cited by most of the respondent organizations are shared below:

-
- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Maintained the continuity of production and continued supply to the market effectively. | 2. No work stoppage in any plant, no shut-downs, smooth ramp ups and workers satisfaction scored. |
|--|---|
-
- | | |
|---|--|
| 3. Very few positive cases (~3 per cent of total employees) were registered among the employees from the plant. | 4. Except for few weeks, all factories ran uninterruptedly: <ul style="list-style-type: none">► None of the workers made excuses/complained about working during the lockdown.► In pulse surveys conducted during the pandemic; employees gave a satisfaction score of >90 per cent for the measures put in place by the organization. |
|---|--|
-
- | | |
|--|---|
| 5. Stand out performance acclaimed by the Government of India, that cited the example of one of the respondent organizations, as being worthy of emulation in terms of the Atma Nirbhar**** achievement: The Prime Minister of India's overarching theme for the country and its citizens, towards becoming more 'self-reliant'. | 6. One of the surveys' participating companies has reported that against the average attrition of 5 per cent in FY'20, the average attrition during FY'21 and till date was less than 2 per cent, which shows that the COVID-19 pandemic response measures were very effective. |
|--|---|
-

Q.16: What are the top three lessons learnt by the respondent organizations, while developing and implementing the COVID-19 pandemic response measures?

The top six lessons, cited by most respondent organizations are shared below:

-
- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Collaborative working, prompt response and addressing the challenge(s) with sympathy. | 2. Small but meaningful first steps of caring, went a long way in strengthening relationships between the union(s), workforce and the management. The family metaphor meant that all affected stakeholders, cared for each other and in a sense, the organizations became a "ONE UNITED FORCE", to combat the challenges posed by the pandemic. |
|--|---|
-
- | | |
|--|--|
| 3. Sharing is one of the most important values that bring happiness to life and the key to developing and nurturing human relationships. | 4. Employees are now understanding their responsibilities, by following the guidelines, contributing to the same becoming a part of the new lifestyle. |
|--|--|
-

****Atma Nirbhar is in reference to Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, which is the mission started by the Government of India on 13th May 2020, towards making India self-reliant.

-
5. Focusing on employee wellness.
 - ▶ Union and management can jointly face any problem.
 - ▶ Many jobs can be performed, without having any physical interaction.
 6. Prompt initiatives by the senior leadership sent out the message that they truly cared for their employee's health and well-being.
-

Leaders and HR teams had to be innovative and flexible in supporting the employees during the pandemic.

Q.17: Can you provide three examples of measures, taken by the management (and/or jointly by workers and management), that have/continues to have positive gains for the company/business and its workers/workmen?

The top five most common examples cited by most respondent companies were:

-
1. Emphasis on adopting and inculcating new normal practices, side by side with deploying business as usual practices.
 2. Staggered shifts which have the potential for sustaining higher productivity.
 3. The existence of a higher level of trust in the relationship, between management, unions and the workforce, enabled better collaboration, to protect each other and reduce the negative impact of the pandemic. This led to the enviable result of zero stoppages in any manufacturing/related operations in all the respondent organizations, with help from the union's actions and/or actions of the workforce.
 4. Movement on the adoption of digital platforms:
 - ▶ Union management meetings taking place through the virtual mode.
 - ▶ Engagement surveys for workers done via Google (an online software website) forms (higher levels of anonymity).
 - ▶ Online training programmes.
 - ▶ Extending virtuality into other practices, i.e. meetings, customer visits, audits, etc.
 5. Support to the communities around the factories during the pandemic with emphasis on mental health.
-

Q.18: What are the top five lessons learned from the development and implementation of your company's COVID-19 response measures?

The top five lessons, cited by most respondent companies:

1. Health, safety and social distancing awareness:
 - ▶ Learning lessons in wellness and hygiene.
 - ▶ Maintaining food quality — many initiatives were taken by management, along with union representatives and/or workforce representatives in developing a food menu that could be served in the canteen at the workplace. This was necessitated because of supply chain breaks (items that were normally consumed, pre-pandemic period), while at the same time ensuring the right nutritional requirements.
 - ▶ Maintaining work-life balance, including adjustment to extended shift hours.
 - ▶ Learning the need to boost the immunity system.

2. Effective utilization of digital platforms:
 - ▶ Investing more in technology.
 - ▶ Increasing number of virtual meetings (audits and audit meetings, PSRM training, consultant/visitors).
 - ▶ Communication meets with employees.
3. Generating commitment to the organization:
 - ▶ Sincere approach to correct oneself and other stakeholders.
 - ▶ Significance and importance of regular sharing of relevant information.
4. Risk mitigation through contingency planning ('What if scenarios?'): Plan B, in addition to Plan A.
5. Coordination and collaboration among all stakeholders.

Q 19: Can you provide three examples of initiatives taken by management and/or jointly by workers and management, that have resulted in positive gains to the enterprise and the workers?

The four most common initiatives, cited by most respondent organizations:

1. Enhanced focus on employee health and strengthening interpersonal relations:
 - ▶ Promote healthy work-life balance.
 - ▶ Promote team work and communication, towards improvement in 'inspire and reward' and 'promote and open dialogue'.
2. Focus on macro and micro, supported by effective communication:
 - ▶ Creating awareness among all staff and workers by management and union team jointly.
 - ▶ Timely and effective communication.
 - ▶ Timely changes of work practices.
 - ▶ Implementation of plans, involving many stakeholders.
 - ▶ More than the initiation of diversification strategies, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, it was the depth and width of the existing product/SBU portfolio, that proved to be the saviour for most of the respondent organizations.
 - ▶ Some of the respondent organizations had to rejig their supply chain architecture, including re-sequencing, from 'manufacturing to dealer to consumer' to an altogether different flow of 'manufacturing to consumer/customer's office/home location'.
3. Systems, methods and process improvements:
 - ▶ Realigning of locker rooms of workers with restricted entry time.
 - ▶ Distribution of breakfast and lunch in the canteen.
 - ▶ Planning canteen menus as per the advice of medical team.
 - ▶ Instant reporting of instances if self or any family member was found with symptoms of COVID-19.
 - ▶ Framing of internal guidelines/SOP for employees.
 - ▶ Limiting the canteen menu.
 - ▶ Avoiding crowding and encouraging quick dispersion.

4. Going beyond the boundaries of the organization:

- ▶ Factory campus school was converted into a hospital to take care of COVID-19 cases.
- ▶ No deduction of wages of contractual workers, (either by the company or by the contractor).
- ▶ Disbursed valuable Hypo Chloride disinfected produce, to 41 nearby villages and 3 district centres (to enable the arrest of the COVID-19 spread).



Awareness Talk with Canteen Contract Workers emphasizing on social distancing and increased personal hygiene.

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Q.20: (Optional) In your considered opinion, are you expecting changes in the directions of how industry relations/employee relations would unfold, going forward from January 2021?

About a quarter of the respondent companies answered.

The essence of their perspective of the future is:

1. Changes in the directions of how industry relations/employee relations would unfold going forward in the coming times. The post-COVID-19 pandemic phase has built confidence in workers that they will not be left unsupported in difficult times.
2. Challenges of manufacturing organizations, which have a requirement to run 24/7, while ensuring safety, health and medical insurance coverage, building immunity among employees and their vaccination.

3. Contingency planning, based on alternative scenarios, for, if and when a large number of employees get infected, ability to move employees from other departments and deploy them in the severely critical operations.
4. The current 'mental maps' of what a workplace is, will drastically change, arising from the learning of the pandemic period. The implication therefore would be that the 'appetite' for online work models/hybrid options, will increase significantly.
5. The workforce in India, especially in non-manufacturing set-ups, is likely to embrace new hybrid work models; some working from the physical office, others working from home while the remaining employees would possibly be placed on a revolving roster.
6. The employee relations function will need to be reimagined and reinvented, in the new distributed work model, mentioned in point 4 and 5.
7. New challenges for managers and senior leadership would entail, how to engage individual employees (one at a time) to ensure performance, progress and productivity. Remote working likely to become a serious choice (even beyond the pandemic) for work and cost optimization, the 'lens of blue collar/white collar/pink collar' might have to give way to 'jobs that can be done in remote mode and those roles for which on site is a must'. Within this job architecture, the Research Team visualizes increasing deployment of FTE's, apprentices, gigs, freelancers, contingent work force, foreign visitors, interns and suchlike.

► Closing and concluding remarks

The Research Team would like to share the following learning lessons, for reflection and action, going forward:

1. For the first time, 'livelihood' became the central issue in the relationship between the workforce and the management/managers/other stakeholders. This added another dimension to the existing mental models of the employee-employer relationship and the resultant quality of ER and/or IR. The need for the workforce to have good health, eat the right food, exercise and so on, along with the requisite physical health regimen, has to be re-imagined.
2. It also means that there is a 'life beyond a job', in this sense, the Research Team expects higher levels of flexibility in the work-leisure timings/number of hours and suchlike.
3. Increasing focus on preventive mental health, including curative responses.
4. It was amply demonstrated, that when the organization (and the country too) was going through this never-before crisis, the union leadership, rank and file of workers closed ranks with management to unitedly face the implications and move forward. This experience would have a salutary effect on how the actors in the IR/ER system, will perceive each other, going forward too.
5. It is heartening also to note that the respondent organizations were able to move with speed, agility and empathy in initiating and executing multiple strategies across the value chain and the stakeholder system. This 'untested strength' could now become an asset for the organization and the workforce, to look into the challenges of today and tomorrow.
6. Both employers and workers have realized the need to be self-reliant and initiate actions, independent of government support. Industry going out of its way to support society with distribution of masks, sanitizers, medical oxygen, food packets and so on, to migrant workers, are a few examples.
7. Last but not at least, workforce wellness and their well-being has come under the spotlight. This augurs well for everybody. A healthy workforce is closely linked to raising levels of productivity and innovation. Health will also be viewed as an important facet of the risk assessment and mitigation strategies of organizations.



Social distancing norm strictly followed by employees at the time of reporting duty at the workplace.

► Appendix: Blank questionnaire

Questionnaire

Purpose of the questionnaire

Globally, businesses have been placed under enormous strain and uncertainty because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Enterprises in India have also been deeply affected. A full recovery from this crisis will require the joint efforts of management and workers, working in partnership to identify and implement solutions to return businesses to productivity.

A crisis always opens opportunities to unite. It has afforded an opportunity for workers and employers to work together to protect jobs and enterprises.

The ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team for South Asia and Country Office for India has decided to embark on a study to find out the initiatives that enterprises have taken together with employees, to safeguard jobs and sustain businesses.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify good practices, at the workplace level, aimed at addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These good practices would be in the areas of:

- i. Management practices to promote harmonious employee relations, in order to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.
- ii. Partnership efforts by management and workers (including unions where these exist) to jointly address the impacts of the crisis.

The questionnaire also aims to identify the impacts of these good practices, in the areas of:

- i. Improving management-worker relations through, for example, putting in place grievance-redressal mechanisms, workplace-cooperation mechanisms, collective bargaining and so on.
- ii. Supporting the business to safely and efficiently return to operations.
- iii. Supporting the business to return to productivity and profitability.

The questions below are focused on obtaining this information. Comprehensive responses to the questions are greatly appreciated.

A. General information

NAME OF RESPONDENT:

POSITION/JOB TITLE:

NAME OF ORGANIZATION:

(Public Limited/Private/PSU/Indian MNC/Foreign MNC/Cooperative Society/Not for Profit/Others — mention)

SECTOR:

(Agriculture and allied industries, automobiles, auto components, aviation, banking, cement, consumer durables, e-commerce, education and training, engineering and capital goods, financial services, FMCG, gems and jewellery, healthcare, infrastructure, insurance, IT and ITES, manufacturing, media and entertainment, metals and mining, oil and gas, pharmaceuticals, sports, power, railways, real estate, renewable energy, retail, roads, science and technology, services, steel, telecommunications, textiles, tourism and hospitality, others — mention)

TOTAL EMPLOYEE STRENGTH:

1. Permanent:

2. Contract:

3. Temporary (Apprentice, etc.):

EMAIL OF RESPONDENT:

B. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

1.A. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your business(es)?

1.B. In your considered opinion, what was the level of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on your business(es)?

1: Significant impact 2: Moderate impact 3: Little impact 4: No impact at all

2.A. Did the pandemic necessitate your company, to implement any workforce restructuring (including lay-offs, retrenchments, closures, wage reductions, freezing of increments, and/or other similar measures)? Specify details.

2.B. If the answer to 2.A is Yes, how did the company/business communicate such decisions to the involved workers/workmen?

3.A. Does your company/business have an effective grievance-redressal system that enables, captures, measures, tracks and resolves the same? Could you specify the existing systems for the same?

(If your response to 3.A is affirmative then please respond to 3.B.)

3.B: In your considered opinion, how effective was the grievance-redressal system, during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1: Highly effective 2: Moderately effective 3: Little effective 4: Not at all effective

4. Do you have an operational works committee in place as per the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947?

Yes/No (If Yes or No, please elaborate with two reasons.)

5. Is there a registered union operating in your company/business? Is there a recognized union or are there more than one? Is the union externally led or is it internally led?

C. Measures taken to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic:

6.A. What specific measures (short term: 0-1 year, medium term: 1-3 years and long term: 3 years or more) did your company/business put in place to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to safeguard the workers/workmen and their jobs?

6.B. In your considered opinion, how effective were the above measures, on the scale provided below?

1: Highly effective 2: Moderately effective 3: Little effective 4: Not at all effective

6.C. Please provide examples to support the level of effectiveness stated in the previous question.

7. In ensuring that the workers/workforce were provided the necessary training and skill development, what are the three most important initiatives that your company/business has taken/is taking? (Please specify the initiatives taken, from March 2020 to date.)

8. In your assessment, what is/was the role that the union(s) — or worker groups, in the absence of a union — play in the planning of such measures? Specify three measures.

9. In your assessment, what is the role that the union(s) - or worker groups, in the absence of a union — play in implementing/supporting the measures, taken by the company/business? Specify three examples.

10. Did your company/business set up any special management-worker collaborative platforms/mechanisms (or similar ones) to deal with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Yes/No

11. If response to Q.10 is yes, please provide details of the same (including its mandate, composition, process to appoint worker representatives, support provided by management to ensure the effective functioning of the mechanisms, and so on).

12. Who (if applicable, more than one person), from the management group, led the development and implementation of the above measures, as a response to the pandemic's outbreak?

13. Did your company engage in collective bargaining as part of its COVID-19 pandemic response?

Yes/No

14. Did any of the counter-pandemic measures taken by the company get hindered by the existing/'then existing' regulatory environment?

Yes/No

(If Yes or No), please provide details :

D. Impact assessment of measures taken against the COVID-19 pandemic

15. In your considered judgment, how effective have your company's COVID-19 pandemic response measures been?

1: Highly effective 2: Moderately effective 3: Little effective 4: Not at all effective

Specify 2-3 quantitative and/or qualitative reasons.

16. What are the top three lessons learnt from the development and implementation of your company's COVID-19 pandemic response measures?

17. Can you provide three examples of measures, taken by the management (and/or jointly by workers and management) that have/continues to have, positive gains for the company/business and its workers/workmen?

Optional question:

1. In your considered opinion, are you expecting changes in the directions of how industry relations/employee relations would unfold going forward January 2021?

► Acknowledgements

Participant organization	Contributors
Bennett Coleman & Company Limited	Mr Alok Ranjan and Mr Amit Kochrekar
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Gujarat State Fertilizers & Chemicals Limited (GFSCCL)	Mr S. H. Purohit and Ms Neha Wadhvani
Godrej Agrovet Limited	Mr Salil Chinchore
Larsen & Toubro Limited (Powai)	Mr Suhas Ghatwai and Mr Prashant Patil
Piramal Glass Private Limited	Mr Vidyanand Joshi with Mr Rajeev Yadav, Mr Bharatsingh Parmar and Dr Sachin Lal
L&T Electrical & Automation	Mr Santosh Deshpande
Tata Chemicals Limited	Mr R. Nanda with Mr SP Vithalani, Mr Priteshparbat Goswami, Mr Janardan Singane and Mr Manoj Nair
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UDAY GHADGE



CHAHAT SURANA

Annex 2

▶ Good employee relation practices in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learnt:

India

▶ Contents

1. Introduction	59
2. Overview of surveyed enterprises	60
3. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on surveyed enterprises	62
4. Mitigation and recovery measures against the COVID-19 outbreak	63
5. Role of management and union in the COVID-19 mitigating measures	66
6. Impact of mitigation measures	67
7. Key lessons learnt	68
8. Conclusion	69

Enterprises surveyed	
1	FCC Clutch India Pvt. Ltd
2	Greaves Cotton Ltd
3	Hindalco Industries Ltd
4	JK Lakshmi Cement
5	Lucas TVS
6	Minda Group
7	NLC India Ltd
8	Orient Electric Ltd
9	Simpson & Co. Ltd
10	Windsor Machine Ltd

▶ Introduction

This study is aimed at understanding the progressive industrial relation practices that were adopted in order to respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. The study involved gathering data from ten enterprises from diverse sectors and with varied workforce demographics. This draft report highlights the sample characteristics and the highlights with regard to counter-pandemic measures taken.

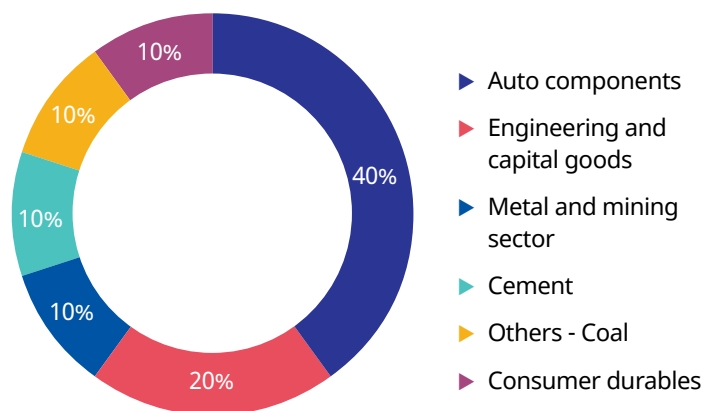
▶ Overview of surveyed enterprises

A diverse cross-section of manufacturing units was selected for data collection through a stratified and random sampling method. The data collection tools used in the process were — a structured questionnaire and scheduled interviews. Below is an overview of the sample characteristics:

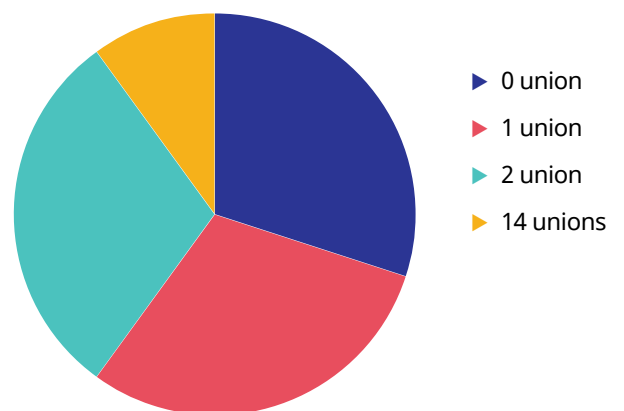
Overview of surveyed enterprises

Sample size= 10

▶ Sector representation of sample



▶ Unionization representation of sample



Workforce strength

No.	Category	No. of companies
1	1-1000	3
2	1000-2000	3
3	2000-5000	2
4	5000 and above	2

- ▶ Highest sample representation from the auto components sector.
- ▶ 70 per cent of the sample enterprises were unionized.
- ▶ Sample enterprises selected from varied workforce- strength ranges.
- ▶ All enterprises had a grievance-redressal system in place.
- ▶ 5 of the sample enterprises had works committees in place.
- ▶ 6 enterprises had internally led unions while 1 enterprise had an externally led union.
- ▶ 2 enterprises had carried out collective bargaining during the pandemic period.

The enterprises covered in the study were located in locations from all across India and since they represent a wide variety with respect to the workforce and union demographics, the study was able to capture a vast array of measures taken against the COVID-19 outbreak.

All enterprises had grievance-redressal mechanisms consisting of various methods — *online portals, grievance-redressal committees, plant inspections, management-union committees, open-door policies, ER/HR helpdesk/kiosks, issue-based stakeholder meetings and works committees.*

As reported, the most impactful mechanisms in handling the pandemic's impact have been — online communication forums, issue-based stakeholder meetings and management-worker committees. The issue-based stakeholder meetings consisted of periodic meetings with unions, government officials, village representatives and suchlike. These forums helped in the seamless exchange of information among the various stakeholders (employees, workers, family members, nearby village residents and others); which further led to the enhanced awareness regarding the government COVID-19 regulations, company guidelines, prevention methods, containment zone notifications and so on.

▶ Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the surveyed enterprises

The surveyed enterprises faced several challenges due to the pandemic. The initial period of lockdown (mid-March to May, 2020) has been reported to have caused the highest revenue and productivity losses in the enterprises surveyed. The various reasons reported to have caused economic difficulties for the enterprises are —

- ▶ Low volumes in market demand.
- ▶ Restricted domestic and internal movement of goods, labour and services.
- ▶ Exodus of the migrant workers causing manpower shortage in factories.
- ▶ Differential demands across product categories requiring production re-planning.
- ▶ Government restrictions on labour deployment (working hours, wage relaxations and the like) and factory operations.
- ▶ Very slow demand pick-up after the lockdown period.
- ▶ Financial liquidity issues with customers, causing a decline in sales and overall revenues.
- ▶ Increased fears among investors, customers, suppliers and employees.
- ▶ Reduced realization of dues, negatively impacting cash flow.
- ▶ High inventory costs.
- ▶ Extra costs of the COVID-19 prevention measures.
- ▶ Decisions that some enterprises were forced to take on freezing increments, suspending recruitment, salary deduction among others.

Due to revenue losses and lack of visibility of business revival chances in the immediate future, half of the enterprises surveyed, had frozen the increments of their employees for the year 2019-20. Most of the companies refrained from deducting the salaries/wages of their employees/workers. However, a few of the companies surveyed either paid salaries in parts or just made pay cuts for a limited period around the lockdown phase, and that only for the top management cadre.

None of the companies surveyed had made any changes to the amount and the disbursement manner of wages for workers. Select companies had paid salaries in parts or made pay cuts for a limited period, only for the top management cadre, around the lockdown phase.

Most of the enterprises avoided lay-offs, retrenchments or dismissals, but some of the worst-hit enterprises surveyed (30 per cent) had laid off temporary workers and a low percentage of supervisory or management cadre employees.

Hindalco Industries Ltd stood out as an outlier by engaging in no lay-offs, no retrenchments, no closures or wage reductions of workers, or of the supervisory- and management-cadre employees. The company on the other hand paid a one-time ex-gratia payment to all the workers who worked during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as a goodwill gesture. The company took the decision in line with its organizational ethos of appreciating workers who strived to ensure the safety and sustainability of the organization during the challenging pandemic phase.

▶ Mitigation and recovery measures against the COVID-19 outbreak

All the enterprises adopted measures categorized as below:

Formation of COVID-19 taskforce committees

All the enterprises surveyed had formed committees or groups for monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic situation and took decisions with regard to the COVID-19 safety precautions, factory operations, supply of essential items and the like. The groups were named as — Covid Response Team (CRT), Emergency Response Team (ERT) and so on. All the enterprises surveyed had these task force groups/committees that comprised of only management cadre employees and union members/worker group representatives. The COVID-19 committees in all enterprises were chaired by plant/unit heads, and in select cases, by the business heads. The committees had been working in close coordination with the union members, whose main role was to — help in dissemination of information and in implementation of the decisions, as well as provide feedback. As reported, in all enterprises, the committees used to hold meetings more frequently at the onset of pandemic, although that decreased as the situation improved. In all cases, the committees were responsible for — analysing the COVID-19 pandemic situation, monitoring government regulations/circulars, framing company COVID-19 guidelines (related to travel, quarantine, testing, work rules and so on) and implementing decisions through stakeholder collaboration.

For all of the unionized enterprises, the committees consisted of representatives from both management and unions. In the case of non-unionized enterprises, the committees either consisted of only the management personnel representing multiple levels, or, had a mix of management and worker representatives. There was a higher frequency of the former rather than the latter.

The committees used to formulate COVID-19 pandemic guidelines and SOPs (standard operating procedures) which were reviewed periodically. The guidelines included instructions related to quarantine, social distancing and sanitizing norms, supply of essentials, protocols on visitors and travellers and suchlike. The frequency of COVID-19 pandemic committee meetings reduced with time due to the longer applicability of released company norms and guidelines as the pandemic situation was improving with time.

Adopting the protocols of social distancing, protective gear and sanitizing facilities

All the enterprises had designed COVID-19 guidelines or protocols which were deliberated upon and framed by the COVID-19 task force teams/committees in these units. The guidelines included clauses related to temperature checks, enforcement of mandatory mask-wearing, restrictions on gatherings, regular sanitization of the plant and residential colony, home-delivery of essential items in the plant's residential colony and so on. The enterprises had also invested in ramping up the plant premises with sanitizer and hand-wash dispenser facilities as well as isolating work spaces with the help of painted demarcations, poly-sheets and suchlike. Three of the units also modified their canteen timings to avoid crowding.

Establishing and leveraging strong communication channels

All the enterprises stressed on the important role that effective communication played in taking collaborative decisions, spreading awareness among people, dealing with queries/grievances, notifying on latest revisions in the COVID-19 protocols and the like.

The most frequent modes of communications used by the enterprises were — emails, use of Whatsapp (web-based application used for communication) groups, curated videos, online meetings, online awareness sessions, conference phone calls and notices and posters.

All the enterprises surveyed had grievances-/queries-/doubts-redressal mechanisms in place and 60 per cent of the enterprises reported that their grievance-handling systems were *'highly effective'* during the pandemic. The rest, 40 per cent of the respondent enterprises reported that their grievance-addressing systems were *'moderately effective'*. As reported, in the early phase of the pandemic, it was difficult to conduct online meetings with worker representatives/union members, as they had to adapt to handling the technology. Also, it took the plant teams time to adapt to the new non-physical way of working and handling situations. The redressal mechanisms included various formats and policies — *online portals, grievance-redressal committees, plant inspections, worker-union committees, open door policies, ER/HR helpdesk/kiosks, issue-based stakeholder meetings and works committees*. The grievance-redressal committees and management-union meetings have been found to be the most common systems in place in the surveyed enterprises.

Creating awareness and wellness programmes

The enterprises under study have proactively engaged in organizing awareness and wellness programmes during the pandemic, mostly through the online modes. The management team along with the help of unit hospital's medical professionals/external vendors/external medical professionals had organized such sessions in all the surveyed enterprises. The works committees and unions had only an advisory and supportive role in organizing the mentioned programmes. The worker representatives provided inputs or feedback to the management team for programme topics as well as with disseminating information regarding the programme, all the while motivating workers to attend the same. The sessions were conducted through online modes such as videos, online-managed competitions and conference meetings. The most common themes of such sessions as reported by organizations were — COVID-19 awareness, breaking the myths related to COVID-19 and motivational and spiritual sessions.

A few enterprises also engaged in spreading awareness in the nearby villages around the plant by distributing masks, sanitizers and soaps.

Testing – tracing – isolating

The enterprises surveyed had either organized coronavirus testing camps or had facilitated smooth testing of their employees in nearby hospitals. All the enterprises had planned for quarantine facilities and a few had even planned for staying facilities for contract labour coming from other places.

As reported, the enterprises had been actively testing, tracing and isolating symptomatic or COVID-19 positive patients, throughout the pandemic phase.

Adopting hybrid work models

All the enterprises had adopted hybrid work models. They were allowing some employees to work-from-home, that is, employees in support functions like IT, finance, HR, procurement and others. For workers on the shop-floor, staggered shifts had been planned to minimize physical contact and crowding. In one of the companies, employees with comorbidities and physical disabilities were specifically given, only the work-from-home option, irrespective of their work function.

A mix of various work arrangements devised in all the enterprises, played a key role in maintaining desired productivity levels while also curbing the spread of COVID-19, by preventing crowding situations. In all enterprises, the work-from-home arrangement was applicable only for the support-function staff and hence, there was no impact on productivity due to remote working. Also, in all the factories, working from home was allowed only from the factory's residential area or nearby locations.

One of companies (JK Lakshmi Cement) reportedly faced a shortage of labour due to the country-wide mass exodus of workers. The concerned factory was able to arrange for labour from local areas with the support of union members and local leaders.

Leveraging technology for ensuring business continuity

All the enterprises reported that their workforce was able to quickly adapt to technology-supported mediums of working like; online meetings, tech-supported team work, online training and others. The enterprises unilaterally credited technological intervention to have played a major role in preventing disruption to day-to-day operations and business continuity. The enterprises also used online mediums to conduct online trainings related to — technical training, kaizen training, behavioural training, mentorship initiatives, knowledge-sharing sessions and suchlike.

► Role of management and unions in COVID-19 pandemic mitigating measures

Collaboration in planning

In the unionized enterprises, the management and union representatives were part of the COVID-19 taskforce teams which jointly discussed and decided on matters related to: precautionary restrictions, safety protocols, plans for continuing day-to-day plant operations, steps to curb fears of workers/employees, quarantine and testing instructions, travel advisories, contact tracing efficiency and such like. In non-unionized enterprises, the worker groups played a similar role but this collaboration was more predominant in the implementation phase.

The management collaborated with worker representatives and facilitated the implementation phase through periodic discussions, providing necessary resources (pamphlets, company guidelines in local language, government circulars and suchlike); and gaining feedback on the impact of its implementation.

Collaboration for implementation

Unions played a vital role in ensuring effective communication with workers through constant interactions with them. In unionized setups, management relied heavily on unions for ensuring increased awareness and precautionary behaviour among workers. Two of the surveyed enterprises also engaged in collective bargaining during this phase and as reported, unions have been cooperative in the process.

Synergy through constant feedback

Unions/worker groups and management have been reported to be in good synergy by providing each other with feedback from various sources. Feedback from workers helped management to modify their policies and their problem-solving approach; while feedback from the management helped unions/worker groups in motivating workers during the challenging times. The feedback was shared and collected through the verbal mode facilitated through telephonic calls and online meetings.

Welfare measures

The surveyed units organized a range of welfare measures for their employees such as — online awareness sessions with medical professionals, online medication and yoga classes, sessions on 'busting COVID myths', sessions with COVID-19 affected and recovered employees, among others.

▶ Impact of mitigation measures

Ninety per cent of the enterprises surveyed believe that the counter-pandemic measures adopted by them had been 'highly effective'. The mitigation measures have had the following impacts:

- ▶ Low count of COVID-19 positive cases and its controlled spread.
- ▶ No dire need for retrenchments/lay-offs or major pay cuts.
- ▶ Low COVID-19 positivity rate.
- ▶ Continued social distancing and sanitizing protocols followed in the plant.
- ▶ Negligible hindrance to plant productivity and day-to-day operations.
- ▶ Increased awareness among employees and their families about health and hygiene.
- ▶ Increased trust between unions and management.
- ▶ Goodwill in the nearby villages due to the COVID-19 disease awareness drives.

▶ Key lessons learnt

With the experience of handling ambiguous and tough pandemic situations, the enterprises reported to have gained the lessons below:

- ▶ Clear and timely communication plays a vital role in a crisis.
- ▶ Formation of dedicated teams for handling difficult situations is very effective.
- ▶ The spreading of awareness is important to allay fears and motivate people.
- ▶ Innovation in challenging times (WFH [work from home], work flexibility, online meetings and trainings, utilizing inherent talent exposed of employees and others) is crucial.
- ▶ Leveraging resources for maximum impact is vital. For instance, during the pandemic, employees learnt to leverage technology-supported mediums to maintain productivity levels and the necessary infrastructure facilities were ramped up for quarantine purposes.
- ▶ Maintaining an emotional connect with employees during times of crisis is important. This involved connecting with COVID-19 positive patients through telephonic calls, helping distressed employees through resource mobilization and personal involvement and others.
- ▶ The need to develop high adaptability and a proactive approach in the employees are important.

► Conclusion

With 80 per cent of the surveyed enterprises considering their businesses to have been at least 'moderately impacted' by the pandemic, it can be concluded that unions/worker groups and management displayed good collaboration in deliberating on changing in the COVID-19 pandemic scenario for better planning and implementation of counter-pandemic measures. A wide range of measures were taken against the COVID-19 outbreak and as reported, they have proved to be very effective in maintaining business continuity. In this phase, while relying and leveraging on existing systems and resources, the enterprises also innovated new ways of working and collaborating. Since work in the physical workplace has been a conventional work norm for factory setups in India; during the pandemic, remote working and using digital platforms for collaboration, redefined working norms in all the enterprises surveyed.

With such huge leaps in the field of industrial relations, enterprises envisaged higher automation levels in factories and more liberal government regulations in future. It is also expected that the focus of management will shift from skilling to multi-skilling in the near future. With the increased dynamic nature of work along with the fast-paced innovations in production technologies and changing business needs, a multi-skilled workforce on shop-floors would be required in the coming future. The involvement of industries with local communities is expected to increase considering the important role that they play in co-handling crisis situations. Lastly, the ER of the future is expected to be even more involved in trust building and empathizing with workers.

The "**Good employee relation practices in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learnt: India**" report examines the good labour relation practices that were implemented by enterprises in India, to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The report is based on the survey and research carried out by the Employers' Federation of India (EFI) and the All India Organisation of Employers (AIOE).

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