

## How Instrumental is Organizational Agility Toward Sustainable Human Resource Management During the VUCA Situation?

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**Abstract.** *The COVID-19 pandemic caused volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), and has created an unprecedented change for all organizations to either evolved or seized to exist. The dynamism due to COVID-19 has forced the HRM function to look forward to organizational agility to adapt and stay in business. The approach to make a linkage between COVID-19, organizational agility, and sustainable HRM is theoretically argued based on a resource-based theory. By conceptualizing the work of Dyer & Shafer (2014) and Nijssen & Paauwe (2012) five dimensions are identified to measure organizational agility, which includes fluid organizational design, flexible core business strategy, distributive information, fast organizational learning, and highly adaptable infrastructure and workplace design. However, further research is needed to confirm the dimensions proposed and to expand them into indicators that can specifically measure organizational agility as a variable.*

**Keywords:** HR Function, Organizational Agility, Sustainable HRM, VUCA.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The epic effects of COVID-19 on the lives of people in different countries, regions, societies, communities, and business are beyond expected with deep pain, bitterness, experiences, and struggles. Yet, the effects of COVID-19 on each constituent are not unique, with varying degrees of destruction and annihilation of both lives and property. COVID-19 is the only natural phenomenon or pandemic with a large-scale global reach, affecting the entire world at different times within the lifetime of many people. Other pandemics existed but never had the proportional harm and threat of COVID-19, there were SARS, MERS, H1N1, SWINE FLU, and EBOLA with each affecting a region or some parts of the world.

The COVID-19 pandemic health protocols shut down the world, and both business and people activities were ground to a halt. The virus has forced many businesses to close leading to an unexpected disruption in commercial and business activities throughout the whole world. These business disruptions created burdens and dilemmas for organizational leadership and human resource (HR) function in particular as it directly deals with employment and people's issues in the organization. The COVID-19 pandemic caused volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity to both people's and businesses' existence.

The pandemic has created an unprecedented change for all organizations to either evolve or cease to exist. The level of transformation has never been seen, it affects the entirety of the organization, and the human resource function is put under undue stress and challenged to handle the change. An externally induced change of the magnitude of this nature has never happened, a change that obliterates the structure, the culture, and the people in the organization. Any change that is not internally induced in the organization seriously harms employees, the most important constituent in the organization that defines and guarantees its short-term and long-term sustainability. The HR function, a key department in the organization characterized as the maintenance subsystem charged with holding the pieces together and getting the employees to work as a single unit, (3). The change forcefully introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic affected the organizations in two ways, first, it affects the nature of employment and employment relationships in the organization. Secondly, COVID-19 affected the behaviors of the organization and employees in adverse new ways. These changes have provoked organizations and HR functions to quickly re-adjust, adapt and accommodate the changes. The dynamism of the environment lets HR function with no choice but to tailor HR systems, strategies, policies, processes, practices, and programs to reflect the current realities of the environment to survive.

Many organizations shifted their strategies toward organizational agility as a move to play along with the virus to survive. When HR functions in turbulent times with unpredictable events of great impact and threat to its very existence. The only way to confront the unpredictable changes is to align the organization's strategies with the changes, the goal is not a performance for profit or competitive advantage but one of survival to see the next day out. The pandemic is an organizational crisis, and the crisis has three related threats, financial loss, reputation loss, and threat to people's (employees) lives the approach and the willingness to be proactive to adopt will determine the outcome. According to Nijssen & Paauwe (1), the only sure way for an organization to manage the frequent unpredictable dynamic environment is to have the capacity to keep up, not to get better but to do differently by embracing and organizing the changes quickly, this is what they called organizational agility.

Agility as an HR approach helps the organization to identify and determine which systems, strategies, policies, processes, practices, and programs to adjust or abandon for the time being to accommodate the externally induced changes. Sustainable human resource management reflects the current realities of the organization not only in the short term but also helps to adopt practices that will support and strengthen the capability of the organization in the future. Sustainable human resource management takes an integrated approach to the needs

of the organization and that of the employees as a way of guaranteeing a long-term sustainable organization-employee relationship which is the recipe for sustainable competitive advantage for the organization.

The dynamism of the environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic provoked the HR function to adopt and evolve embracing agility as a strategy to determine survival in turbulent circumstances. The approach to making a linkage between COVID-19, organizational agility, and sustainable HRM will be theoretically argued based on a resource-based theory to enhance the capability of the internal resource for competitive advantage. The HR function's use of agility as a strategy has seen the organization upscaling to meet up with the demand for more employees to cope with the situation and enhance the capability of the organization to remain competitive. With the COVID-19 outbreak, many organizations in the TECH world have seen a rise in demand for their services and as such the organization has to recruit more capable people to strengthen their competitive edge, notable among them is Amazon, where other businesses are struggling for survival, Amazon was and still busy profiteering off the pandemic.

The doctrine of the resource-based theory emphasizes the unique capability of internal resources to strengthen the position of the organization. The increasing complexity of markets makes it difficult for firms to have all the resources necessary to compete. According to Augier & Teece (4), an organization needs resources which are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, to sustain competitive advantage of its organization. A dynamic capability that can renew and reallocate resources to achieve the organization's objectives in a rapidly changing environment. The sustainability of competitive advantage depends not only on the nature of resources but also on the dynamic capability to manage and combine those resources, (5,6). Capabilities are argued to be the pre-eminent sources of firm success, (5). The know-how of employees and leadership, the interaction between leadership and employees, and between personnel and tangible assets, generate durable advantages because they are largely complex, specialized, and tacit (7).

Secondly, hence COVID-19 caused the business environment to be characterized by what many research papers labeled as VUCA meaning volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, organization's strategy moderates the HR practices on firm performance, a perspective that claims the external environmental factors can entirely affect, made, or defined the internal environmental or organizational reactions. Lawrence & Lorsch (8) argued that an organization's existence is centered on the optimal fit between organization structure and some contingency factors such as technology, structural favorability, environmental uncertainty, and so on. Organizational agility as a strategy is flexibility meant to adapt to any contingency

challenges. According to Ketkar & Sett (9), in a dynamic business environment, an organization's fulfillment depends on partly the flexibility of resources available to the organization and the capability to utilize the resource based on specific demands. Accordingly, stressed that achieving sustainable competitive success through people involves changing the organization-employment relationship. The essence is to approach the workforce as a reliable malleable resource capable of sustaining the competitive powers of the organization, also seeing the workforce as a strategic asset for sustainability.

The open dilemma of the crisis is the continuous threat of work and work-life activities as every major human activity is grinding to a halt except the health institutions. Organizations either temporarily or permanently closed down operations. Many other businesses were forced to cut down numbers or operations. This places the human resource function in a critical situation, and a threat to the sustainability of human resource management is imminent. Most of the strategies adopted by many businesses during COVID-19, especially the lean approach to human resources, is predicted to continue in the post-Covid-19 era. The survival and sustainability of HRM have been debated well before the outbreak of the Coronavirus with the evolution of the industry 4.0 concept as to the future viability of HRM within the influence of automation of jobs and artificial intelligence.

Another dilemma the COVID-19 pandemic exposes is the monetization of the HRM aligning more towards the business profit partner role than a fair arbiter between the interest of the organization's leadership and that of the employees. This practice has long been in existence, especially in gig economy-oriented businesses, and COVID-19 just exposed corporate greed at the cost of human lives. The challenge for tomorrow is human resources would be needed as an organization's core resources in the future, the ability of HR functions to balance the need for employees and the ability to safeguard the well-being, health, and safety of employees would be instrumental to organizational sustenance.

The dynamism due to COVID-19 has forced the HRM function to look forward to organizational agility to adapt and stay in business. Due to the stress and constrain of the pandemic on the organization, employees still working in the healthcare sector or those in other sectors providing essential services faced pressure and burden placed on them and begged to be agile to support the organization to register competitive advantage in moments of environmental uncertainty and disturbance. The call for organizational agility or agile mindset requires sacrifice from the employees while compromising their other social, psychological, health, and safety obligations to sustain the organization. With the emergence of the coronavirus (COVID-19), the whole world shut down, major activities grind to a halt. COVID-

19 has exposed the merits and the demerits of organizational agility as a convenient strategy to confront and accommodate environmental changes induced by the virus to help register sustainable HRM practices. Worst of all, millions of employees are laid off from their jobs most of those employees affected are the ones in arranged work practices compared to employees with a fixed-term employment arrangement. One key positive of organizational agility during the pandemic is the ability to work from home (WFH). The negative aspect of organizational agility practice is the immediate layoff of employees. Organizational agility is championed as a dynamic capability with a forwarding and future-oriented strategy.

The question of the research is what lessons can be taken from the harm and havoc caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the employment and work relationship arrangement to identify sustainable human resource management practices that could be applied beyond COVID-19 to help the organization through organizational agility to help register sustained existence for the future? How instrumental is organizational agility as a strategy to support sustainable human resource management during a “vuca” situation?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

COVID-19 is synonymous with environmental dynamism and as such, it created environmental conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity for both businesses and people alike. The research tries to address the effect of COVID-19 on the sustainability of HRM where HR is the sole custodian of employment and employment matters in the organization. COVID-19 is a pandemic that creates a disproportionate level of crisis and employees carry the burden of that crisis which the HR department as the organization’s leadership has to handle in ways that are fitting with high tolerance to ensure a balanced outcome. As a result, organizational agility according to Nijssen & Paauwe (1) is a dynamic capability strategically chosen to bail organizations out of distress for sustained long-term existence.

In trying to create the linkage and justification for the research agenda, the study will heavily rely on and invest in a theoretical philosophy to support the argument for the key variables. The human resource management function is without doubt popularly argued based on a resource-based theory. The organization strategically has many resources at its disposal that add up and translate to the bottom line of the organization. Among the resources the organization has are the physical resources, and informational resources that do age and can be used and reused yet will continue to make better results unending. Finally, human resources will age someday and will retire bearing in mind the possibility of transfer of their wisdom to

the new generation in the organization for the continuity of organizational life. Human resources are undeniably the most potent and dominant resource that needs to touch each other resources to translate them into reality for organizational profitability.

The resource-based theory states that the competitive advantage of an organization is created from the variety of resources in it, including human resources that produce its unique character. Armstrong (10) and J. Barney (11–13) stated that competitive advantage arises first when firms within an industry are diverse concerning the strategic resources they control; creating sustained competitive advantage, therefore, depends on the unique resources and capabilities that a firm brings to competition in its environment. The human resource includes all the experience, knowledge, judgment, skills, risk-taking propensity, and wisdom of individuals associated with the organization (14). For the organization's resources to have the potential for creating a sustained competitive advantage, it must have resources that are valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable, (12). To discover these resources and capabilities, leadership must consider within their organization for any valuable, rare, and costly to imitate resources and then exploit them for the organization to create value, (10)

According to Grant (15), the resources and capabilities of a firm are central considerations in formulating its strategy. The primary ingredient constant upon which an organization can establish its identity and frame its strategy is the primary source of the organization's profitability. The key to a resource-based approach to a strategy formulation is to understand the relationship between resources, capabilities, competitive advantage, and profitability and in particular, an understanding of the mechanisms through which competitive advantage can be sustained over time. This requires visionary leadership qualities to design strategies that exploit to the maximum effect, each organization's unique characteristics, (10). Resource-based theory strategically sees HRM as an advantage whose potential is to be strategically developed continuously (16).

This means a strategic fit between resources and opportunities, obtaining added value from the effective deployment of resources, and developing people who can think and plan strategically in the sense that they understand the key strategic issues and ensure it supports the achievement of the organization's strategic goal.

The resource-based theory emphasized investment in people increases their value to the organization. According to Boxall (17), the strategic goal of the resource-based theory will be to create an organization that is more intelligent and flexible than its competitors by hiring and developing more talented staff and by extending their skills and knowledge base. Ulrich (18) mentions that knowledge has become a direct competitive advantage for organizations

selling ideas and relationships. The challenge is to ensure that the organization has the capability to find, assimilate, compensate, and retain the talented individuals they need for posterity, (10). The resource-based theory according to Barney (11) and Moore et al. (19), states that a firm develops a competitive advantage by not only acquiring but also developing, combining, and effectively deploying its physical, human, and organizational resources in ways that add unique value and are difficult for competitors to imitate. Most resource-based arguments are rooted in human resources according to (10). The resource-based theory is interested in identifying the essential productive (knowledge) resources and examining how these resources can be acquired, protected, and evaluated, (20). This knowledge resource requires high-handed leadership involvement to manage tight but flexible procedures, policies, and defined actions to serve the needs of the organization and all associated with the organization, (21).

Strategically popular, the resource-based theory of the organization is the most utilized framework by scholars which analyses the relationship of HR performance in an organization. Most of these scholars argue that the HR practice done in an organization usually has affect employees' knowledge, skills, motivation, and behaviour directly, which therefore impacts on the performance of the organization. The performance is in the form such as operational quality and efficiency, increase productivity which predict further outcomes such as financial and market performance, (10). But some critics still argue that the resource-based theory is unable to explain the significance of internal and external contingencies which influence nature and magnitude of the relationships within the theorized causal chain.

The resource-based theory is constructed on the premise that the firm's success is mostly determined by its internal resources its own and controls, (22). Studies argued that sustainable competitive advantage and excellent firm performance can be achieved if firm resources retain certain specific characteristics. Whilst resources that are easily attained in the market or imitated by competitor and do not have produce an important source for economic benefit can be classified as resources which have sustainable competitive advantage.

Organizational agility represents capabilities or an organization that are established through the development of tacit learning where the processes and actions used to generate and improve the combination of the resources are difficult or impossible to articulate, (7,23). The resource-based theory emphasizes that through effective human resource management practice, knowledge and relationship processes can be renewed and developed in response to or even ahead of environmental dynamics, (24). Organizational assets like flexible or agile organizational structures or work arrangements may be complicated to replicate as well

because growth over some time represents a high level of asset specificity and long-lasting strength, (6,15).

### **3. DISCUSSION**

Organizational agility is a smart business approach the essence of which is to take notice of the prevailing circumstances to enable the organization to figure out what is going on in its environment and to determine an appropriate way to act according as deemed fitting for its survival. The core foundation of organizational agility lies in the ability of the organization to be sensitive and suspicious of the environment to adapt and adapt to that situation to stay relevant. The chameleon characteristic suits organizations operating in dynamic environments as reflective of agility. Today, the key driver to agility is a change or the prospect of change in the future. The recent interest in organizational agility is overwhelming as dynamic competence to helpful to operate in a complex environment.

The evolution of the world business due to the proliferation and dominance in the use of technology makes sense for organizations to give central focus to agility as a pragmatic strategy and a key organizational capability that will continue to play a leading role in organizational relevance. In today's business environment there is no constant, there is no one best way or approach fitting all situations. Organizations continue to prevail based on a mix of competencies such as agility and flexibility as core dynamic capabilities (2).

According to Gartner as mentioned in Gunsberg et al. (25) defines agility is the "ability of an organization to sense or create environmental change and respond efficiently and effectively to that change with emphasis on the organization, not the discrete elements". Denning (26) defines "the agile organization is designed to be an ongoing, learning, adapting living organization that is in constant influx to exploit and seize new opportunities to add value to stakeholders". To Tooranloo & Saghafi (27), "agility is the ability of the organization to respond to the continuous and unpredictable changes in the competitive environment". Accordingly, an agile organization is compatible and informed with quick business insights that have the ability to adapt quick compatibilities in response to unpredictable changes, events, opportunities, and threats. Organizational agility as an approach relates to both action and behavior for the organization and its employees.

Agility and organizational agility have been measured as multidimensional constructs varying from three dimensions to six dimensions. Yusuf et al. as cited in Tooranloo & Saghafi (27) used four dimensions to measure agility and include critical competencies of the management, virtual enterprises, the ability to transform, and knowledge-oriented enterprise.



Seethamraju & Krishna Sundar (28) argued on behalf of the ability to integrate four dimensions of comparative cost, quality, reliability, and flexibility. Sharifi & Zhang (29) reported that changes provoked agility and organizational response with four dimensions including responsiveness, competence, flexibility, and speed. Zain et al. (30) identified four classifications of concepts and measures of agility such as customer enrichment, organizing for the creation of comparative advantage, leveraging the influence of individuals and information, accepting change, and unreliability. Gunsberg et al. (25) measured agility with six dimensions including leadership and management, innovation, structures, strategy, learning and change, and culture.

Dyer & Shafer (2) reported that organizational agility is created from two distinct sets of combinations, ‘agility-oriented organizational infrastructure and agility-oriented human resource strategy’. An agility-oriented organizational infrastructure references the stable nature of the organization’s core inner workings that consist of several elements. These elements will include the ability to articulate a vision worthy of pursuit, shared values that center on trust, openness, honesty, prudent risk-taking, mutual respect, and personal accountability, and common performance metrics to capture the essence of agility (2). The agility-oriented human resource strategy focused on broad principles that guide the choice of organizational policy, program, and practices in the period of change. The concepts and principles include drive and discipline (P1, forge a sense of common purpose; P2, promote contextual clarity); autonomy & accountability (P3, foster fluid adjustment; P4, instill ownership of outcome); growth & continuity (P5, facilitate serial incompetence; P6, encourage continuous employment. The above principles align with agility-oriented HR policies, programs, and practices (1). To them, organizational agility should reflect employees and human resources as the most important assets in an organization’s structure with competence, and capability to reconfigure and transform the workforce. The dimensions to measure organizational agility summarize from the dimensions proposed by Dyer & Shafer (2) and Nijssen & Paauwe (1), which include fluid organizational design, flexible core business strategy, distributive information, fast organizational learning, and highly adaptable infrastructure and workplace design.

### ***Fluid Organizational Design***

As organizational existence is saddled between internal and external events and organizations always want a stable environment that ensures order, control, and predictability to enable them to execute their policies, plans, and programs with great certainty. When an organization’s environment changes due to factors beyond control such as the coronavirus, the organizations are forced to rethink their approach to fix the organizational structure and work

arrangement. They would rather apply temporary measures building work around a small agile and flexible team approach or build networks or alliances to create a synergistic wall of defense to accomplish goals. In making a fluid work design, the bureaucratic approach to work is replaced with an organic or dynamic approach to work. This approach flattens the authority structure with decentralized communication and decision-making (2).

In contrast, workforce fluidity refers to the speed and ease with which employee transition is made from one human resource configuration to another continuously. The concept of workforce fluidity reflects human resource practice flexibility which is divided into two distinctive approaches to work and employment arrangement. Resource flexibility enhances the capability of the employees through skills and behavior while coordination flexibility relates to the demand and supply of employees in terms of need or shortage. reconfiguration of the value chain and redeployment of human resources. Resource and coordination flexibility enhance workforce fluidity and agility. In a situation of environmental dynamism like the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations heavily rely on both resource flexibility and coordination flexibility to stay in business. In a dynamic environment, fast decision-making and implementation is a critical ability helpful to organizational survival. The key to success for both workforce alignment and fluidity is the essence of employee involvement and participation. This gives employees shared ownership value with autonomy to maximally contribute but be accountable for the probable outcome (1).

Fluid organizational design is characterized by flat, minimal formal authority, limited organizational boundaries, and cellular division into small sub-units and team-based work groups. A flexible business process is characterized by routinized internal processes only where, when, and no more as necessary. Employees' capability to manage sovereignty given by their organization can enhance the flexible business process created by the organization.

### ***Flexible Core Business Strategy***

A dynamic environment creates dynamic organizations, and such environmental changes proactively create room for organizations to revisit their core business processes. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic as a threat to organizational survival and profitability. Many organizations were proactive and innovative enough to rebrand to seize the opportunities to choose businesses or product line that aligns with the need to contain the coronavirus. Smart businesses are agile and flexible with quick decision making, i.e., emergent business strategies versus formalized plans, making decisions based on expertise and dialogue with those that matter to the organization. The organization approaches the market environment with much emphasis on open and all-round communication for timely decisions that involve employees

with faith and belief that they apply common sense to do the right thing for the organization (2).

### ***Distributive Information***

The COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis, and it is outlined crisis that creates three related threats, a financial threat, a reputation threat, and a threat to life. The only way to eliminate or mitigate such threats is the provision of real-time, easily accessible information, quick and accurate information loaded with facts. The crisis demands a total and unconditioned delivery of the most information. The leadership is not allowed to hoard the information to appear as if they are guilty and hiding something. Every employee in the organization needs to access information and today's organization has many platforms to reach out to every stakeholder within and outside the organization easily. The emergence of COVID-19 has created many platforms to access information as well as disinformation. Therefore, it will be prudent for the organization to identify a focal messenger to deliver its information (2).

### ***Fast Organizational Learning***

Organization as an entity exists between internal and external environments. to help generate information and knowledge as a valuable resource to make critical decisions. Information and knowledge are the means to- the end of the decision-making process. The external environment in particular is very important in organizational learning as an unfamiliar territory with varying degrees of dynamism both as a threat and as an opportunity. Firstly, the organization takes steps to look beyond its natural influence (outside world) to be able to proactively obtain information and knowledge about the dynamics of the environment. The knowledge from outside is aligned with internal knowledge to prepare to strengthen the capability of the organization. You cannot beat or challenge something you don't know. Knowledge alignment for the organization, especially the right knowledge acquired at the right time, to proactively apply to prevailing contingencies would make a difference in the life of an organization. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult for organizations to access the right information and process it because as much as there is a lot of information but there is also a bunch of misinformation, a real threat, and a challenge to the organization's leadership. The only way for the organization to emerge out of the information-misinformation cloud due to the proliferation of the social media communication platform is to create its message and becomes the messenger (1).

Secondly, an agile organization can creatively manage, adapt, distribute, apply knowledge, and internalize it in a form referred to as absorptive capacity. The absorptive

capacity relates to the idea of acquiring resources available as a competitive competence to engage the dynamism of the environment. Sometimes events in the environment overwhelmed the organization's ability to decide based on inaccurate and unavailable information. To mitigate it, the organization should constantly scan and sense the environment, in a state of alert to focus on both the speed and high-quality strategic decisions through real-time information. Information com knowledge is a prerequisite capability for survival in a dynamic environment. The organization's ability to access and process real-time, up-to-date, and accurate information, and apply it to the dynamics of the environment as well as having the ability to monitor, assess and analyze the environmental information as a tool to respond to environmental contingencies is a winning strategy (1).

The process of learning concerning organizational agility starts with the process of repetition and experimentation to enable tasks to be performed better and quicker. Organizations engaged in dynamic environments need to proactively access and process information efficiently and also with the ability to create information and knowledge. The organization as an entity engages in four steps phase to generate knowledge production through creating, adapting, distributing, and applying the knowledge for immediate use or stored for future use. The three types of knowledge related to the organization include tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge, and conversion knowledge. All the knowledge available to the organization is applied partly or in combination with competence to engage the environment. The knowledge in the organization resides in individual employees and also resides in the organization as an entity.

### ***Highly Adaptable Infrastructure and Workplace Design***

According to Nijssen & Paauwe (1), a highly adaptable organizational infrastructure is a prerequisite to facilitating workforce scalability and high adaptable workforce is a key capability for organizational agility. Organizations that operate in a dynamic environment require an adaptable infrastructure designed to change and evolve to match the environmental demands. Adaptable organizational infrastructure includes three components of organizational design, business processes, and supporting technologies.

Fluid organizations are proactive and adaptable in response to changes to re-arrange work to fit with the current realities of the threats. The COVID-19 threats forced organizations to temporarily reduce operations, and shift operations towards a leaner approach or towards technology-aided work arrangements such as remote working or work from the home approach. The measurement will be guided by the principle of drive, discipline, growth, accountability, autonomy, and continuity. To enable the organization to withstand the threat faced by the

organization. The organizational competence or capability will be measured as; Sensing the market, mobilizing rapid response, exploiting temporary advantage, and embedding organizational learning (2).

Mintzberg as mentioned in Nijssen & Paauwe (1) iterates four scenarios of the organizational environment as dynamic/stable versus complex/simple. Accordingly, claimed that an organic organization is the fitting form of organization in a dynamic environment. An organic organization is characterized by flexible procedures, mutual adaptation (coordination through informal communication), and a minimal level of standardization). An organization with flat authority structures, a low process of regulations, and only rudimentary planning and control systems. It has a minimal level of formalization, routine, and standardization, to make adaptation possible. An organization with a scalable workforce, with the ability to sense the environment, create and process new knowledge, with an adaptable organizational infrastructure that gives room for employees to be fully engaged and involved maximally with leadership that acts proactively to help competitively in dynamic environments (2).

COVID-19 created conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity and has forced businesses and organizations to temporarily close operations, scaled down operations, or permanently closed down operations. COVID-19 did not only cause organizations financial loss, but the loss of employees through layoffs as well as the loss of employees through deaths by COVID-19 at the same time made some organizations sicker and sicker thus affecting normal daily operations. It causes shortages of basic food supplies or supplies of basic services which provoked unhealthy competition for it leads to the hoarding and scrambling of the limited available product during COVID-19 lockdowns and governmental restrictions. According to DeFilippis et al. (31), COVID-19 forced organizations to respond to alter work arrangements to accommodate the new realities including a shift to work from home for knowledge workers and the adoption of other new ways of working. Accordingly, COVID-19 brought large-scale economic and social stress and forced an unexpected transition to remote work and telework at a time when organizational leaders coordinate decision-making processes and productivity of proven consequential factors for all. For Donthu & Gustafsson (32) the pandemic forced many businesses to close leading to unprecedented disruption in all inside and outside organizational activities. Small businesses face many short-term challenges like health and safety concerns, supply chain disruption, workforce issues, and many others. The worst no one knows when it will end, and it seems we will emerge from the pandemic in a totally different world after the outbreak. COVID-19 has accelerated workplace transformation and changed drastically how we work, socialize

(interact), learn, communicate and where we work has changed for many forever and is a great concern for HRM function.

The pandemic has created stressful situations for so many people who remote work and are living as single persons and in isolation, totally cut-off from human social life. The lockdown and restrictions make such people lose their social and human connections only attainable at the organization a psychological and employee well-being issue for HRM function and leadership. The pandemic has alerted business leaders to identify, optimize, re-assess, and re-access existing technologies and business models in light of the volatility and uncertainty created by the virus. The COVID-19 pandemic has re-engaged organizations to re-imagine their current state for future prospects. The leadership of the organization reimagines and redesigns the organization's work structure, production structure, and service structure to re-align with the unprecedented time around things that are possible and workable specially to develop strategies around artificial intelligence, automation, internet of things to help focus on sustaining the organization. the COVID-19 pandemic provoked organizations to aggressively innovate by engaging in innovative strategies like responsive strategy, collective strategy, proactive strategy, and partnership strategy to stimulate the ability to survive and sustain relevance (32).

Organizational agility, therefore, is highly regarded as a strategy for this kind of moment, a moment of crisis and organizational turbulence. Organizational agility is nicknamed a dynamic capability with the ability to quickly adjust fluidity and re-arrange work through configuration and reconfiguration to fit the changing circumstance. COVID-19 may be the beginning of work changes and organizational changes, but the trends will continue post-COVID-19 and beyond. Organizational agility is labeled as a dynamic capability, as a strategy, organizational agility allows and enables organizations to survive economic crises or otherwise. Dynamic capability is the tangible and intangible resources of the organization both of which are mobilized in terms of uncertainty to help the organization stay competitive. According to Nijssen & Paauwe (1), a dynamic capability is a competence that seduced an organization to transform into real changes in order to make the best out of the situation. These COVID-19 changes require and forced shifts in strategies for some organizations away from the core production or service orientation, also changes in the structure and systems of the organization. To many organizations, organizational agility is synonymous with dynamic capability reflected in the ability of the organization to evolve and adapt to the demands of the environment.

Organizational agility as a competence makes flexible organizations with fluidity and reconfiguration as its core characteristics. In the hit of crisis, through agility, dynamic capability enables the organization to combine competencies and resources to develop, deploy and protect the competitive advantage of the organization. It serves as a defensive wall to existing or expected threats to survive. Organizational agility to some experts is ambidextrous in character and capability to serve the HRM function and the organization to sustain. It has a duality of focus and benefits for the organization during the implementation. Core to the value of dynamic capability is the ability to enhance sustainable competitive advantage. In terms of a crisis and economic distress for the organization, agility can help to reduce the workforce or redeploy the workforce to alternative activities. It can flexibly add numbers in terms of the need for human capital to sustain a challenge.

A sustainable HRM is first determined by the dynamism of the organization and second by how resourceful the organization is in terms of the possibility of long-term engagement with environmental dynamism. The sustainability of the HRM is dependent on both organization's internal strength (core capability) and external environmental contingencies with both threats and opportunities. Sustainable HRM is not only contingent upon the generalized environmental scenarios but specific to HR practices that should adjust to the realities of the time of changes. Therefore, the sustainability of the HRM is contingent upon the HRM function and the organizational agility as strategies but more so on the dynamism of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organizational agility is ambidextrous in character with a double-sided benefit for the organization, especially during situations of environmental uncertainty. Organizational agility has been referred to by many research reports as synonymous with dynamic capability, an ability that helps organizations in stressful situations adapt to survive. According to Augier & Teece (2008), dynamic capabilities provide a comprehensive roadmap for how organizations can develop and maintain a competitive advantage over a long time. Dynamic capabilities help the organization assess and identify strategic foundations for long-run growth and prosperity. Dynamic capabilities help an organization build capacities to shape, reshape, configure, and reconfigure to mobilize the organization's tangible and intangible resources to respond to changing environmental and market demands. Dynamic capabilities enhance the ability of the organization to proactively adapt to changing circumstances in order to generate and exploit to capture the essence of the organization's internal and external competencies in engaging in changing environments.

The dynamic capability of the organization helps to survive changing organizational constituents including market needs, customer needs, technological needs, and opportunities including competitive behaviors, and develop to better prepare the organization to adapt and even proactively reshape the business environment in a timely, efficient, and effective manner for long overhaul sustainably (4). Organizational agility as a strategic flexibility approach relatedly influences an organization's various constituents including the ability to survive and sustain operations. The basic characteristic of organizational agility is the ability to be flexible and very efficient and effective in the engaging workforce in challenging situations. Agility fits and aligns in all organization's departments to enhance competence and capability. It helps to create workforce fluidity, makes organizations embrace organic work structures with a highly flexible potential as well as configure and reconfigure work arrangements at any given time. Agility allows the organization to quickly deploy employees where and when needed to serve the organization.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This paper contributes to expanding knowledge of how organizational agility strategically supports sustainable human resource management during the "vuca" situation, i.e., the COVID-19 situation. Organizational agility as a strategic flexibility approach relatedly influences an organization's various constituents including the ability to survive and sustain operations. The basic characteristic of organizational agility is the ability to be flexible and very efficient and effective in engaging the workforce in challenging situations. Agility fits and aligns in all organization's departments to enhance competence and capability. It helps to create workforce fluidity, makes organizations embrace organic work structures with a highly flexible potential as well as configure and reconfigure work arrangements at any given time. Agility allows the organization to quickly deploy employees where and when needed to serve the organization. The dimensions to measuring organizational agility, therefore, include fluid organizational design, flexible core business strategy, distributive information, fast organizational learning, and highly adaptable infrastructure and workplace design. However, further research is suggested to confirm the dimension of organizational agility and expand them into indicators for measuring organizational agility.



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