

**THE COVID RECOVERY IS DIGITAL - THE SHORT-TERM
IMPLICATIONS ON RECRUITMENT
CASE STUDY IN ROMANIA**

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Abstract

The pandemic has brought changes in every aspect of life, both personally and professionally. The business environment is characterized by volatility, uncertainty, and constant change. The digital age identifies and accelerates the pace of change. In this context the current article presents the ways the companies changes their recruitments methods, because only being agile, flexible, adaptable and innovative in any crisis they can give birth to innovation! In terms of employment, the forecast for 2020-2021 was certainly uncertain. Adapting to change made all the difference and digitalization was the key to change.

Keywords: *online recruitment, covid-19, recovery, digitalization*

JEL classification: *O15, H12, L86*

1. Introduction

The pandemic reviewed existing tendencies in remote work, e-commerce, and industrialization, with up to 25% more employees than theretofore who have to switch occupations.

A correct and efficient human resource planning process always ensures the optimal mix of employees to achieve strategic objectives, saving organizations money and time.

Digital recruitment is the process by which recruiters use technology and the internet to attract, evaluate, and select candidates for available positions in a company. It includes several methods of attracting candidates,

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including the use of online recruitment websites, the use of social media, and online assessment questionnaires (Knowlson, 2020). Digital recruitment can facilitate the whole process by easily using the online profile of potential candidates in the first stage, or even assessing their experience and skills through online interviews. Managers can find the right people faster, and experts have more career opportunities at hand. Technology has revolutionized the job market, enabling digital recruitment to enter the industry, giving employers and employees a competitive advantage.

Recruitment means first of all connecting, making connections - as many as possible and in the shortest possible time. A better way to connect, to enter the new realm of social media communication is known as "social media".

The change in the sphere of the Romanian human resources department was seen first of all in the need for a drastic change in the way the company operates, having to find new adaptation solutions following the legislation change due to the pandemic. One of the most important advantages of digital recruitment is the reduction of time and costs in the recruitment process. Through online interviews or questionnaires, companies can find out more quickly if potential candidates fit, allowing more people to be interviewed in less time. Online interviews offer the possibility of not having to travel to the recruitment company's headquarters (Stoughton, 2013).

Another important trend and perhaps one of the most effective is offered by interviews through social media, an example is LinkedIn, this being one of the most effective recruitment channels. Virtual reality also plays a significant role for some companies that use it to show potential candidates what it means to work for them.

If before Covid-19, only a part of the process was online, namely CV screening, contacting candidates, scheduling the interview, the initial stage of the interview, and online feedback, now absolutely all the steps must be done remotely by phone and video. The effect was perpetuated even after the end of the pandemic (Kemp, 2022).

Because many people lost their jobs overnight, there were extremely many job applications, with the number of applicants significantly increasing. This has forced human resources departments to redouble their efforts to meet job supply and demand. Human resources specialists are certainly in a gold mine, but the efficiency of the recruitment process in the social network depends largely on the intelligence of the recruiter who takes advantage of the unique resources that each social networking platform offers.

2. Recruitment via LinkedIn in 2020-2022

Although relatively new to our marketplace, LinkedIn was launched in 2003 and was listed on the stock exchange 8 years later, with a market capitalization of \$ 4.25 billion at the time. In 2016, Microsoft bought LinkedIn for \$ 26 billion.

If at the beginning of 2020 in Romania, over 1.7 million Romanians have profiles on LinkedIn, in 2022 the number of LinkedIn users in Romania has steadily increased. By June 2022, the number of people using LinkedIn had peaked at 3,180,000 users. This means a doubling of the number of users as a direct effect of the pandemic (Knowlson, 2022).

This can be explained on the one hand by the large number of unemployed people who existed as a result of the pandemic, who was looking for a job and on the other hand by the digital explosion also caused by the pandemic.

LinkedIn allows employers to advertise open positions on the site and enjoy the benefits of a powerful lead generation platform - LinkedIn Recruiter and its recent extension to Talent Pipeline, a lead management solution that was launched by the company in response to market needs as a result of the pandemic in 2021. If there were any budget issues to access these premium features, you could also opt for free headhunting options. Online recruitment resources are available to all experts in the human resources industry. To be successfully recruited through LinkedIn, it is essential to develop strong links with industry members and to join discussion groups to promote their employer's brand (Gigauri, 2020).

3. Recruitment via Facebook in 2020-2022

Facebook is by far the largest and most visited social network in the world. At the beginning of 2021, Facebook had 2.74 billion users worldwide, being not only the most popular social network, but also the most used. Facebook is also a valuable tool for building professional relationships, and when it comes to recruiting employees, this social network is a must-see, not only because of the huge potential of young talent but also because of the multitude of recruitment applications developed for the platform (Knowlson, 2020).

New branded Facebook pages allow companies to deliver targeted and interesting content to their followers, thus increasing brand awareness and gaining a competitive advantage. You need to be as involved as possible by

participating in live conversations or scheduling tweets to match online followers (Ellison, 2007).

The number of Facebook users in Romania peaked in March 2021 at 12.57 million users, after several months of maintaining a slightly constant value of 11.1 million accounts. By September 2021, the number of Facebook users had dropped to 11.94 million, due to the dramatic increase in users on the TikTok network.

In Romania recruitment via Facebook is not very used. Although it has great potential in recruitment processes, few people use this resource when recruiting. Even in these cases, recruiters and managers use Facebook rather as a tool to validate the quality of candidates identified by other search methods.

Not only do Facebook users outnumber communities on other social media platforms, but they are even more active than ever. Every 60 seconds, people on Facebook update 293,000 states and upload 136,000 photos. Moreover, globally 5 new profiles are created every second. The numbers are too high to ignore (Gigauri, 2020).

Reduce recruitment time by quickly identifying those who are actively seeking a career change. With the influx of information that is accessible on the internet and the number of users who are constantly online, the traditional barriers to the recruitment cycle can be overcome when we recruit on Facebook. The job postings are posted here to allow you to reach people who can meet your hiring needs faster than ever before (Ellison, 2007).

4. Recruitment via Zoom or Google Meeting in 2020-2022

Before 2020, almost no one had heard of Zoom. In 2020 Zoom was the fifth most downloaded mobile app in the world, with 477.3 million downloads. Its systems run in the cloud and allow video conferencing, chat rooms, audio calls, and recording of these conversations as they happen. Thanks to the different plans offered by Zoom Video Communications, this application is ideal for organizing meetings that need to share digital material with other users.

By April 2020, Zoom Video Communications had 300 million daily meetings worldwide and over 20 million meetings in Romania. Just six months earlier, at the end of 2019, that number was 10 million worldwide and almost nobody knows about Zoom in Romania.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led companies from Romania to adopt Zoom or Google Meeting as a solution to stay connected with employees and customers when working from different locations. This

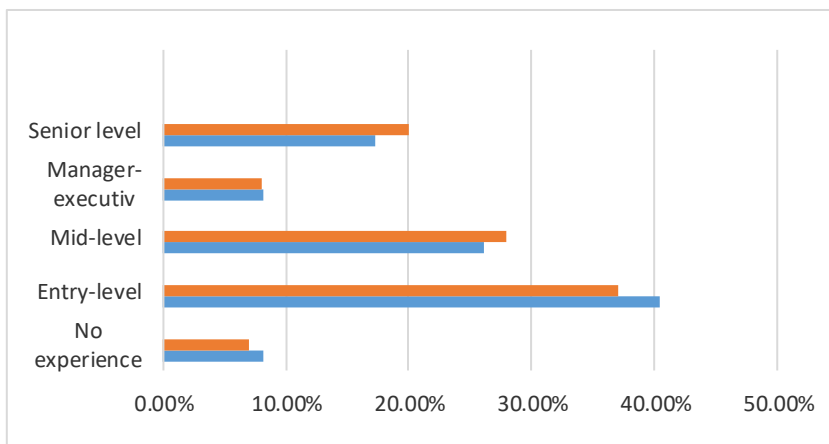
has increased the use of the platform in 2020. In addition, people are using the Zoom or Google Meeting video platform to stay connected with friends and family

5. The digital transformation

At the beginning of 2020, the challenges facing recruitment teams were the lack of qualified candidates. Thus, about 45% of companies faced a lack of qualified candidates. After the beginning of the pandemic, after a whole series of layoffs and the closure of several sectors of activity, employees became more flexible than ever, namely, 44% of candidates said that if they have no options, they will accept jobs that do not are at their level of experience, and 43% said they would accept a lower salary than before. It was not surprising to find that the number of jobs available at a distance had tripled, and their demand increased on recruitment platforms by 400% (Vries, 2021).

From the county statistics on the submission of candidates, a comparison was made between the number of applications submitted in the country and the number of applications in Bucharest. Attention was drawn to the experience of jobseekers. In figure 1 we can observe that the job seekers are most entry level ones and mid level ones. This is easy to explain, as entry level employees are generally used by companies to grow, and with the downgrade of the pandemic, survival was the goal for all the companies and not development. The middle level employees are the ones on which the most layoffs were made.

Figure 1: Candidates' level of experience



Source: National Institute of Statistics

“Digital transformation” has been the most heard word lately, and adapting to a hybrid work system has been the most obvious trend since 2020. The workload of human resources is now higher compared to the times before the pandemic, according to research conducted by Happy Recruiter (2022).

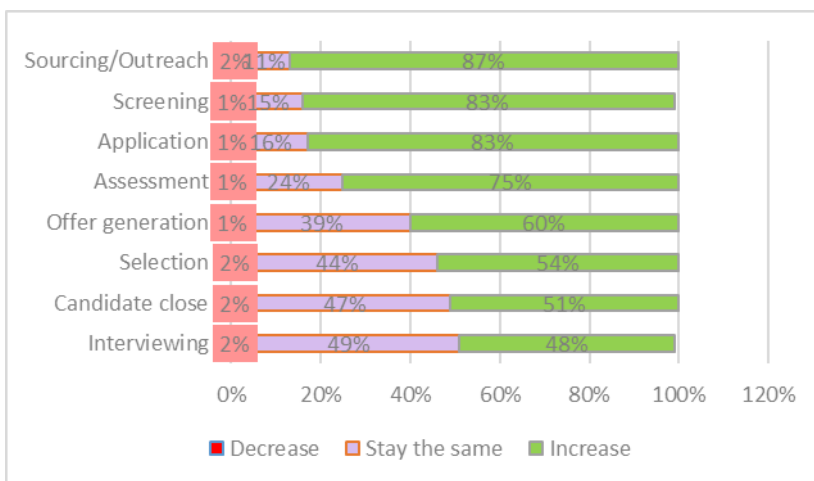
Over 51% of recruiters worked more during this period, while only 17.88% said they worked less. Only 40% of recruiters had an increase in the number of candidates compared to previous periods, even if the data show that unemployment in Romania is increasing, 35% of companies have fewer candidates for available jobs compared to the pre-pandemic period.

Three-quarters of recruiters have seen a change in the criteria for new job seekers. Stability is the main criterion that a person wants when looking for a job. Other top criteria for job selection would be professional development, additional salary benefits, and personal safety (Bhagyashree, 2020).

The role of technology is in the permanent raise in the recruiting process. Even if we speak about launching the jobs, selecting candidates, an outreach of them, or the screening process it is expected that the technology to increase, as we present in Figure 2. Automating the process of searching for employees has now come to use the use of artificial intelligence and various

automation tools, which are gaining more and more attention. The special software will allow you to find and analyze the candidates, schedule the interviews, resume the processes, and much more. All this reduces the task of the human resources department. 72% of employers surveyed (based on LinkedIn research) believe that the hiring process will be fully automated by 2027.

Figure 2: Expecting digitalization in recruiting sector



Source: Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends Survey, 2019

In this way, using the range of new devices that exist on the market, the whole cycle of recruitment is more scientific, scalable, and effective.

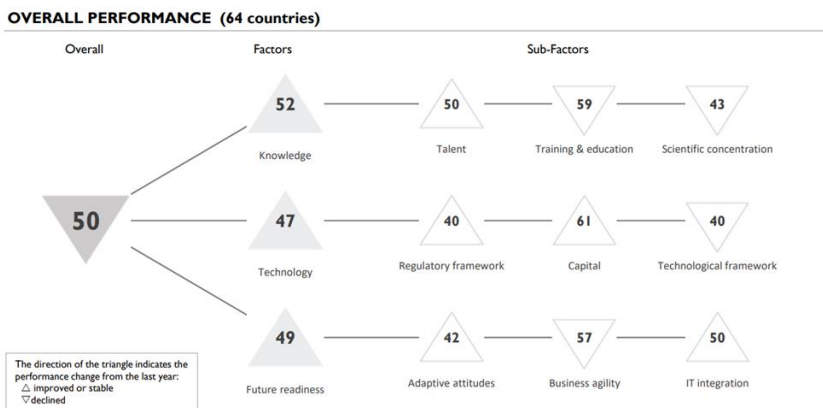
The reasons for making the transition online so fast were the inability of candidates to travel for interviews due to local restrictions or social distance. Broadcasting the hiring process online and interviewing candidates through platforms such as Zoom, Skype, and Microsoft Teams not only helped overcome some of the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but also helped save time and money for everyone involved (Jomo, 2022).

In 2021, the digitization of recruitment has gone from a simple preference to a real necessity. 40% of organizations did not use software specialized in the recruitment process, 34% wanted to implement one - and the remaining 26% were prepared for the new digital world (Claeys, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought awareness of significant gaps and shortcomings in this area of digital skills, connectivity, and the use of technology in education. In addition, according to the latest study of the digital economy and society, 42% of Europeans did not have digital skills, and the European labor market is facing a severe shortage of digital specialists.

Among the countries with a population under 20 million inhabitants, in terms of the index of the economy and the digital society, Romania is in the year 2021 according to the World Digital Competitiveness Ranking the 51st place after 2 years when she was in the 49th place. What does this mean? The pandemic has made some changes. The changes that have taken place have consisted primarily of the desire to grow and learn, the ability to adapt, and the ability to cope with the uncertain situations that may arise. These are the criteria that are quite important for employers to make employment choices in 2021.

Figure 3: Romania in World Digital Competitiveness



Source: OECD 2021

If we talk about the wishes of both employees and employers, we can say that they have undergone a considerable transformation. If in the past, employers appreciated the technical knowledge of employees in the recruitment and selection process, today there is more interest in skills such as analytical thinking, flexibility, perseverance, and even adaptability. This is because technical skills are easier to learn than these "soft skills".

In the situation created by the pandemic, it will be noticed that some companies responded, without having any strategy, some of the employers

resorted to dismissing employees, for example, to keep their business. Other companies have chosen to close their doors, but there have been companies that have not only tried to keep their employees but have also implemented new procedures in the process of getting as close to them as possible and inspiring them, to help them to get through this period, because understanding how important the human factor is in this context, but also in general, it will effectively contribute to the production of high-quality results (Knowlson, 2020).

Significant differences in employment in the new period include:

- Increasing the role of "employer branding" (creativity, adaptability, and organizational capacity);
- Creating an efficient recruitment ecosystem;
- Automation of the people search process;
- Increasing the number of remote workers;
- Independent, self-employed;
- Focus on external recruitment.

Because a company competes with other companies, it also competes with other employers for customers called "candidates". Efforts to develop an employer brand are not only important but also necessary. Companies that don't spend time marketing human resources will simply lose the fight for candidates.

If employees want to work long-term and do their job efficiently, they need to ensure that there is a transparent recruitment and adjustment system. If what is shown from the beginning does not match the reality, the future employees and the reputation will be lost.

Working online with job seekers has been another hiring trend for 2021. Online video interviews and tests have begun to replace regular interviews. However, profiling candidates without verbal cues has increased the risk of hiring the wrong candidate. For the final interview, some potential employees could be invited for a distance interview and this was easier and faster to filter for those looking for a job.

The traditional office work model has been abandoned in favour of a hybrid work model preferred by both employees and employers: the "3-2-2" working week - three days at the office, two days away, and two days off was the model chosen by most employees. On the other hand, other employers preferred only to work from home. This format saves employers rent and offers flexibility to employees (Vries, 2021).

The epidemic has thus changed the purpose of developing a benefits strategy. Currently, the motivation process includes the creation of comfortable working conditions at home as opposed to the years before the pandemic when the motivation consisted of other variables such as a shorter program or a well-structured system of benefits (Tampu, 2015). Flexible strategies and benefit formats are gaining popularity in the market, giving employees the power to choose compensation packages. For example, many companies pay part of the maintenance costs in the employee's home to meet various needs such as quality internet, etc.

6. Conclusions

Faced with the situation created by the pandemic, the leaders of the Human Resources departments had to make decisions that had a direct impact on the organization to ensure their employment, as well as their survival. Through this research, we tried to analyze the impact of the coronavirus crisis on human resource policies and the role of digitalization in the new context.

The problems of human resources are and will remain essential for the possibilities of companies to face the great changes of the internal or external environment, the companies always succeeding only with the help of their employees. That is why recruitment and staff selections must be based on perfectly defined principles and models and of course, are strictly observed. If these principles are not observed and applied, it will threaten the proper functioning, and with it even the future of the company.

The pandemic forced companies to digitize or rethink their existing digitization strategy, as part of the plan to change and adapt the business model. In this case, companies wishing to achieve a long-term sustainable impact digitalization strategy must also consider strict rules, with two significant changes needed to accelerate the digitalization and innovation strategy during this period.

Although the interest in digital transformation and the implicit interest in digital skills has significantly grown, it is important to note that the pandemic has not only made a real change in the lives of its companies and employees but also forced several sustainable solutions.

COVID-19 may drive quicker adoption of industrialization and AI, particularly in job areas with increased physical proximity.

Remote work and virtual conferences are possible to persist, even if depend a lot on the industry sector and will continue less or more intensely than at the pandemic's peak.

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