The Post-pandemic World of Work: Are We Using the Right Management Tools to Create Value?

Patrizia De Corato and Rhonda A. Best

ABSTRACT

The lockdown-induced hybrid working model changed the labour landscape significantly. However, as restrictions were relaxed, there was little sign that previous ways of working would fully return. Instead, some forms of the modern trend were here to stay. You see, once new approaches become mainstream the impact is seldom challenged. Take for example an interview, it is a trusted management tool that helps organisations decide whether a potential recruit might be the right fit. Do you interview everyone that joins your business or are there exceptions? Management tools and systems, like interviews, can remain unchallenged for centuries. This paper adds to the body of research into an organisational design that emphasises human capital and the ability to create value through intangible assets. We bring together three perspectives (i) what experts say are best management practices today, (ii) what employers in Lebanon currently do, and (iii) how effective employees feel these tools are. We draw conclusions that can help accounting professionals to take the step and question traditional practices that might be restricting growth. Our investigation into the subject of value creation revealed that while system updates were already underway in some countries, in Lebanon, businesses are behind in capturing value from intangible assets. That’s significant because intangible assets are up to nine (9) times more valuable than a business’s physical assets. Although senior management there know that employees’ skills, know-how, and commitment can directly impact the financial performance of their business, the work people perform continues to be managed in the traditional way, which is a recipe for failure.

Keywords: EFRAG, ESG Reporting, Intangible Assets, International Framework.

I. INTRODUCTION

Just as the pandemic entered its third year, the UK's Centre for Management Consulting Excellence (CMCE) initiated a seven-part series to contemplate the post-pandemic world of work. So, thirty-eight participants from twelve countries had come together to debate topics ranging from 'Do entry-level jobs require interviews?’ to ‘Are labour laws ill-equipped for today's environment?’ These discussions included several fall-out questions, including the topic for this paper. Are management tools employed by businesses creating the desired value?

The US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC, 2020) and others have proposed several revisions to the existing rule to improve human capital reporting and disclosure. Investors are "better served by understanding how each company looks at its human capital and, in particular, where management focuses its attention in this space.” The SEC proposal drew out material disclosures concerning human capital that allows investors to perceive this "resource" better and observe effectiveness through the eyes of company management (Dzinkowski, 2020).

According to the International Integrating Reporting Framework (2021), human capital represents people's competencies, capabilities, experience, motivation, and encouragement to innovate and improve processes, goods, and services, alignment with and support for an organization's governance framework, risk management, and ethical values, ability to understand, develop and implement an organization's strategy, loyalties, ability to lead, manage and collaborate.

So, in a broader sense, management tools do require modernization to be as effective because today's environment significantly differs from that of the 1700 to 1800s when ideas of management techniques were being developed for their changing world (Lloyd & Aho, 2020). As seen in the McKinsey Global Institute Discussion paper published in June 2021, the challenge for most employers will be how to use management tools to sense and capture workforce capabilities that create value for the business.

While several studies have provided empirical evidence that proves the hypothesis that intangibles will generate future company benefits, it is also true that intangibles are elusive, multi-faceted, unstable, uncertain, and risky in many respects. Making them difficult to document, represent and measure (EFRAG, 2020). Consequently, the economic relevance of intangible assets is accepted, but the complexity remains in its management, accounting, valuation, and disclosure. Our paper adds to the ongoing debate and provides clarity on some of the main misconceptions.

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II. METHODOLOGY

We used a mixed research methodology, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to draw on the strengths of each data type. At the study's core is the online survey from which we used to collect data for one country. Data collection took place in Lebanon, with 3000 survey participants completing the online survey. The target group for the research included Lebanese employers, employees, and experts, mainly from the Lebanese Association of Certified Public Accountants (LACPA) and professionals from the Lebanese business environment. There were 235 respondents.

The survey was designed in English and accompanied by a letter of explanation. There were seven structured questions that targeted an audience to measure Lebanese attributes, opinions, orientations, and attitudes or actions toward the four selected management tools.

Questions were asked from three sections:
1. Personal questions, used as qualifiers for sorting the data.
2. Conditional questions help us separate respondents into two distinct categories of roles/responsibilities (i.e., employers and employees). We wanted to compare how employers and senior managers interpret value created through these tools with those tasked as employees. Those respondents selecting 'business owner' or 'full-time senior manager' were deemed employers. All other responses were from employees. Both categories shared their views on statements that related to the four management tools under review, namely:
   - The strategic workforce plan;
   - The recruitment interview process;
   - The key skills development process;
   - The annual employee performance assessment.

While respondents knew that the four (4) management tools were under review, they commented on indirect statements to reduce bias. For each category, there were nine (9) statements related to at least two (2) of the management tools on observation.

3. Finally, both categories then ranked which hard (technical skills) and soft (behavioural skills) were most or least important for generating value in the workplace.

The Likert scale, frequencies, and correlation coefficients were used to measure the strength of data relationships on a normalized scale from -1 to 1. On an ordinal scale, answers were ranked and rated in our study research, but the distance between responses is not measurable and not necessarily equal. Likert-type responses are assigned numbers representing varying degrees of agreement or disagreement for behaviours, attitudes, rules of conduct, or actions, giving rise to a particular quantitative manner to these data.

In addition to the survey, this study incorporates information collected from two (2) supplementary sources, namely the Centre for Management Consulting Excellence's (CMCE) 7-part series and a restricted literature review (publications issued in 2017 and later). The CMCE is a collaborative professional community-based in the City of London, United Kingdom. The CMCE series ran for seven weeks, from 20th January to 3rd March 2022, covering one of seven topics for one hour each week. The literature review began with the examination of 22 books (refer to the Appendix for the full list). Each covered one of the four management tools under review.

From these books, a clear theme arose. An update of management tools was underway. Several books explained that the environment, tools, or people's behavior had changed. While this proved the need for change, we focused on publications over the past five years (2017-2022) in search of similarities, contrasts, and gaps.

III. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

There were 235 responses over two weeks. Nevertheless, some limitations to the data collection process could exist due to the language barrier. Over 3000 people received the survey; however, respondent numbers were smaller. Although refined to examine just management tools as a driver creating value, the low level of responses may also indicate the complexity of intangibles.

According to one source, 'etymologists say the word 'intangible' originates in France in the 1600s. It meant 'incapable of being touched'. There is also evidence of its origin in Medieval Latin from the root word 'tangibles', which meant 'that may be touched'. In the 1800s, that understanding of the figurative sense began to grow. Back then, the definition had evolved to mean 'that cannot be grasped by the mind'. Today's Cambridge dictionary explains intangibles as impossible to touch, describe, or give an exact value.' (Best, Business & Financial Times Online, Ghana, 2021).

There might have been more answers if there were no limitations.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents to the survey were primarily from the service sector. We questioned a cross-section of employers and employees to gauge whether their understanding of using management tools was congruent. There were 133 employers, represented by 47 respondents identifying as business owners and 87 as full-time senior managers. All employers surveyed were over 21 years of age. There were 102 employees.

While the data collected was indicative of the Lebanese service sector, we have drawn focus to the findings that help us answer the research question – in the post-pandemic world of work, are we using appropriate management tools to generate value? Our insights look at the correlations between the variables under review, the gap in workforce planning strategies, and the methods used to close the gap.

V. CORRELATIONS

We used generic questions to help qualify the responses. Then we looked for correlations to disprove some set hypotheses. Table 1 shows that there were positive correlations between variables.

We examined these correlations because there is an expectation that:
Older individuals in the service sector are likely to be more educated than their younger counterparts.

The service sector would primarily hire the educated to extract and deliver more value as they grew.

In a knowledge economy, it is assumed that the most educated individuals will always be permanently employed.

The service sector would employ the most individuals as the service sector market is boundless.

Although existing, we were intrigued to discover that these relationships were weak. For example, all calculations measured less than 1. This result told us that there still needs to be more understanding of the advantages of managing intangibles in a service-led environment. If there were, more educated talent would attract service sector jobs, and traditional recruitment practices would have updated.

**Correlation between age and education:** 0.845756635

This correlation does not mean that people will have an identical zeal for learning as they age. Ageing is not the criterion for pursuing education. Younger people may be more educated due to increased accessibility.

**Correlation between education and employment status:** 0.80726139

Additionally, the education level of younger candidates varies on their employment status. The level of education does not guarantee work opportunities. For example, start-ups may hire recent graduates with fresh ideas but discount those with more education and no experience. The recency of graduation might be a deciding factor for selection.

**Correlation between the service sector and education:** 0.796366795

In our research, most respondents were from the service sector, where value creation is most significant for jobs. Nevertheless, investment in education is less substantial for a sector that depends on knowledge. The lack of knowledge about intangibles likely creates this poor correlation. Employees are therefore working from the conventional management approach and not benefiting from non-traditional thinking. This finding means that some existing problems would persist, although alternative solutions might be available.

**Correlation between the service sector and employment status:** 0.881057114

While most jobs should be available within the service sector, this measure indicates that jobs are less available, although there is the capacity for growth within the sector. This finding could be because employees need to access the knowledge needed to add value beyond that of employees within non-service sectors.

Based on our survey questions and respondents’ answers and looking at the correlation values depicted between the four variables mentioned above, we can see the strongest positive correlation between the service sector and employment status equal to 0.8810 (correlation coefficient value > 0), which means that the two variables are moving in the same direction; in other words, more respondents in the frontlines employed at senior level are oriented toward professional service sectors because they are identifying growth prospects in intangibles thus creating more value for the business.

The second positive correlation between the age and education variables is equal to 0.8457 correlation coefficient value > 0), pointing to the fact that more respondents who have an age group between 32-51 years old hold a master's degree level of education. This finding can justify that the mentioned age group of respondents is looking for higher education levels to create more value for their businesses since intangible organisational knowledge is vital to managers and decision-makers.

The third positive correlation between education and employment status variables equal to 0.8072 shows that most respondents holding a master's degree are mostly employable and engaged in senior-level management positions.

The last and fourth positive correlation between the service sector and education variables equal to 0.7963 indicates that the service sector is engaging more educated persons having master's degree level of education and knowledge-based intangibles, thus giving in return to the business service sector fields an added value and opportunities to progress in different areas.

Overall, employment can be created within the service sectors once there is a greater understanding of the value-creation process and how intangible assets will benefit profitability. University graduates need to be more utilised because they are not aware of the value they can offer.

**VI. THE MANAGEMENT TOOLS GAP**

The above expectations aside, these employers are conventionally hiring based on the current job description. Therefore, these employers support the concept of value creation associated with recruiting skilled and competent employees.

Our study, however, revealed that most employers use the first concept tool of key skills development and the second concept tool of annual employee assessment for hiring to generate value for the business. The results are consistent with other expert findings – while soft skills will create the most value for businesses, employers have yet to update the strategic management tools for enabling business value creation. Current tools primarily focus on tangible, technical skills.

In the past, value creation in organizations largely depended on tangible assets (IIR, 2013). However, over the past few decades, the emphasis has been increasingly on activities that will improve intangible assets, including the company's care in reducing environmental harm, making social contributions, and exhibiting good governing practices (known as ESG). Therefore, value creation assessments consider the interdependency between (i) workforce competitiveness and performance and (ii) the extent to which its management tools either support or threaten value creation.
The high rank given by respondents for each of the five soft skills under review indicates that these are essential skills. However, while respondents quantified their responses from 1=least important to 5=most important, it is essential to note that intervals between values cannot be assumed equal.

We used a frequency distribution table below to highlight these markers.

Of the dataset of 235 observations, the highest percentage of frequencies (percentages of responses in each category) are, ranging from 46.80% to 60.00%, located on the fifth Likert survey scale, indicating some recognition for skills that will produce intangible value.

Similarly, there is a high concentration of answers ranging from 31.06% to 38.72%, in the fourth Likert survey scale showing that technical skills are also crucial to employers and employees.

In Table III, we measured the central tendency of data set values averaging responses received for the first and last two columns.

The central tendency analysis reveals a similar pattern that soft skills outweigh technical skills. Furthermore, these statistics indicate that respondents were neither concerned about the long-term impact nor the materiality in this case. For instance, the data suggests that respondents may not appreciate the productivity gains of implementing artificial intelligence while maximizing human intellectual capital.

Additionally, when we separated the most important skills (responses that rank 5), we saw that employers and employees have similar views about the skills (Fig. 1). Congruent views are noteworthy. Whether that is positive or not is left to be determined. For example, congruence could mean that employers and employees are unable to gauge the significance of soft skills for business growth and development, which is a worrying indicator.

VII. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: BRIDGING THE GAP

The need to close the gap was evident from more than just our primary research. The literature review also provided a first-hand account of the changes happening worldwide. For example, Gemma Dale explains in her book "Flexible Working" the significance of disregarding employee feedback.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), an internationally recognized association for human resource management professionals, defines strategic workforce planning as a core business process. The strategic
workforce plan:

- is meant to support the business while balancing changing talent needs.
- will typically outline the way businesses acquire, train, and retire talent with the supply of skills available in the labour market.
- identifies talent needs associated with the organization's future goals.
- ensures the company has the right mix of talent, technologies, and employment models to reach these goals.

One of the major setbacks to modernizing today's organization has been the exclusion or de-emphasis of the HR function; as explained in the Big Book of HR, key trends all point to why HR should be involved in the organization's strategic planning (Mitchell, 2022). Most businesses fail to accentuate the material financial gains that shifting strategic plans to HR-focused can have for the business.

In the book 'Solving the Productivity Puzzle' ex-Accenture HR Consultant Tim Ringo writes about the significance of an effective strategic workforce plan for navigating today's complex environment (Ringo, 2020). Tim characterized the environment as having ten key trends that are affecting productivity.

While Mitchell examines trends within the HR function, Ringo's assessment is across the whole business environment. Despite this difference, both books outline significant trends shaping the world economy. These trends include:

- dwindling employee drive, engagement, and productivity (Ringo);
- six generations within the labour force (both Mitchell and Ringo);
- diversity and inclusion of ethnicities and genders (Ringo);
- a demand for reconceptualizing rewards and compensation as employees have an interest in becoming owners (Ringo);
- employee well-being (Ringo);
- the use of BIG data and drill-down analytics (both Mitchell and Ringo);
- technology and machine learning (both Mitchell and Ringo);
- gig-economy platforms and increased collaborations (both Mitchell and Ringo);
- hybrid working (Ringo).

Ringo points out that despite the availability of a multi-cohort labour supply, today's sophisticated mix of experience and energy, there are recorded levels of disengaged staff. As a result, employees generally feel unsupported as they develop the skills they need for their work.

Workforce plans must be more utilized within companies or articulate the path an organization has decided to take for resourcing its vision.

Essential action: Ask these questions of your senior management:

- Is there a well-defined strategic workforce plan that outlines the work and how value is created?
- Do you know that the current employment model will meet the company's future goals?
- Is there a harmonized approach to resourcing people and technology within your operating model?

If the answer to all three questions is yes, your strategic workforce plan is likely generating the intended value.

VIII. RECRUITMENT INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interview process is a known employment screening method. However, this study defines the process as a recruitment interview to differentiate this type from other interview processes.

Sources say Thomas Edison introduced the recruitment interview in the 1920s, a time when they could be more selective because there was a surplus of tertiary-educated individuals entering the workforce (Buckley & Wiese, 2000; Smith, 2015; Delaney, 2020). However, little theoretical development has occurred since those modernization ideas originated in the 1940s.

During the CMCE series, the first question asked whether entry-level roles required interviews (CMCE's Next Gen - The Post-Pandemic World of Work Series, 2022). Initially, the majority view appeared to be 'yes'. However, it is a thought-provoking question. On the one hand, employee screenings are valuable, but on the other hand, new entrants are yet to gain skills or experience. So, is an interview the most effective assessment method for school leavers or graduates?

That evening’s conversation began with an icebreaker question where panelists shared personal stories about their first work experience and interviews. Interestingly two of the five panelists did not have interviews. Chido Chadoka from Zimbabwe explained that being literate had granted him entry into his first job in the banking sector at the age of 19. Eva-Christie Bessala from the UK also did not have an interview. She started to work right out of school through an internship at her mother's office (Best, 2022). By the end of the hour, some had a change of heart.

We have used qualitative data to explore situations and develop a potential model of understanding. Testing the conceptual model by looking at a blog post published on LinkedIn (Nathanson, 2017) showed that "From lengthy, redundant applications to outdated interview methods to lousy candidate experiences, we still have a very long way to go before we truly "disrupt" or "innovate" our industry. Some big things have changed, but we still have miles to go on many of our dated practices." Nathanson adds that the value of the recruiting process had become much more of a "check the box" exercise which it currently is. That is why we need to review and assess the four prevailing management tools to meet the intended outcomes again.

For example, one participant said, "We need to rethink and differentiate our recruitment processes for entry-level positions. Adapt and update our mindset on hiring practices". Another said, "An interview is an important brand engagement point - candidates should leave the interview feeling confident and inspired. Whether hired or not, they should speak positively about their experience with your brand." Given the desire to transform it, these were invaluable insights into how the interview process can change in the coming years.

The rationale was that interviews could become enjoyable conversations and dispel the traditional interactions which
some had described as interrogations (Guido, 2019; Hannan, 2022; Lauzon, 2020; Rice, 2022). This tendency was persistent. When the pandemic upset the economy, many workers lost their jobs and had to adapt to the changes made to the selection process.

The interview process has evolved over the pandemic. The social distancing requirement caused that evolution. Nevertheless, some changes also occurred to improve results. Management consultant and author of Hire with Your Head, Lou Adler, explains the importance of a power profile during the recruitment interview process (Adler, 2021). He insists employers should refrain from hiring based on skills, personality, or experience if they seek peak performance.

Authors should consider the following points:
1) Technical papers submitted for publication must advance the state of knowledge and must cite relevant prior work.
2) The length of a submitted paper should be commensurate with the importance, or appropriate to the complexity, of the work. For example, an obvious extension of previously published work might not be appropriate for publication or might be adequately treated in just a few pages.
3) Authors must convince both peer reviewers and the editors of the scientific and technical merit of a paper; the standards of proof are higher when extraordinary or unexpected results are reported.
4) Because replication is required for scientific progress, papers submitted for publication must provide sufficient information to allow readers to perform similar experiments or calculations and use the reported results. Although not everything needs to be disclosed, a paper must contain new, usable, and fully described information. For example, a specimen's chemical composition need not be reported if the main purpose of a paper is to introduce a new measurement technique. Authors should expect to be challenged by reviewers if the results are not supported by adequate data and critical details.

IX. KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Since the purpose of a business is to create a customer, Peter Drucker explained in one of his lectures that there were only two critical functions of any business – innovation and marketing (Trout, 2012). Therefore, all essential skills would be in support of these functions. We found a consistent pattern in examining the literature on modern techniques for crucial skills development. They focused on processes to improve modern-day innovation and marketing.

In The Power of a Positive No (2007), William Ury emphasised that negotiation options refer to any available choices among parties that satisfy our interests, including conditions, contingencies and trades. According to Ury, we are experiencing high-stress levels at work, limited choices, and the pressure to give in and say yes grows daily, producing overload and overwork, expanding e-mail and eroding ethics.

Additionally, employers have conventionally left potential employees with a negative post-rejection experience when recruiting. As pinpointed by recruiter Lara Quentrall-Thomas in the CMCE series, ‘An interview is an important brand engagement point - candidates should leave the interview feeling confident and inspired. Whether hired or not, candidates should speak positively about their experience with your brand.”). How many brands have considered the unhired pool of candidates as unofficial brand ambassadors? Only a few. Most companies focus on the talent within.

Other studies attempted to link the interview process with the practised law. The law aimed to protect individual and societal interests by coordinating them, thus minimising occasions for conflict (Rudolf von Jhering, 1877-83). Weissman (Weissman, 2021) wrote that wherever law ends, tyranny begins. He referred to goal displacement in law practices and ended with a report revealing the situation for public opinion. According to Weissman, even rules have an end, which may clarify the original idea that management instruments sometimes become misleading over time.

Finally, Marquet (2021), in his book "Turn the ship around", showed that simple changes could go a long way and bring about a sea change in a team's functioning and performance. With this new approach, Marquet convinces readers to put decision-making in the hands of more people because this empowers the workforce to recognise their self-leadership responsibilities and boosts employee satisfaction and performance. In addition, Marquet advised that we should reject leader-followers as a model and view the world as a place for leaders everywhere to achieve this vision.

X. CONCLUSION

Capitalism in its current form has failed as a social system (Foster, 2019) but as the post-pandemic environment further fuels unemployment and underemployment, leaders who understand the true potential and challenges of human capital are set to win this industrial revolution (Elliott & Corey, 2018).

We started this research by questioning whether employers used effective management tools. For example, we looked at interviews, the tool used to select and recruit employees who would create value for the business. To explore this topic further, we conducted observations during panel discussions and utilised an online survey and a literature review. We then mapped results to provide insight into the Lebanese service-sector businesses.

Our findings highlighted that, regardless of some understanding of the importance of intangible skills to create value for businesses, there needs to be a more practical application of that knowledge. For instance, some Lebanese employers use traditional management tools that do not attempt to measure and manage employees' intangible skills. This executive decision restricts productivity and growth.

Despite employers’ outdated practices, most employees have demonstrated their desire to generate organisational value, which is a significant point. However, employers wanting to guide employees can generate more value may need to understand the subject better before integrating it into their skill strategy.

While it is easier to use traditional management methods and techniques, they can fail to equip businesses to take advantage of the growth opportunities in an evolving environment. We recommend that employers in Lebanon
experiment with one new management tool and strengthen their current organisation structure, so it explores existing growth potential.

You can begin by asking these essential questions:

✔ Is there a well-defined strategic workforce plan that outlines the work and how value is created?

✔ Do you know that the current employment model will meet the company’s future goals?

✔ Is there a harmonised approach to resourcing people and technology within your operating model?

As unemployment rates rise in the Arab States the post-pandemic recovery period is an ideal starting point for implementing better-aligned management tools.

APPENDIX

Literature review book list – not all the books reviewed were cited.

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<th>TABLE IV: RELEVANT REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE BOOKS</th>
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<td>2. The Big Book of HR 10th Anniversary Edition – Barbara Mitchell, Cornelia Gaunlem</td>
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<td>3. Hire with your Head - Lou Adler</td>
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<td>4. The Star Interview: The Ultimate Guide to a Successful Interview – Laila Lauson</td>
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<td>22. Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go – Beverly Kay, Julie Winkle Giulioni</td>
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CONFICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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