Global Scientific JOURNALS

EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYEES TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT AT SOHAR ALUMINIUM DURING COVID-19

Maryam Issa Al Jabri, 18f18480

Student, Middle East College
Muscat, Oman
Ms. Maryam Al Rashdi
Faculty, Middle East College
Muscat, Oman

_____

Abstract :

This research revolves around the study of training and development challenges during COVID-19 in Sohar Aluminum Company. where the outbreak of this disease has led to a tremendous change in all areas of life, including changing some of the systems, laws and strategies used in companies. This research is a descriptive research, the two main resources of information are Primary and Secondary resources. Secondary resources, mostly relays on latest journal articles as well as some academic websites. While the primary resource is a questionnaire which distributed to the company's employees. As a result, there are many challenges that the company faced in training and developing employees during COVID-19 including that it developed new strategies appropriate to the current situation to limit the spread of disease among employees, as it trained employees online, but also faced some challenges and difficulties in doing so. As the employees faced difficulty in benefiting from these training programs because some of them had difficulty organizing and balancing their time between their personal life and work, and also some of them did not have the Internet to join the training programs and others did not have sufficient experience of how to use technology. but it created many methods and strategies to complete the training programs and not stop. On the opposite side, although it was able to find several appropriate methods for the situation, some employees did not benefit from the training programs well. It is very important for Sohar Aluminum to develop these methods to overcome

this crisis and the coming crises. Also to maintain high performance and maintain employee health and safety in the workplace. The company should develop training programs that are provided via the Internet, such as mixing these programs with social programs and other applications in order to reach satisfactory results, such as it were in the workplace and better. In addition, care should be taken to teach all employees how to use software devices and enhance their knowledge of technology to avoid this obstacle will occur in the future.

Keywords: Training, Development, challenges, COVID-19

Introduction

Training and development is an important and effective component of the business world. It means the development and improvement of the employee's skills, abilities, ideas and behaviours with the aim of obtaining a highly experienced employee to meet the requirements of the job and his ability to produce and innovate to develop the organization in which he works.

Recently, the opportunity for an employee to receive training has become very small, due to the Corona pandemic. When this pandemic began to spread rapidly, it negatively affected all companies that conduct training programs for their employees. Where most of the people began to work in their homes and hold their meetings via the Internet. In addition, companies are providing their employees with the necessary information through social media programs, and attendance at the workplace is limited only to severe necessity.

Most companies have adopted appropriate procedures to complete their work and not stop due to this pandemic. At first it encouraged employees to learn digitally and later it created several online training courses. It also reduced the number of employees for training in the workplace in order to preserve their safety and not to contract this disease. In this study, Suhar Aluminum Company will be selected to study the challenges it faced during the training and development of employees and the procedures that must be followed.

In 2004, in the month of April, Sohar Aluminum Company was established. The idea of this company is considered as the first aluminum smelting project in the Sultanate of Oman. In addition, the OQ Company, the Abu Dhabi National Energy Company and the Rio Tinto Company are co-owners of this huge company. In addition to that, Sohar Aluminum has been built in a way that promotes efficiency, preserves the environment, and provides maximum safety for its personnel by employing long-standing industrial experience in its design, specifications, and construction. The smelter has a capacity of 395,000 tonnes of high-quality aluminium per year (Sohar aluminium, 2020).

Statement of the research problem

The Corona pandemic has negatively affected the performance of companies, whether in the private or government sectors, specifically Suhar Aluminium. As the company faced difficulty in conducting training courses for its employees as usual. Where there were several decisions from the

head of health stipulating reducing the number of employees in the company, as well as preventing travel outside the country and applying social distancing measures. All these decisions made it difficult for the company to conduct workshops and training courses for employees.

Research aim and objectives

This research is conducted to guide Suhar Aluminium in implementing and developing their training and development strategies. Where effective training courses must be held at the same time, commensurate with the current conditions.

1- To identify the significance role of training and development in organization.

2- To examine the impact of COVID-19 on employee's performance.

3- To determine the challenges faced by companies in training and developing employees during COVID-19.

4- To identify procedures that organization should conduct to minimize the impact of covid 19 on training and development.

Literature Review:

Definition of organizational training:

Training is a basic concept in all organizations. It is the basic step that prepare the employee to the working environment within the organization. also, training enables the employee time to adjust to the regulations of organization and help introduce him to its requirements and demands. It is considered like acquaintance period where both new individual and the management investigate each other and measure qualities and what each has to offer. Moreover, (Tannenbaum & Yukle, 1992) wrote that training is a limitless process. It can be executed in many forms and programs. also, it can be adaptive countless times according to the needs and goals of the organizations. When implemented correctly, training can be considered a powerful tool in building and investing human resource in different and various sectors of economy. Shonna Waters has identified organizational training as the processes that focus on transferring of knowledge within an organization. training is used in order to improve performance of employees in the current positions and prepare them for future responsibilities. Moreover, a successful training process aims to support the business objective of the workplace by providing employees with sufficient tools and knowledge. (Waters, 2021)

Definition of organizational development:

Development of the activity and achieve sequential improvements in the business field is an essential purpose for all organizations and businesses. As development is a natural outcome for any activity or effort done by management and employees within the company. It is considered a continuous process that requires a lot of effort and requires operating number of factors correctly. Organizational development is a systematic, long-range ongoing process that works on improving performance of organizations in the market by applying strategies and working practices that increase effectiveness and solve problems and obstacles. (Porras & Robertson, 1992). According to (Owen, 2003), development process is a systematic process initiated and controlled by members of the organization. this process is not routinely occurring, but it evolves as a result of contribution of knowledge, implementation of strategic planning and execution of working efforts. Development is considered the basic concept that participates in directing decision- making and organizational strategic planning.

Role of training within organization:

According to (waters, 2021), the importance of training process in the organization lies in

its role foster a positive transformation during cultural changes occurring within the work environment. in addition, to its effect on enhancing leadership and qualification in all team members. The author of the article published in 2021 agrees with the objective stated within our research, as it stated that training programs are learning-focused not development- focused as their main aim is to transfer knowledge and build essential expertise within the worker. Which can then be invested in developing its career and skills. Moreover, another research that was recently published in 2021 agrees with our objective about the importance of training and development within an organization. the research was written by researcher Satyendra indicated that organizational training and development programs provides vital opportunities in the development of the human resources and behavioral skills in organizations. Also, the research indicated that training and development participates in employee's personal growth and satisfaction. In addition, it increases knowledge and skills of employees at each level. (Satyendra, 2021)

Impact of COVID-19 on organizations:

Because of the large infection numbers and the emergency situation spreading around the globe, almost all countries shifted their working methods and strategies to accommodate the current demands. Managements and organizations transferred into remote working. Where all tasks were performed from home and all communication and interactions were also virtual. Moreover, most of related processes were transformed to online mode too. For example, training and learning sessions. And as a result of the significant impacts that COVID-19 enforced onto organizations and working environments around the world, many challenges were generated within the sector during the pandemic.

An article written by (Alexandria, 2021) stated that COVID-19 pandemic has caused major changes in the methods and strategies used in workplace learning. Which in turn participated in creating large number of challenges related to organizational work and performance of an organization within the market. Some of these challenges included contraction of the global economy by 3.2%. the study explained this trend by the effect of damage occurring to the offer and demand in the market due to the pandemic, the large impact on tourism and entertainment sectors on global levels and

the fast and large spreading of the virus across border of various countries. And according to the study, the lost occurring during the pandemic included human loses, financial loses and even loss of knowledge, expertise and potentials. Moreover, the unpredicted situation of COVID-19 has disrupted the whole industry. Many organizations were forced to shut down due to their failure in solving the challenges caused by it. these challenges facing organizations were including losing human resources due to high cases of death, short working hours because of the curfew and reduction of income done by closure of the global and local markets. Companies and businesses were unable to find employees to purchase their products or services. the levels of demands decreased dramatically comparing to the levels of offer.

Challenges regarding employees:

The impact of COVID-19 on the performance of employees was found to be various. As in one hand, many employees were affected negatively due to the high pressure, fear and stressful situations that they have been through. They were continuously afraid to lose their jobs. Also, new working methods such as working from home and other social distancing procedures

caused significant confusion and discomfort to large number of employees. many workers were annoyed that their work followed them home as they were forced to do additional number of tasks. Also, some managements used the world health situation and the economic problem to reduce the salaries paid for employees, reduce number of employees and force remaining workers to achieve additional tasks. (Yildirm & Arslan, 2020)

Also, (Saleem, Malik & Qurashi, 2021) agrees with the objectives included in the current research. The study concluded that COOVID-19 has significant negative impacts on performance of employees working in the different organizations and facilities all over the world. For example, the authors stated that the pandemic caused negative effects in tasks and contextual performance of employees The study included that COVID-19 caused stressful-life situation which impacted the psychological and mental health of employees. also, the unknown variables resulted in high levels of stress, anxiety, social deprivation and mental confusion in addition to other physiological issues. Moreover, the quarantined period during the pandemic caused long exposure to stress, fear and frustrations for workers. Which

affected their ability to focus on their hobs and accomplish their assigned tasks with high quality performance.

education, tourism and food services.

Challenges related to psychological health:

A study was performed by (Saleem, Malik & Qurashi, 2021) in order to investigate the amount of work stress implemented on employees during the period of COVID-19 pandemic. The study was performed by researchers of Prince Sultan university in Saudi Arabia. The study focuses on investigating how employees reacted when their psychological health was changed due to the impact of the pandemic. The study confirmed that employees were affected by the pressure generated within their working environment. the study proposed a model stating that employees may be more concerned about their health while coming to work during COVID-19 which can affect their organizational behavior and increase psychological stress.

Another study that focuses on the same topic is (Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020), which indicated that the work stress can directly impact the degree to which employees accomplish the tasks assigned to them. the results of the study showed that the

relationship between safety concerns during COVID-19 and was significant. The intense health threat and concerns implied a strong negative impact on the ability of employees to accomplish their work. Some participated employees in the study indicated that the difficult situation has caused them many stresses and concerns. Some admitted that they feel helpless and anxious most of the time at the office. Others confirms that the situation has greatly impact ed their motivations and interest in the workplace. Depression, sleep disturbance, lack of focus and paranoia are some examples of psychological issues faced by employees as impacts of the COVID-19 situations.

Challenges related to the internet:

Moreover, Challenges facing organizations due to the impact of COVID-19 included various points such as unreliable internet access: the world wide web had become the mostly used tool in the world during the period of the pandemic. The internet provided opportunity to sustain life from a safe distance. According to global statics, 90% of adults said that internet was the most important to them during the pandemic. New subscriptions increased with 53% and 26% of responders indicated that they were continuously worried about losing the

connection to the internet. This dramatic response was expected due to the shift of schools, works and most of shops and businesses to online mode. Furthermore, the intense usage of the internet has caused pressure on the servers and result in slowing down the efficiency. Many organizations suffered from unreliable internet connection, and weak safety measures on the internet while completing organizational work online. (Mcclain, Vogels & Rainie, 2021)

Financial challenges:

Small businesses were more vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic as the challenges were much harder on them. It caused more pressure due to the smaller budget and limited financial resources comparing to the larger firms. (Dua et al., 2022) reported that in 2021, third of the registered small businesses were forced to stop operating due to the impact of the pandemic. And by middle of May of the same year, more than half of these organizations reduced the number of their employees as an attempt to overcome the fallout of the situation. The study resulted that most organizations that were affected by the challenges caused by COVID_19 are the ones working in industries such as food service, occasional services, tourism and

education. These organizations faced many challenges such as changing the customer's behavior, finding solutions to adapt to governmental restrictions and regulations. In addition to maintaining safety of employees, solving financial risks and recession of global economy.

Procedures to limit impacts of COVID-19 on training:

According to department of labor of the United States, there are some procedures that can be performed by companies in order to limit the impact of COVID-19 on the training process. These procedures include demanding employees to wear protective masks and cover the faces of employees with personal protection tools all the time. Also, encourage employees to practice hygienic actions such as washing hands regularly, throwing used tissue into the garbage, avoid touching foreign objects and public surfaces. Moreover, the organization must provide employees with sanitizers, ensure their health safety and implement good airing system within the working place in order to circulate the air. (Department of labor, 2022)

Procedures to prepare organizations for work after COVID-19:

The world health organization (WHO) published a Guidance book that include various procedures and advice regarding preparations installed within organization to prepare working places for work after COVID-19. The book included instructions that organization must imply. These procedures include:

- Analyzing situation and defining the best route of action.
- establishment of developed and online training programs: these programs mixed social media, virtual applications and communication programs in order t create a training experience highly similar to the real working environment. trainees were given tasks, monitored and guided by their supervisors via online.
- Performing intensive advising guiding for individual employees in order to help them adapt to the new situation and learn how to be sued to the new situation.
- Encourage employees and motivate them to adapt to the new situation by providing additional aiding tools, reduce number of tasks or provide financial rewards.
- Take advantages of available resources and technologies and

create new strategies focusing on remote working and communication programs. this step ensures completing the work in the specific time and reduces the pressure that falls on employees.

- Gather data and monitor results while performing work. This can help improving strategies of the company and implementing further developments. (WHO, 2022)

Also, (Young, E., 2020) discusses some of the procedures that can be implemented within the workplace in order to overcome the pandemic and reduce infection chances. The article indicated that traditional planning and strategies are not enough to overcome results of the pandemic. Thus, organizations are required to improve their responses and create a new system that is suitable for sustaining high performance while maintaining health and safety of employees.

Research Methodology:
Research Design

Descriptive research aims to describe the data with high accuracy and detailed. The data were collected, analyzed and arranged in order to create an integrated research. The primary research tool, a questionnaire, was also used to collect the necessary data. This study relied on the use of qualitative data and quantitative data. This project seeks to study the challenges facing Sohar Aluminum Company in training and developing employees during the Corona pandemic. This research contains a questionnaire that will be distributed to the company's employees. In addition, qualitative data will be used. For example, articles have been published and discussed on the same topic, and an analysis and discussion will be conducted on them.

Data Collection Techniques

Two main types of data were used in this research

Primary data: where the questionnaire tool was used as an initial and rapid type of data collection. The questionnaire contains 21 questions and was distributed to most of the employees with the help of an employee working in the same company. An employee of Sohar Aluminum Company was also contacted to obtain additional information.

Secondary data: Some Journals Articles from different websites such as Emerald Insight and Masader have been used. Where some literary articles related to the subject of training and development were used, re-analyzed and discussed.

Data Analysis Technique

Investigative thinking is used to examine and process information. This data is gathered from many sources, analyzed, and discussed. Content inspection, business knowledge, and information visualization are just a few of the approaches for analyzing this data.

The macro analysis of data is generated using descriptive information, graphs and tables. whereas descriptive statistics are compiled using population summaries and contain the standard deviation and variables. Furthermore, qualitative data is gathered through observations and interviews, which are data that cannot be simply tallied since they are defined by qualities.

Quantitative data analysis:
COVID-19 has affected the performance
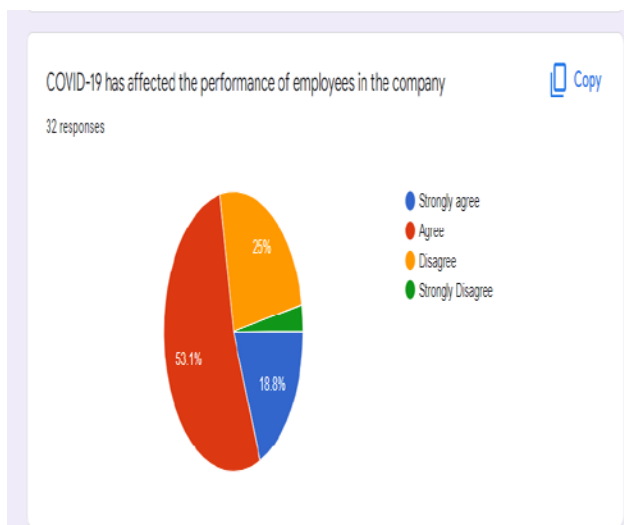
of employees in the company

This chart shows the employee's opinion of the impact of Covid 19 on the company in conducting training and development programs. A large number of employees, at 59.4%, answered, I agree, and another group of employees, at 25%, answered, "I agree strongly." Most of the employees agreed that COVID-19 affected the company negatively, which led to the suspension of training programs for a certain period or the change of some strategies related to training and development programs. However, 12.5% answered "disagree" and a small number also answered "strongly disagree". They may not see changing new training methods such as online training as an obstacle (Yildirm & Arslan, 2020).

## The provided training programs are useful to your job situation during
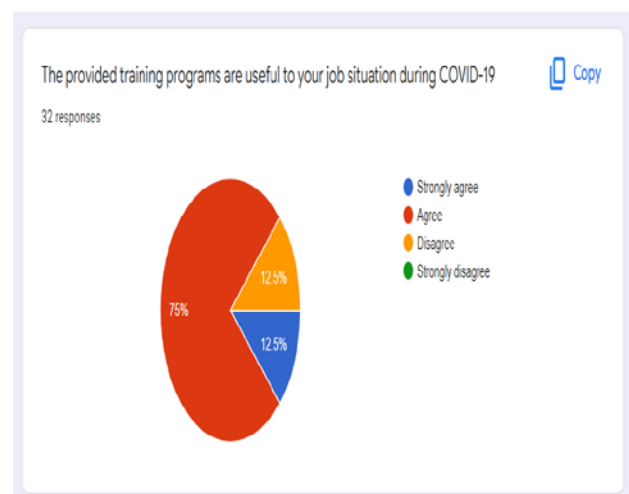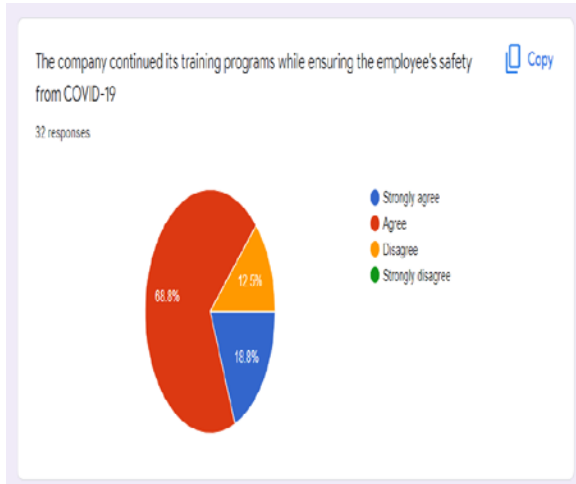

COVID-19

This chart shows whether training programs are beneficial for every employee during COVID-19. 75% answered "agree" and 12.5% answered "strongly agree", which means that the company was keen to provide useful and appropriate training programs for most of its employees during the COVID-19 period. But on the other hand, 12.5% answered "disagree" and a very small number answered "strongly disagree." This means that the company was unable, during the Covid-19 period, to provide appropriate and appropriate training programs for the work they do, due to the difficulties imposed by this the disease. But in general, the company was keen not to stop training programs and to continue with them, and the evidence for this is the largest percentage of employees who confirmed this through their answers to this question.

Difficulties faced during online training

As can be seen above, the chart explains the difficulties that employees faced during online training. Where four options have been developed, which are as follows: Internet, time, use of the software, and all of the above. 62.5% of the employees had difficulty in all of the above when they tried to train online. While 18.8% had difficulty organizing their time between attending online training and their private life at home. Also, 15.6 of the employees faced difficulty in providing the Internet to enroll in the online training programs, perhaps because of the weak network in the areas in which they live, or perhaps their inability to provide the Internet at home, as all of these reasons are considered an obstacle to attending online training courses. It also becomes clear that there is a simple group that does not know how to use software devices and programs, which leads to the difficulty of knowing how to attend training programs online (Mcclain, Vogels & Rainie, 2021) .
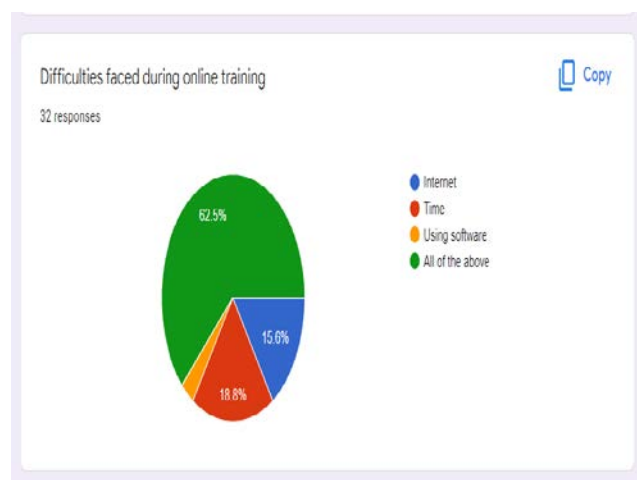
The company continued its training programs while ensuring the employee's

safety from COVID-19

This chart shows whether the company continues to conduct training programs while ensuring the safety of employees during the COVID-19 period. 68.8% of the employees confirmed by answering "agree" that the company is keen on employee safety. In addition to another group of employees with a rate of 18.8% who confirmed this with their answer "strongly agree", and this indicates the company's concern for the health of its employees and its great concern that none of them would be infected with this contagious and dangerous disease. But there is a very small number of 12.5% who answered "disagree", but this is a very small percentage

compared to those who thanked the company for their safety.

Conclusion:

Training and development are two essential components for the development of any organization. Therefore, it is very important to continue training and developing employees, even in difficult circumstances, to maintain the company's performance, expansion and development. This research aims to develop training and development methods in line with the current time (COVID-19). Where many literatures related to training and development were used, as they were discussed and compared with other literature and came up with something new.Also the necessary information to study the challenges facing Sohar Aluminum Company in the training and development of employees during Covid 19 was accurately and clearly collected and analyzed. Where this experience helped in learning the correct way to analyze data and know its reliability and validity. Where the questionnaire that was distributed to Sohar Aluminum Company was discussed and analyzed. This questionnaire includes questions about knowledge of training and development challenges during the COVID-19 period.

Where the answers were presented in the form of pie charts with percentages based on the employees' answers. After the completion of the project, it became clear that Sohar Aluminum Company had faced many challenges and difficulties in training and developing employees during the COVID-19 period. Such as the difficulty of maintaining the safety of employees from this disease during the conduct of training programs, the difficulty of ensuring that the employee has benefited from the training programs held via online platforms, in addition to that, the company faced difficulty in conducting training programs for all departments, which led to a reduction in training and a reduction in the number of trainees. In addition, it faced some obstacles that prevented the employee from enrolling in online training programs, such as the employee's lack of knowledge of using software devices or the lack of Internet services for the employee at home. But at the present time the company has overcome some of these challenges as it is trying to find solutions and ways to achieve stability in the company and be more amenable to conducting training programs.

Recommendations:

There are many recommendations and suggestions made by some of the employees of this company that would improve and develop training programs during the Covid 19 period and help avoid the challenges it faced previously. Such as making sure to increase safety in training places and intensifying the awareness of employees of the importance of adhering to safety procedures and explaining to them why this is important. Divide the trainees into groups and in different places. Focusing on the quality of training more than on increasing the number of trainees. In addition to that, developing online training programs to be more effective, attractive and enthusiastic for the employee. Motivating employees by obtaining different training materials on different topics, whether related to work or personal skills development. Also, doing a questionnaire for employees to know their opinions on how to conduct training programs that suit them, not boring and get more benefit.

REFERENCE

1. Alexandria, V. (2021). COVID-19 pandemic created changes and challenges in the workplace learning. ATD. Retrieved from:

2. Arthur, L. (2018). What are disadvantages in training employees. HR department. Bizfluent. Retrieved from: https://bizfluent.com/info-8026443-disadvantages-training-employees.html

3. Bahman, Randa & Al-Enzi, Abrar (2020). The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on conventical work settings. Kuwait Collage of Science and technology, Safat, Kuwait.

4. Brown, A. (2021). Performance management training. Northpass. Retrieved from:

5. department of labor (2022). Occupational safety and health (control and prevention). United states. Retrieved from: https://www.osha.gov/quicktakes/04182022

6. Dua, A, Engllingrud, K., Mahajan, D. & Silberg, J. (2022). Which small businesses are most vulnerable to COVID-19? McKinsey & company. United States.

7. Ershad, S. (2017). role of training and development in organizations. Santhanam of management studies. India.

8. Haigh, N. (1998). Staff development: an enabling role. In Lactchem and Lockwood. P182-192.

9. Lobez, A. (2021). Why remote training is key for new hires. Betterup. Retrieved from

10. Mahyoob, M. (2020). Challenges of organizations learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Science and art collage. Taibah university, Saudi Arabia.

11. Mcclain, C., Vogels, E. & Rainie, L. (2021). The internet and the pandemic. Pew research center. Retrieved from: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/09/01/the-internet-and-the-pandemic/

12. Mccombes, Sh. (2019, September 19). Sampling Methods | Types and Techniques Explained. Scribbr. Sampling Methods | Types and Techniques Explained

13. Mcrill, D. (2017). Why employees need training. Bizfluent. Retrieved from: https://online.maryville.edu/blog/importance-of-training-and-development/

14. Middleton, F. (2019, July 3). Reliability vs Validity in Research | Differences, Types and Examples. Scribbr. Reliability vs Validity in Research | Differences, Types and Examples

15. Nair, G. & Suresh, M. (2021). Challenges faced by construction organizations during COVID-19. IOP conference. IOP publishing.

16. Narayanamurthy, Gopalakrishan and Guilkerme. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on employee performance- moderating role of industry 4.0 base technologies. International journal of production economics. P.1 -3

17. Ogbonna, E. (1998). British ethic minorities and employment training: redressing or extending disadvantage. International journal of training and development. 2 (1), 41-44.

18. Porras, J. I & Robertson P. J. (1992). Organizational development: theory, practice and research. Consulting Psychologists press.

19. Salas, E., Steve W. & Koziowski (2009). Learning and development in organizations. Industrial and organizational psychology society.

20. Saleem, F. & Malik, M. (2021). Work stress Hampering employee performance during COVID-19. Department of Management. Collage of business administration. Prince Sultan university, Riyadh. Saudi Arabia.

21. Satyendra (2021). Role of training and development in employee and organizational performance. Online research. Ispatguru. Retrieved from: https://www.ispatguru.com/role-of-training-and-development-in-employee-and-organizational-performance/

22. Scott T. & Yukle, L. (1992). Training and development in work organizations. State University of New York. Reviews Inc. Albany, New York.

23. SOHAR ALUMINIUM. (2020). SOHAR ALUMINUM. Home | Sohar Aluminium

24. Vinesh D. (2014). Role of training & development in an organizational development. Intranational journal of management and international business studies. Collage of Meerut. CCS university. Meerut.

25. Waters, S. (2021). Organizational training: the what, why and how. Betterup. Retrieved from: https://www.betterup.com/blog/organizational-training

26. world health organization (2022). Guidance on preparing workplace for COVID-19. United Kingdom.

27. Young, E. (2020). COVID-19 and pandemic planning: how companies should respond. EY Global. Retrieved from: https://www.ey.com/en_gl/covid-19/covid-19-and-pandemic-planning--how-companies-should-respond