A Guideline to Improve the Business Continuity in the New Normal (Covid-19) through Human Resource Management: Case of Sri Lankan Apparel Industry

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Abstract

The Sri Lankan apparel industry is having a high demand for exports all over the world and is a leading apparel producer in the South Asian region. It has started to fight for its survival due to the pandemic, Covid-19. It guesses a bracing for a 50% drop in demand by the following one to one and a half years from Covid-19. Thus, the industry is in a position to reinvent itself by forcing itself to live. Thus, business continuity is necessary to proceed with the business without any interruption at this time. Moreover, human resource professionals act a major role to continue the business after the new normal, as handling the main resource of the organisation which is humans. Hence, this study aims to develop a guideline to maintain the continuous business operation of the Sri Lankan apparel industry during the Covid-19 through the commitment of HR professionals. Initially, the literature review delivered a theoretical understanding of the research area and a semi-structured interview was selected as the primary data collection method. Collected data were analysed using manual content analysis. The findings revealed that the challenges or factors that affect each HRM function during Covid-19 were identified and the action or solution used to handle those challenges/ factors were collected. Finally, the guideline was developed.

Keywords
Apparel Industry, Business Continuity, New Normal- Covid-19, Human Resource Management, Sri Lanka.

1. Introduction
The apparel industry is the most significant and dynamic contributor to the national economy in Sri Lanka and provides more than 990,000 employment and empowerment opportunities, and also which has a solid worldwide reputation for high-quality apparel by the iconic global fashion brands (EDB, 2020). Accordingly, the nation has an important place in the trade of the apparel world (World Trade Organisation [WTO], 2015), and Sri Lanka is home to some of the world's largest garment manufacturers (AFL-CIO, et al., 2021). The Sri Lankan apparel industry is having a high demand for exports all over the world and is a leading apparel producer in the South Asian region (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2013). Moreover, the production of this industry caters to many internationally reputed brands like Nike, Victoria's Secret, Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger (Board of Investment Sri Lanka, 2016). Also, the revenue from the apparel industry is accounted for 43% of the total export revenue of the country (Kapuge & Smith, 2007). This

sector is the prime foreign revenue maker (Board of Investment Sri Lanka, 2016), and it generates around 4.4 billion USD in export income each year (The World Bank, 2016).

The organisations are exposed to many new normal conditions such as natural disasters, terrorism acts, and Covid-19, which typically upset business operations, disaffect end-users, and compromising the creditability of business and revenue streams. The new normal is "an event, or status, or era that previously was an unfamiliar or atypical situation that has become standard, or usual, or expected" (Oxford Dictionary., 2020). Likely, the Sri Lankan apparel industry has started to fight for its survival due to the pandemic, Covid-19 (Echelon Media, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic is one of the most disruptive, life-changing events that had brought the world to a perpetual standstill in 2020 (Rasiah, et al., 2020). It guesses a 1.5 billion American dollar loss in export incomes in the quarter, April-June of 2020, and bracing for a 50% drop in demand by the following one to one and a half years (Sukumaran, 2020). Thus, the industry is in a position to reinvent itself by forcing itself to live (Echelon Media, 2020). Thus, business continuity is necessary to proceed with the business without any interruption at this time (Goromaru, et al., 2021). Moreover, the continued spread of Covid-19 has led to regular lockdowns and outbreaks within apparel organisations and as a result, the Sri Lankan apparel sector continues to face disruptions to its business operations. Meanwhile, its competitors in the global market started to return to more stable functions (Hewage & Pathirana, 2021). Moreover, considering the current status of the global apparel market, Sri Lankan apparel manufacturers need to look for ways to overcome the current crisis for business improvement (Bolonne, 2020). Thus, this situation explicit the demand for business continuity in the apparel industry after a new normal situation to sustain their position in the global market.

The means to anticipate and overcome disruptions in organisations is known as Business Continuity, through which the risk due to loss can be reduced and business operations could continue to operate (Fani & Subriadi, 2019). This aims to guarantee the recovery of business operations as a whole after an incident that causes major disruption to business operations in an acceptable period (Smith & Sherwood, 1995). Moreover, human resource professionals act a major role to continue the business after the new normal, as handling the main resource of the organisation which is humans (Krell, 2006). In today's usual time, each business has its challenges, but they also have one common feature; their success depends on their employees (Maurice & Bassey, 2021). Human resources professionals can play a key role in an organisation's efforts to operate through the Covid-19 crisis (Iza, 2020). Also, among the critical success factors of the competitiveness of the apparel industry the human resource management (HRM) is one of the factors (UNIDO, 2000). Thus, this study focused only HRM perspective. The coronavirus outbreak is first and foremost a human tragedy, affecting hundreds of thousands of people. The spread of the coronavirus and the restrictive measures imposed everywhere in countries, along with self-restrictions of the population, have had a rapid impact on all most all the business not from the disease and virus, but from the measures taken to stop it (Tkach & Kurpayanidi, 2020), especially due to the complete shutdown of all industries at the start of Covid-19 in March 2020 in Sri Lanka. And, this situation is still not fully recovered. Thus, there is a requirement available for all the businesses to continue their business after the Covid-19 outbreak. Thus, the practical significance from this study will be helpful to maintain the continuous business operations after new normal conditions, especially at this post-Covid-19 stage.

Hence, this research aims to develop a guideline to improve the business continuity of the Sri Lankan apparel industry during new normal (Covid-19) conditions through human resource management. The structure of this paper starts with a literature review lining the key concepts of the study. Then it presents the method used in achieving the aim of the study and finally, it presents the discussion and conclusions based on research findings.

2. Literature Review
This section consists of three subsections such as new normal, business continuity, and human resource management.

New Normal
Oxford dictionary (2020) outlines the new normal as "an event, or status, or era that previously was unfamiliar, or a typical situation that has become standard, or usual, or expected". The new normal arises to ensure the rapid response and efficient adaptation to change of organisations (Politico Magazine, 2020). This would ensure that the world would be more ready for its re-emergence with a stronger position after each shock, or crisis, or global challenge (Buheji, 2020a). Accordingly, even though the Covid-19 is a sudden incident, it can also be a consequence of broader modern world changes such as climate changes, migration, hunger, poverty, and also technology development (Buheji & Buheji, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic is one of the most disruptive, life-changing events that had brought the world to a perpetual standstill in 2020 (Rasiah, Kaur, & Guptan, 2020). Information on people's movement, travel restriction,

behaviour, etc. plays a pivotal role in preventing the range across the community (Tripathi & Bagga, 2020). Further, this new normal threatened many employees with the termination of employment mainly because several jobs cannot be done at home, among those major production activities which need to be done using machines, like the apparel industry (Levenson, 2020). Also, nobody has an idea of how long the Covid-19 pandemic will last while creating a panic situation (Bolonne, 2020). Thus, this new normal is expected to react, realise and reflect on the essence of the sudden major challenges of life and also it has significantly influenced a lot of organisations as well (Helyer & Lee, 2014). Hence, Business Continuity Planning (BCP) needs to be developed in each organisation (Goromaru, Kokogawa, Ueda, & Fukaya, 2021). Further, the Covid-19 is expected to remain prevalent for a few years, and there may in future threat of other infectious diseases. Therefore, it is necessary to study this pandemic situation and apply this knowledge to future BCP (Buheji, 2020b). Also, as the world would strive to resume its activity towards better productivity and progressive growth, it would need to go through fuzziness and would need to reshape itself to fit the pre-requisites of the next new normal. (Helyer & Lee, 2014).

Business Continuity

Business Continuity is defined as "a comprehensively managed effort to prioritise key business processes, identify significant threats to normal operation, and plan mitigation strategies to ensure an effective and efficient organisational response to the challenges that surface during and after a crisis" (ASIS International, 2006). Business continuity is a way for organisations to anticipate and overcome disruptions, so the risk of loss was reduced, and business operations could continue to operate (Fani & Subriadi, 2019). Business Continuity Planning (BCP) is defined as 'the proactive discipline of identifying vulnerabilities and risks, and planning how to mitigate, accept, or assign them in the event of a business disruption' (Croy & Geis, 2005). Moreover, BCP is a plan to respond to emergencies, to recovery business operations and it ensures that employees, assets, and business processes could quickly recover during disruptions. Also, it was one of the most critical components in the recovery strategy (Snedaker & Rima, 2014). It aims to ensure that the important operations of the organisation be continued during or after a major disruption, reduce the adverse effects and facilitate the comeback efficiently to normal conditions in an acceptable time (Haddow & Bullock, 2006), and also allow business operations to continue under adverse conditions, by the introduction of appropriate resilience strategies, recovery objectives, and business continuity and crisis management plans (Bajgoric, 2006). Also, it is to ensure the recovery of a business in an acceptable time frame, succeeding to an incident that roots for major disruption to the operation of the business (Smith & Sherwood, 1995). Moreover, even though, this guide prepare plans to prevent, respond, manage, and recover a business from any disruption, most organisations have not recognized the importance of business continuity (Goyal, 2004). BCP life cycle consists of assessments and objective setting, critical process identification, business impact analysis, and continuity response strategies, as well as monitoring, testing, and improving these areas (Krell, 2006).

There are many advantages through business continuity planning such as help to respond to emergencies and to recover business operations (Kirschenbaum, 2006), ensures that employees, assets, and business processes could quickly recover during disruptions (Fani & Subriadi, 2019), support to risk mitigation, to minimise the risk impacts and to make sure the business operates normally (Krell, 2006). Also, it is to mitigate risk, reduce the impact of risks, and ensure the business operates normally (Fani & Subriadi, 2019). BCP consists of the details of procedures before, during, and after disruptions occurred to maintain business continuity (Dushie, 2014). Moreover, it evidences the protection of employees, equipment, plants, property, production and profitability and also guarantees the continuity of business processes (Venclova, K., et al., 2013). Additionally, Business continuity planning is aiming to preserve essential customer services, revenue generation, essential support services, customer, shareholder and employee confidence and the public image of the Company (Smith & Sherwood, 1995). Further, BCP has been widely accepted by most organisations of all sizes as being an essential strategic management tool (Goyal, 2004).

Accordingly, the apparel industry also needs business continuity mainly as a manufacturing industry. In the case of Sri Lanka, the apparel industry play a major role in the revenue-making of the country, thus it is vital to make sure the continuous operation of the industry during and after the new normal conditions. The industries have faced a series of challenges due to the ongoing pandemic, in the form of layoffs, bankruptcies in affected sectors, supply-side issues due to lockdown, and demand-side issues due to financial disruptions (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). In this turbulent environment, organisations implement a full proof strategy and BCP to continue critical business operations (Venclova, Urbancova, & Vydrova, 2013). An optimum BCP enables an organisation to absorb the disruption due to the unfavorable situation and help it return to the normal state as soon as possible (Soufi, Torabi, & Sahebjamnia, 2018).

Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) is "an approach to managing people that supports an organisation's long-term goals with an overall planned and coherent framework" (CIPD, 2021). It is the practice of recruiting, hiring, deploying and managing an organisation's employees (Price, 2007). In addition, HRM is employee management with an emphasis on those employees as assets of the business (Armstrong & Baron, 2002). This helps to ensure that the various aspects of people management work together to develop the behaviours and performance needed to create and distribute value (Liyanage & Galhena, 2014). It focuses on longer-term people issues, matching resources to future needs, and large-scale concerns about structure, quality, culture, values and commitment (Lohari & Gopal, 2013). The HRM as the human resources factor is critically more important to the organisations (Anand & Kheterpal, 2014). Accordingly, nowadays, most organisations are recognised that people are fundamental to sustainable value creation, which is why they are often referred to as a business's most important asset. Also, employees' knowledge, skills and abilities are assets which the organisation should invest in and use to create sustainable value for the organisation and its various stakeholders (CIPD, 2021). More effective and profitable organisations build-up by talented, qualified, and trainee employees, thus the employee issues in an organisation are well known as the lifeblood of an organisation (Thammita, Seedevi, Jayarathne, Welianga, & Madushanka, 2010). Therefore, when an industry is facing challenges like new normal, it is more important to pay attention more to the human resources asset (Ranaweera, 2014). Moreover, the Sri Lankan apparel industry is actively connecting with the working population; hence it is necessary to pay attention to the HRM perspective especially in this new normal situation like Covid-19. The impacts of Covid-19 on employees and workplaces across the globe have been dramatic (Kniffin, et al., 2020). While Covid-19 abruptly upended normal work routines, it also caused an acceleration of trends that were already underway involving the migration of work to online or virtual environments (Gartner, 2020). Unemployment and layoffs, wage flexibility, presenteeism, social distancing and loneliness, etc. are some of the prime effects of Covid-19 on HRM (Alon, Doepke, Rumsey, & M, 2020).

The virus is a potential threat to organisational sustainability and HRM in the new world. some of the greatest challenges confronting HRM within the business organisation in the new normal ranging from loss of jobs, salary reduction, the prevailing absence of performance measurement and that of workplace connectivity. The Covid-19 pandemic has presented serious mental, physical and financial complications to employees. The shock of the pandemic is such that every spectrum of both human and economic activity is severely impeded. For sustainability, organisations now have to rely more than ever on their HR department as a corporate strategy to ensure their workforce feels safe as possible during this unprecedented and unpredictable time. Human resource management plays a key role during the pandemic as many businesses are struggling to keep their doors open and finding ways to keep their employees and customers safe, comfortable and productive.

There are many human resource functions such as recruitment and selection, learning and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, human resource planning, reward management, safety and health, employee engagement and communication, labour relation, and regulatory compliance. Among which recruitment and selection, performance management, employee engagement, and compensation and benefits will only be discussed in this research study.

3. Research Methodology

This research aims to develop a guideline to maintain the continuous business operation of the apparel industry during new normal (Covid-19) conditions through the commitment of human resource professionals.

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information from all the relevant sources to find answers to the research problem (Fellows & Liu, 2014). There are different types of data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, surveys, experiments and document analysis (Yin, 2014). The data collection method should be selected based on its rationality, appropriateness, validity, and amount of data needed (Polonsky and Waller, 2015). According to the authors, the expert interview was used together to collect data from selected cases.

A case study is a methodology that is used to investigate a particular phenomenon in a natural way using a range of approaches to gain in-depth knowledge (Wedawatta, Ingirige, & Amaratunga, 2011). And, it is particularly used in situations where the contextual details need to be analysed, but the phenomenon is not separate from the context (Yin, 2014). Since this study focuses on the improvement of business continuity of the apparel industry after Covid-19 and it was only done for a unique industry which is the apparel industry, selecting multiple cases is the most appropriate way to collect data. Multiple case studies allowed us to compare the collected data and subject studies to attain

comprehensive knowledge on research practices. Accordingly, a multiple case study design was selected for this research. Since there were constraints with limited accessibility and time, only three large-scale apparel organisations were selected to collect data and which were coded as Case A, Case B and Case C. The following Table 1 illustrates the details of semi-structured interview respondents.

Table 1: The respondents' details of the semi-structured interview

Case	Code	Designation	Work experience
Case A	RA-1	Group Admin & Compliance Manager	16 Years
	RA-2	Head of Business Process	19 Years
	RA-3	Head of Human Resources	13 Years
Case B	RB-1	Executive – Compliance & Sustainability	4.5 Years
	RB-2	Executive – HR & Admin, Recruitment	07 Years
	RB-3	Employee Relations Officer	03 Years
Case C	RC-1	Executive Facilities Engineer	3.5 Years
	RC-2	Human Resource Team Head	07 Years
	RC-3	Sustainability – Team lead	09 Years

Yin (2015) revealed, interview method is one of the most common ways in which data are collected when the research is conducting with a qualitative approach. For this study, a semi-structured interview was used because it guides to the right direction to the interview enabling the researcher to have more clarifications at the point where the interview is done than structured interviews. Hence, this is the best method to conduct interviews within case studies. Therefore, semi-structured interviews with professionals who are engaging with business continuity after Covid-19 apparel organisations were used as a data collection technique. Moreover, middle and top-level professionals were targeted to this survey, and extra attention was given to human resources professionals. Accordingly, three respondents from every three cases were selected for the interviews. The respondent selection was done based on the convenience sampling method, as this is a type of non-probability sampling method where the samples can be selected by considering the easy contact or reach. The semi-structured interview can be done in different ways such as face-to-face interviews, group interviews such as focus groups and remote interviews can conduct online or by telephone. In this research; a semi-structured interview was carried out through the 'Zoom' application.

Moreover, the Content analysis technique is used to summarise qualitative data to derive patterns in the presentation and reporting of data (Guthrie, Petty, Yongvanich, & Ricceri, 2004). Interview data were analysed using the manual content analysis technique, as qualitative data is less in amount and thus using manual content analysis was more prolific to interpret analysed data.

4. Findings and Discussion
The semi-structured interview is having a total of 12 questions for each respondent in four subsections, which is for each selected function of HRM such as recruitment and selection, performance management, employee engagement, and compensation and benefits. In each subsection, the same three questions are repeating by replacing the functions of HRM.

During the analysis of the interview survey, the first two questions have been analysed together as the first and second questions are respectively, "what are the factors/challenges that affected <HRM function> during the Covid-19? and how those factors/challenges affected <same HRM function>?". Because the second question is the reasoning or explanation of the first question and also during the interviews, when answering for the first question, the respondents have answered the second question at the same time. The last question of each subsection of the interview is "what are the actions/solutions used to handle those challenges/ factors of each function?".

In the recruitment and selection, the actions taken to prevent the Covid-19 from spreading such as social distancing and lockdown & travel restrictions were mentioned as the prime challenges. The respondent RC-2 pointed out that "The process of completing induction paperwork, signing contracts, and initial training is much difficult due to social distancing". And, the lockdown & travel restrictions are affecting the recruitment and selection mainly in conducting interviews, because of the barriers to the candidates to visit the organisation for an on-site interview and also it is difficult to conduct off-site or virtual interviews, as the majority of the employees of the apparel industry are low-

level employees, and also who are engaging with the practical activities such as cutting, stitching, painting, etc. So, there is a need to test those practical skills during the interview. Moreover, RC-1, cited that "Not everyone is comfortable or familiar with the video-conferencing format, and it can make the candidate more nervous than attending in person, potentially providing a false impression" and RA-2 noted that, "User awareness of technology devices are limited". Thus, this makes challenges in finding talents as well, in all three cases of this study, low-level employees' recruitment before Covid-19 was done through vising the candidates' areas by the HR team, but this was not possible due to the restriction for the access to candidates' areas. This is overcoming through a referral system, social media like Facebook and Instagram for recruitment, and also conduct recruitment campaigns with special approval of Police and MOH under Covid-19 protocols.

In onboarding, welcoming someone onto the team isn't the same when there is no team to meet, and which makes it extremely hard to engage the new employees when they start to work remotely. To beat this, respondent RC-1 pointed out that "Set up group chats and organise regular meetings as a practice within teams or small groups, then new employees can collaborate effectively" and also via creating an onboarding video which can include a virtual tour of your office, short welcome videos. Additionally, there is a necessity to separate the newly recruited employees from older employees both in the workplace and transport, due to uncertainty of new employees' health status on Covid-19. Also, RA-1 highlighted that "Most of our potential candidates live in congested houses where there is a great risk of spreading the virus more quickly". All respondents have mentioned that this can be solved by having a separate workplace as well as the transport for new employees, even cost to the organisation.

During the candidate screening process, getting true information of candidates and identifying their Covid-19 risk. The organisations have adopted the method of consulting area PHI and GS as they are aware of those details to gather true information. And, RB-2 strengthens that as "Get the PHI confirmation by the factory for new candidates". Further, respondent RA-2 mentioned another challenge as "There is a perception that garment factories were spreading Covid 19", which means the community impression toward the Sri Lankan apparel industry. Furthermore, additional time for the recruitment and selection process with the amendment of Covid-19 protocols (Eg: clearance certificate, filling risk assessment) is one of the prime challenges. Digitization of the recruitment process is the best method to save time and also respondent RB-1 suggested reducing time-consuming as "Inbuilt the Covid protocols and standardize the recruitment and selection process". At last, but not least, candidates not adhering to health guidelines is a prime challenge to the HRM team these days and which could be overcome by awareness programme, RC-2 noted that, "difficult to maintain the social distancing within low-level employees" and also RA-1 underlined that, "We faced a challenge in recruiting the right talent due to people not adhering to precautionary methods at the community level". Furthermore, to conduct the on-site interviews successfully, the following were recommended by the respondents such as allocate only a few employees to coordinate with Candidates, keep separate areas for the interview & selection process to mitigate the risk. Only one time to a factory, conduct weekly PCRs and put all recruits for the PCR tests in weekly basis, take all safety precautions to reduce the touchpoints of outside people with factory personnel and interviewers also must wear the full PPE such as Mask, Gloves, face shield.

Challenges or factors affecting the performance management of the apparel organisations were summarised from the three cases and almost all the respondents have stated the same factors such as employee's absenteeism, high workload and work stress due to Covid-19 situation, difficulties in work from home option, reduction of social connection or isolation and lack of training and development. Respondent RC-1 mentioned that, "High Covid-19 cases within the organisation and by that number of the first contact also getting high, thus obviously the performance of the employees decrease and also difficult to measure that", and respondent RB-1 spotted that, "Difficult to measure the performance of employees while working from home without technology advance and proper evaluation criteria was also a big challenge". The respondent RA-3 noticed that "The Lockdown and closure of the factories have significantly affected the performance management", work from home option, reduction of social connection may be due to the lockdown. Moreover, salary reduction, absence of bonuses, and welfare make performance reduce automatically. Motivation is the best way to overcome the performance management-related challenges, accordingly motivate the employees via pay salary for those are affected by covid and on quarantine due to first contact employees and give incentives and give back the reduced salary. Accordingly, respondent RC-2 noted that "fulfill the essential need of the employees and their family members, those who have affected by Covid or first contact ones". Moreover, respondent RC-2 specified that "We are fulfilling the essential need of the employees and their family members, those who have affected by Covid-19 or first contact ones".

And mainly, employees' morale and confidence getting down due to these factors. Proper communication is one of the prime solutions to overcome these challenges, respondent RC-1 pointed out that, "Having open and honest conversations with employees about how they are tracking with their goals, as well as how they are coping personally" and to strengthen this statement respondent RB-3 stated that, "Share on time organisation's status with employees by factory management". Moreover, build employees' confidence by strengthening the safety protocol of the organisation and which was highlighted by most of the respondents. In addition, required to conduct structured mental well-being and counseling session by the professional counselors, especially for the low-level employees. In an apparel industry, teamwork is essential and mostly the performance of the employees is measured as a team other than individually, thus the isolation model affects the measurement of performance. Accordingly, respondent RA-3 highlighted that, "The way we evaluate the performance of the employees has been changed due to the Covid 19".

Additionally, there are some common actions taken to overcome the challenges of the performance management of HRM. At first, implement frequent real-time development conversations or other words performance appraisal, other than waiting for the end of the year appraisal, which is becoming a business trend worldwide. Next, KPIs need to be changed according to this situation as the previous KPIs were unachievable. Also, performance appraisals must exclude all Covid-19 impacts. Conduct community awareness to change the impression with support of MOH, and conduct structured employee awareness programs with internal and external facilitators.

The next function to discuss is employee engagement, high workload and difficulties in work from home option, stress due to that make employees mentally tired and reduce the involvement and enthusiasm towards work, home environment or even office environment may not be comfortable or satisfied for working due to mask, face shield wearing, the frequent need of sanitation of hands must avoid having lunch at a time, etc. reduction of social connection, salary reduction, lack of bonus and incentives lessen the employee engagement automatically. In addition, Respondent RC-1 stated that "lack of competitive mindset due to lack of social connection". Moreover, respondent RA-3 noted that "Employee's morale and mentality were significantly impacted by the covid-19". These challenges were overcome through facilitating remote working conditions so that employees can reconcile work and family life in this new scenario, plan and implement a compensation policy that responds to the new labor scenario, not only with monetary payments but also with non-monetary benefits, which are more financially viable due to the company's economic circumstances as a result of the pandemic. Then, organisations should facilitate communication, information sharing, and informal relationships among colleagues and supervisors, and also daily team meetings. Moreover, in-house training is also viewed as an opportunity to improve employee attitude, expectations, and motivation. Last, not least, employees will be more engaged when they are confident that efforts are being made to safeguard their health.

When questioned about compensation and benefits, respondents of both Case A and Case C were mentioned that overall revenue to the organisation reduced due to Covid-19 and which was affected the compensation and benefits of the employees. In addition to that, huge costs were incurred for Covid-19 prevention and recovery activities such as transport, mask and sanitizer provisions, temperature check devices and manpower, frequent cleaning, PCR testing, etc. Respondent RC-1 mentioned that "Revenue reduction due to covid-19 lockdown is the prime reason and cost increase due to Covid-19 extra activities and materials, sanitizer, temperature check, hand wash, PPEs, frequent cleaning, PCR testing, transport, social distancing, etc.". However, Case B respondents, stated that "We do not reduce or change any of compensation and benefits due to the impact of COVID. However, we strengthen our benefits". When compared to all four functions of HRM, this function is having fewer solutions and the stated solutions or actions to overcome the compensation and benefits from the respondents are pay salary for all the employees even locked down periods, pay for quarantine periods, individual sessions with employees and explained the company situation and make them understand and satisfied with the pay cuts and lack of bonuses. Moreover, covid 19 related illnesses have been added into insurance cover to protect the employees economically. Finally, the aim of this study was achieved and which is displayed in Figure 1.
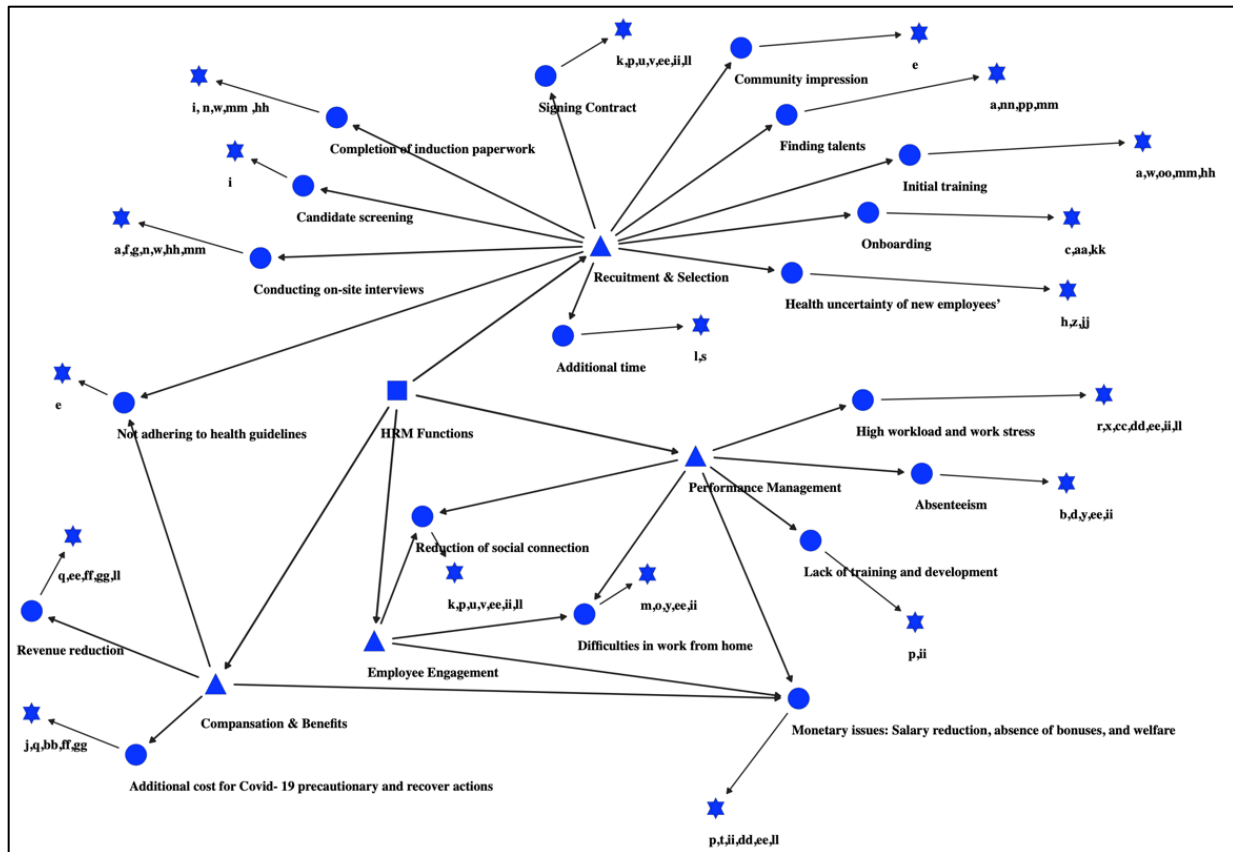
Figure 1: Guideline to Improve the Business Continuity in the New Normal (Covid-19) through Human Resource Management: Case of Sri Lankan Apparel Industry.

a - Allocate only a few employees to coordinate with candidates	**b** - Build employees' confidence by strengthening the safety protocol of the organisation
c - Creating an onboarding video (Eg. virtual tour of your office, short welcome videos, etc)	**d** - Conduct community awareness to change the impression with the support of the Ministry of Health
e - Conducting awareness program	**f** - Conduct recruitment campaigns with special approval under Covid-19 protocols
g - Conduct weekly PCR tests and put all recruits for the PCR tests weekly	**h** - Confirming the status of the candidate and their area's health status from the responsible authority
i - Consulting area's responsible authority (Eg. PHI)	**j** - Covid 19 related illnesses have been added into insurance cover to protect the employees economically
k - Daily team meetings **l** - Digitalization of recruitment process	**m** - Facilitating remote working conditions (provide necessary things like internet, laptop, etc.)
n -Finish all the process within one time visit of new employees / Only one-time visit to organisation	**o** - Flexible working time and hours
p -Fulfilling the essential need of the employees and their family when affected by Covid-19 or first contact	**q** - Give vaccination for all employees including third-party service providers
r - Implement frequent real-time performance appraisal (weekly/monthly) to appreciate employees	**s** - Inbuilt the Covid-19 protocols and standardize the process
t - Individual sessions with employees to make them understand by explaining the company situation & satisfy them via repay the salary & bonus cuts	
u- Informal relationships among colleagues and supervisors	**v** - In-house training **w** - Keep separate areas for the interview and selection process
x - KPIs need to be changed according to the Covid-19 situation	**y** - Motivate the employees via pay salary for those who are affected by Covid and on quarantine
z - Must take PCR test from the organisational side	due to first contact and also give incentives or give back the reduced salary
aa - Organise regular meetings as a practice within teams	**bb** - Pay salary for all the employees even locked down periods/quarantine periods
cc - Performance appraisals must exclude all Covid-19 impacts	**dd** - Plan & implement a compensation policy (including both monetary & non-monetary benefits) that adopt Covid 19
ee - Proper communication: having open and honest conversations with employees	**ff** - Provide immunity boosting drinks and vitamins for employees in daily basis
gg - Provide face shield/masks for all employees including third-party service providers	**hh** - Responsible persons must wear the full PPE (mask, gloves, face shield)
ii - Required to conduct structured mental well-being & counseling session by the professional counselors	**jj** - Separate workplace and transport facility to new employees
kk - Set up group chats **ll** - Share on time organisation's status with employees by the management	
mm - Take all safety precautions to reduce the touchpoints of outside people with organisation personnel	**nn** - Use a referral system
oo - Use virtual conferencing technology **pp** - Utilise the social media like Facebook and Instagram	

5. Conclusion

This research aims to develop a guideline to maintain the continuous business operation of the apparel industry during new normal (Covid-19) conditions through the commitment of human resource professionals. Also, this research answered the research question of this study which is "How could improve the business continuity in the new normal conditions (Covid-19) of the Sri Lankan apparel industry through human resource management?". Semi-structured interview data collection and analysis were contributed to achieving this study. By analysing the interview respondents, challenges or factors that affect each HRM function during Covid-19 were identified separately for all four selected human resource management functions such as recruitment & selection, performance management, employee engagement and compensations & benefits. Also, the action or solution used to handle those challenges/ factors of each human resource management function were collected and discussed. Accordingly, a guideline to improve the business continuity in the new normal condition like Covid-19 of Sri Lankan apparel industry through human resource management was developed and displayed. The guideline summarized and shows in one view that challenges or factors are available for each human resource management function separately and how those challenges or factors can be overcome.

Moreover, this study has mutually significant academic and practical aspects. There are plenty of researches untaken separately for every three areas such as business continuity, new normal, and human resource management. Also, few research studies existing with the combination of 'business continuity & new normal', 'business continuity & human resource management & 'new normal & human resource management'. However, there is a lack of researches with the combination of all three of the above. Also, this research is significant in the selected industry, the apparel industry. The coronavirus outbreak is first and foremost a human tragedy, affecting hundreds of thousands of people. The spread of the coronavirus and the restrictive measures imposed everywhere in countries, along with self-restrictions of the population, have had a rapid impact on all most all the business not from the disease and virus, but from the measures taken to stop it. Thus, there is a requirement available for all the businesses to continue their business during the Covid-19 outbreak. Thus, the practical significance from this study will be helpful to maintain the continuous business operations during new normal conditions, especially at this post-Covid-19 stage.

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