HR Innovation and Job Insecurity Perception during the COVID-19 Crisis: Towards the Proposal of a Conceptual Model

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Abstract

This research paper seeks to explore the relationship between HR innovation and job insecurity during COVID-19 outbreak. In doing so, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with employees and entrepreneur-manager of an IT business company in Marrakech city, Morocco. The data analysis through NVIVO software yields the subsequent results; HR innovation lessens the employees' job insecurity. In the same vein, this impact is moderated by the employees' perception of organizational support. Up to date rare are the papers that have examined the link between HR innovation and job insecurity. Therefore, it is likely to enrich the extant literature about this topic and to open new perspectives for future studies. Eventually, these search's findings evidence that mangers can embrace HR innovation to reduce the employees' job loss fear. This alleviating impact becomes greater when the employees perceive that the employer appreciates their efforts and strives to meet their needs. Put differently, the perception of organizational support is key to make HR innovative practices lessen job insecurity feelings among employees.

Key words: *Conceptual model,COVID-19 crisis,HR innovation, Job Insecurity, perceived organizational support.*

Résumé

Cet article vise à explorer la relation entre l'innovation RH et l'insécurité de l'emploi pendant la crise pandémique COVID-19. Pour ce faire, des entretiens semi-directifs ont été menés auprès des employés et de l'entrepreneur dirigeant d'une entreprise opérant dans le secteur des TICs à la ville de Marrakech, Maroc. L'analyse qualitative des données à l'aide du logiciel NVIVO-10 révèle que : l'innovation RH réduit le niveau de la perception de l'insécurité d'emplois des employés. Dans la même veine, cet impacté est modéré par le soutien organisationnel perçu par les employés. En effet, rares sont les études qui ont examiné le lien entre les construits de l'innovation RH et l'insécurité de l'emploi. Par conséquent, cette recherche est susceptible d'enrichir la littérature existante sur ce sujet et ouvrir de nouvelles perspectives pour les études futures. Enfin, les résultats de cette recherche montrent que les managers peuvent adopter l'innovation en matière des ressources humaines pour réduire la crainte des employés de perdre leurs postes emplois. Cet impact est d'autant plus significatif lorsque les employés ont l'impression que l'employeur apprécie leurs efforts et s'efforce de répondre à leurs besoins. En d'autres termes, la perception du soutien organisationnel est essentielle pour que les pratiques RH innovantes réduisent le sentiment d'insécurité de l'emploi chez les employés.

Mots clés : *Modèle conceptuel, crise COVID-19, innovation RH, insécurité d'emploi, perception du soutien organisationnel.*

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INTRODUCTION

Since early 2020, the world has witnessed an unprecedented health crisis due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The latter has drastically shifted the lives of people and organizations (Rigar et Majhed, 2021). Thus, to curtail the transmission of the pandemic, countries around the globe including Morocco have taken severe measures to protect their populations from the risk of infection. With these regards, the authorities have preceded to the imposition of a lockdown which constraint businesses to halt either temporarily or permanently their activities. In Morocco, surveys conducted by the HCP in April 2020 reveal that "72% and 26% respectively of the production units temporarily or permanently shut down in April were VSEs (very small enterprises) and SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises)". As a result, waves of workers have been laid off (Chirumbolo et al., 2021). According to the International Labor Organization, 114 million people lost their jobs merely in 2020. Hence, individuals have been becoming more anxious and uncertain about maintaining their job (Chirumbolo et al., 2021). The situation gets worse in underdeveloped countries like Morocco where employees are more vulnerable to shocks owing to the lack of employee-friendly laws. This implies an increased level of stress in times of crisis even for those who happily have managed to preserve their jobs throughout the peak of COVID-19 due to the situation of great uncertainty about the future of their job (Abbas et al., 2021). This phenomenon is labeled by Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984, p. 438) as "job insecurity", which refers to "a sense of powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened work situation".

In these unprecedented circumstances, organizations have been under great pressure to rethink their plans to respond to this universal challenge so as to survive. Thus, adjustment has become a matter of life and death, insofar as speed in decision-making in a turbulent and constantly changing context is an absolute priority since organizational rigidity could lead to immediate disappearance (Adikaram et al., 2021). In the face of this great challenge, human resource management appears as a presumed savior. HR managers are more than ever on the front lines. They were compelled to protect employees from any pandemic risk and to raise the spirits of employees to maintain their commitment (Adikaram et al., 2021). Therefore, this pandemic has provided an unexpected opportunity to elevate the status of the HR function in organizations and strengthen its influence in the management of organizations (Collings et al., 2021).

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Like other pandemics that have previously struck the modern world such as the SARS (Bondarouk& Olivas-Luján, 2014), COVID-19 has stimulated creativity in HR departments. This means that these organizational departments need to be creative in reorganizing work, restructuring, sharing responsibilities, working in teams, using technology, adopting new hygiene techniques, inserting new modes of working, etc. (Azizi et al., 2021).

Although, job insecurity is a universal ubiquitous socio-psychological phenomenon. Rare are the studies that have endeavored to shed light on it in the Moroccan context particularly in the time of the health crisis. If the job insecurity has been unavoidable then, the organizations globally and nationally have engaged in changing the mode of managing their resources namely human capital. Therefore, this paper aims to bridge the gap in terms of the impact of HR innovation on the perception of job insecurity during the pandemic crisis.

If the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event in contemporary human history, it is important to highlight the organizational dynamism and stress attributable to the appearance of this fatal virus. In this sense, this research aims to highlight the stimulating effect of this pandemic on innovative HR practices in Moroccan organizations and their contribution to mitigating the perception of employee job insecurity (Harrison et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2014). To approach the reality of job insecurity through the lens of social innovation, we address the following research question: **How do HR innovation practices contribute to the alleviation of employees' perceived job insecurity?**

To answer this main question, the following sub-questions have been raised:

- What are the HRM challenges faced by the company during the COVID-19 crisis?
- What are the HR practices adopted by the company to adjust to the requirements of this unprecedented crisis context?
- HowhasCOVID-19 pandemic impacted employment relationships?
- How do employees perceive the measures taken by the company during the crisis?
- Do these measures have any effect on their perception of job insecurity?

This research work is of great importance from an academic and managerial point of view. On the one hand, this study will contribute to the enrichment of the literature about managerial practices and the perception of job insecurity in the Moroccan context during the early stage of the pandemic outbreak. Thus, to open research perspectives through the conduct of an

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exploratory study having for objectives the exploration of managerial innovation in its human sphere and its impact on job insecurity at the time of the pandemic crisis. On the other hand, this work will make it possible to evaluate the relevance of the practices and decisions taken at the time of the pandemic by the company in relation to their capacity to reduce the job loss fears among the employees who survived the downsizing decisions during Coronavirus outbreak.

I. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1.1. HR innovation

In difficult times such as those of COVID-19, creativity and responsiveness of countries and organizations are the warrant to manage through. According to Ah-Pine (2019), organizations that demonstrate innovation are able to cope with crisis situations by exhibiting absorptive and resilient capacities.

Innovation is a broad concept referring either to the process of bringing new things or the outcome of the process itself. This research embraces the second conceptualization and tries to approach innovation from the HRM perspective. Therefore, HR innovation can be defined as "*practices as ideas, programs, practices or systems related to the HR function and new to the adopting organization*" (Agarwala, 2003, p.176). In this connection, HR management should not only be designed to support innovative and creative members (talents) of the organization, the creation of new ideas, an innovative organizational climate and the expansion of the innovation capacity of organizations, but HRM as an organizational function must evolve by applying new structures, new channels of dissemination of HR practices (Bondarouk & Olivas-Luján, 2014).

Indeed, the tensions generated by the COVID-19 crisis are stimuli for organizational change (Collings et al., 2021). These challenges could be considered by some organizations as an unprecedented opportunity for creativity and innovation. In this sense, HR management appears as a lever for the development of social innovation in an organizational level insofar as it allows substituting inefficient HR practices for others that are more adequate to the requirements of the new environment in order to jointly maintain performance and health of employees (Aziziet al., 2021).

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1.2. HR innovation practices in the COVID-19 times

It goes without saying that Coronavirus outbreak has stimulated the HR departments to engage in an innovation process to alleviate the detrimental effects of this fatal pandemic on the employees' private and professional lives. In this vein, a plethora of researches have evidenced the emergence and proliferation of bunch HR innovative practices during this worldwide health crisis. It appears that maintaining communication and interaction represent the main engine of HR innovation process. In alignment with this, we can mention the organizational communication, training and work-life balance.

- Organizational communication: Ensuring effective communication during a pandemic has been a major challenge for organizations. The circulation of accurate and reliable information has become essential to maintain normal functioning. Thus, the use of new communication and information technologies appears to be necessary to diversify the information dissemination channels instead of remaining on the traditional modalities such as emailing and intranet (Sanders et al., 2020). An exploratory study conducted by Narayandas, Hebbar, and Li (2020)with 20 Chinese business managers explains that "communication during the pandemic, although less 'in person', tended to be more personal. Many avoided emails and used audio applications such as Dingtalk or WeChat instead, or internal applications developed to facilitate information sharing and employee interaction".

In addition, communication is not unidirectional with information flowing from the organization to employees. However, employee feedback is essential for the success of this communicational transaction, with the possibility of openly and freely expressing their concerns and constraints in this period of crisis. Thus, employees are not only passive recipients but also actors in the interaction process (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

By the same token, other research questions the ineffectiveness of communication policies adopted by companies during the COVID-19, which tend to put their stakeholders (especially employees) in perplexing and stressful situations. "A majority of the workforce suffered perplexity, demotivation and constant stress due to supervisors' poor communication. Similarly, some employees experienced anxiety as they had to be more performant regardless of the lack of their colleagues scaffolding and the absence of a permanent online follow-up of the supervisors" (Onwuegbuna et al., 2021).

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Ultimately, effective communication in times of crisis is a tool to avoid the spread of rumors and misinformation. In addition, the quality and consistency of the communication initiated demonstrates the extent of an organization's interest inits employees' wellbeing.

- Training: The COVID-19's health crisis has, undoubtedly, rendered the digitalization the main catalyst of people's lives and organizations'. In this sense, to enable the labor force to perform its job remotely, it should be endowed technically and technologically to adapt to this new reality. Sheppared and Gigauri(2020) emphasize that employees should be trained to increase their employability. In this case, the intervention of the HR function is essential to help the staff acquire the knowledge needed to perform their tasks via telecommuting.

In order to accompany this wave of digital transformation, online training is widely supported as an innovative tool that promotes the updating and upgrading of knowledge and skills (Bait et al., 2020).

Work-life balance: It is true that the use of telecommuting as an innovative practice allows a kind of work flexibility for teams. However, studies show the negative effect it has on the employee's mental health (Gigauri, 2020). The connected workplace blurs the boundaries between the private and professional sphere, which in turn causes work-related stress and depression (Peasley et al., 2020). In this sense, telecommuting extends working hours at the expense of time devoted to family affairs.

1.3. Job insecurity

Job insecurity is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Ashford et al., 1989). This explains the wealth of the concept's definitions and conceptualizations. One of the earlier definitions was developed by Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt (1984). The researchers defined job insecurity as "*the perceived inability to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job position*" (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984, p 438). Over time, and with the changes in labor relations, other conceptualizations of job insecurity have emerged. They are almost inspired by the definition mentioned above. These new conceptualizations have attempted to focus on certain aspects of job insecurity.

Borg andElizur (1992) have distinguished between cognitive and affective job insecurity. According to the researchers, job insecurity is an idea inthe mind before becoming a feeling in

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the heart. In other words, an individual makes a primary cognitive assessment of a job-threatening event before reacting emotionally to the perception of danger (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This conceptualization demonstrates the subjective nature of job insecurity as it is influenced by personality traits. This implies that people react differently to the same threatening situation, in this case job loss.

Another conceptualization of job insecurity was developed by (Hellgren et al 1999) in which they focus on the threatened object. Thus, they have coined the terms quantitative and qualitative job insecurity to respectively refer to the concern about the loss of the job and the concern about the loss of a benefit associated with a particular job such as bonuses and promotion.

Despite the diversity of job insecurity definitions, researchers agree on the subjectivity of this phenomenon, because individuals in general have divergent socio-psychological characteristics that govern their evaluation of reality and their reaction to it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In addition, the concern is about the fate of the current job. In other words, an individual experiences some level of uncertainty about the continuity of employment in the future (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 2010). Finally, job insecurity refers to involuntary job loss. Said otherwise, insecure employees exhibit no readiness to quit their post. Therefore, those that are willing to leave their jobs without any concerns do not full under job insecurity concept (Chirumbolo et al., 2020).

Klandermans and Van Vuuren (1999) have shown that regardless of the objective professional situation, workers can exhibit a sense of job insecurity. This means that the phenomenon occurs among both permanent and temporary workers. The level of job insecurity is exacerbated in firms that are experiencing a period of heightened uncertainty (Cuyper et Witte, 2006).

Roughly speaking, job insecurity is based on perceptions and interpretations of environmental cues linked to an individual's work. This implies that subjectively experienced threats are derived from objective threats through the individual's perceptual and cognitive processes. As a result, emotional and behavioral responses are not identical when faced with the same threat to one's livelihood (Sverke et al., 2006).

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II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

All scientific research embodies a vision of the world. Therefore, consciously or unconsciously, a researcher chooses to position himself in a given vision or what's termed an epistemological paradigm. Thus, this study adheres to the interpretativist paradigm (Thiétart, 2014). It is based on an interpretation of the meaning that the interviewees attribute to the organizational situations and phenomena to enable us to grasp the social reality highlighted in the target context (Mohajan, 2018).

The choice of an epistemological paradigm implies the pursuit of some methodological avenue. Given the embracement of interpretativism implies automatically the appeal to a qualitative approach. However, qualitative methods are so diverse. To overcome this dilemma, the research purpose and question can serve as a basis to attain a better methodological fit (Seidman, 2006). This study is exploratory in nature insofar as it helps explain the effect of social innovation on perception of job insecurity. The use of this exploratory approach can also be justified by the nature of the subject and the authenticity of the problematic dictated by this global context of a pandemic. Therefore, there is a dire need to understand its effects on organizational functioning and employment relationships.

The choice of a qualitative approach does not mean that the researcher is deprived of the possibility of mobilizing conceptualizations already rooted in the literature to begin one's study (Yin, 2011). Methodological pragmatism makes it possible to rely on operational definitions of the abstract entities constituting the research question, namely HR innovation and job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). These conceptualizations are relevant and widely used in academic research. Thus, the formulation of the interview guide questions directly inspired by them is a delicate and unavoidable process for the internal validity of the research (Thiétart, 2014).

The hybrid exploratory process of this research, that attempts to establish a new articulation between two main concepts; HR innovation and job insecurity require the pursuit of an inductive mode of reasoning (Thiétart, 2014).

As it has been mentioned above, to capture of the different dimensions of the phenomena covered in this paper namely HR innovation and job insecurity, we counted for the operationalized definition provided by Agarwala (2003); Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt (1984)

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respectively. Hence, the questions making up our interview guide are carefully formulated to be sure that the data collected exactly reflect the main concept of the research question.

By the same token, the choice of the case study method emanates from the research question. The latter focuses on explaining the effect of HR innovation on job insecurity in the era of COVID-19 pandemics (Yin, 2018). Moreover, a unique case study paves the way to explore deeplythe complexity of the causal link between HR innovation and job insecurity in the Moroccan context. To better study this compound reality, it entails the appeal to a holistic approach to grasp the essence of the two phenomena (HR innovation and job insecurity) and the nature of their relationships.

This study sheds the light of on the case of Moroccan enterprise operating in the IT domain. The choice of this entity stems from its notable fame not only in Marrakech city but also nationally as a business company pioneering in HR practices to manage its human capital (engineers) constituting its main source of edge advantage in a field characterized by a tough competition. The table below exhibits the main outlines of this company's structure, situation and components (see the table 1 below).

Table 1: Presentation of the studied company

Company's name	« Entreprise A »
Date of creation	1996
Activity Sector	IT engineering, consulting in IT services
Share capital	100 000 MDH
Head office	Marrakech
Workforce	76
Legal status	SARL

The intimate nature of job insecurity, especially for discrete individuals who are inclined to hide their attitudes and emotions from others, normally explains the choice of individual semi-directive interviews (Gavard et al., 2008). It is true that data collection through interviews is one of the most widespread methods in management science.

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However, it is necessary to be attentive and vigilant in their conception and conduct. Thus, our interview guide has been carefully constructed to ensure an optimal level of adequacy between the interview guide questions and the research objectives.

The interview guide has been split in two main parts. The first part incorporates questions aims to point out the pandemic's effects on the employees' feelings namely the rising of job loss fear. Therefore, the inner cognitive and affective reactions to their threatened professional resource have been smoothly unveiled. Some of the questions asked are; "in your opinion, how has COVID-19 affected the employment relationship in your organization? At the time of this pandemic crisis, have you imagined the scenarios of the repercussions of a possible job loss or a halt of the salary payment for example? Can you describe these fictive scenarios?". Moreover, the second part includes a range of questions putting emphasis on of the diverse HR innovative practices initiated by the company during the Coronavirus outbreak and their effects on the employees' perception of job insecurity. To have a complete and balanced picture of the situation, both the employer and the employees have been given room to talk about it openly. Among the questions answered by the participants, we cite the subsequent examples; "What are the innovative HR practices adopted by your organization at the time of the pandemic crisis? Do you consider these practices to be reassuring? And why?"

It's important to mention that the interviews have been carried out in French language to enable the participants to give vent to their attitudes, feelings and ideas clearly and openly. The translation of both questions and answers has been accomplished with the assistance of an experienced English teacher.

In order to obtain the maximum amount of information about the research topic, creative interviews Gavard et al., (2008), friendly conversations, were initially conducted to establish a climate of trust with the interviewees. Four people have taken part in this study see the table 2 below). Besides the fact of being the only employees who have expressed a desire to be interviewed, they are seemingly key elements for the company. This can be proved by their positions (Entrepreneur Manager, Project Manager and Engineer). Therefore, the information provided is so valuable to answer the raised questions. It has been possible to schedule more encounters with other individuals, but it has been noticed the presence of a data saturationas the responses are recurrent (Thiétart, 2014).

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Therefore, conducting more interviews would not add much to our analysis. It should also be noted that the interviews have been held in neutral locations, particularly quiet cafés, so that individuals could express themselves freely.

Table 2: Presentation of interviewees

Interviewee	Position held	Gender	Interview duration
1	Entrepreneur manager	Male	26 min 31s
2	Project Manager	Male	1h 08min
3	Engineer	Male	25 min 23 s
4	Engineer	Female	20 min

The data collected has been analyzed using content analysis approach. They have been grouped into three themes namely HR innovation, job insecurity and the impact of HR innovation on perceived job insecurity. The data coding has been accomplished via Nvivo 10 software. For more consistency of the analysis, each member of the research team has coded the data independently. Eventually, there has been an agreement not only over the main categories initially pre-established, but also over the emergence of a new category labelled "perceived organizational support".

III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is no doubt that the flexibility of an exploratory research comes up often with astonishing results. Hence, in the light of the data analysis, it appears that data collected go beyond the borders of the predefined categories HR innovation, job insecurity and the causal link between them.

 As far as HR innovation is concerned, many practices have been mobilized by the target company. However, it has been discovered that innovation in its broad sense stems mainly from the management system embraced by its owner. Moreover, data analyzed have shown that many organizational and individual challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have boosted the creativity of the company's leader to conceive solutions to the encountered problems.

With regards to job insecurity, the interviewees have expressed some worry about the uncertain future of their job positions due to the pandemic. The perceptions of many internal and external

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indicators lie behind their preoccupation. Nevertheless, it has been evidenced that level of job insecurity remains not high. This can be explained by the measures taken by the company in terms of managing its human resources creatively.

If our data analysis, till now, can be seemingly categorized under the main themes of HR innovation and Job insecurity, the data coding gives a rise to another new topic or category named, after a deep background reading of literature, 'perceived organizational support'. It simply refers to the extent of how an organization takes care of its staff wellbeing (Kurtessis et al., 2015 ; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

3.1. The company's management system: a lever of HR innovation

According to the literature, leadership and management styles, participatory governance Raphaële (2017) and socio-economic management Zidi (2021) are the catalysts of an agile and innovative organization. For researchers Richez-Battesti, Petrella, and Vallade (2012), innovation is "social" because it allows the needs of different stakeholders of the company to be met. At this level, these scholars list different social, societal and organizational dimensions to approach social innovation. In the case of the company that is the subject of our study, the organizational culture centers on a socio-economic approach. It is the pledge of the business's responsible behaviors towards its various stakeholders through managerial and social innovation strategies. According to the entrepreneur-manager's statement, "energy-liberating management" is the managerial culture established by the company's leader. It is an innovative management style that provides an interesting margin of maneuver by allowing the new employees to choose the department to joint, the career they want to pursue, and the salary he they expect to receive, etc. This approach facilitates the integration of the new recruits, as well as freeing them from a number of concerns, which will consequently have a significant impact on their productivity and commitment. Thus, this approach labeled "energy liberating management" triggers the business's HR innovations to meet the expectations of employees.

In addition, the organizational structure is a lever for creativity and HR innovation. The entrepreneur-manager underlines that "*we are not a pyramidal company but rather an oval one that is to say that we have an oval management*". Therefore, all the stakeholders have a say on the firm's policies. More specifically, this organizational configuration based on participatory management, active listening, collaborative work, coordination, consultation, and communication between company and its various stakeholders, provides a solid platform for

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developing original actions that respond effectively to the expectations of these actors (Zidi 2021). Similarly, the formalization of the management system through the establishment of a set of committees, such as: the steering committee, the training and technical expertise committee, the environment and working conditions committee and welfare committee, fosters the emergence of new initiatives. Similarly, teamwork methods such as peer programming, often adopted in the field of IT, serve to develop a critical thinking and collaboration between employees. However, HR innovative actions, especially in the context of COVID-19are seemingly unavoidable to address various issues encountered by both the company and the employees.

3.2. The COVID-19 crisis and the underlying factors of HR innovation

The spread of the COVID-19 has shifted the way companies work as well as their organizational structures. The results of our exploratory study have identified both organizational and individual challenges underlying the rise of HR innovation in the context of Coronavirus crisis.

3.2.1. Organizational factors

Among the organizational challenges explaining the adoption of HR innovation practices by the business during the COVID-19, according to the research findings are: training and change in customer relations.

Training is the development of technical skills and know-how. It is essential to overcome the challenges raised by COVID-19 and to maintain the normal functioning of the company. The training is a challenge that acts on collaborators' employability, especially for those laboring in sectors in perpetual change. Indeed, our case company operates in the ICT field, known for its volatility and turbulence. Thus, the employees' skills development via training is so important to "*foster analytical and critical thinking, technical competencies, soft skills and communication to respond to the needs of the shareholders namely the clients*" (Interviewee 1 says). The training program planned by the company for the 2020 period has been accomplished remotely via e-Learning following containment measures implemented during that year.

Changing customer relationships, on the professional side, the change in relationships with the clients is another challenge caused by the COVID-19 crisis. With the measures taken by the competent authorities for instance, the closure of the borders and the temporary suspension of flights to and from Morocco made the working relations with the customers difficult knowing

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that the firm works on the offshore. Although, the working conditions have been metamorphosed by the digital tools, such as; online meetings (via Teams, Google meet, etc.), direct communications via phone calls, etc. these technical devises remain less practical because they do not allow to determine exactly the customers' needs. In this sense, the firm's manager emphasizes"*[…] even if we work remotely, there is still a need to meet, to see each other, to understand the customer's needs, to do empirical studies on the ground to understand better the shareholders' needs and business and try to meet them by designing digital solutions*".

3.2.2. Human factors

These are the professional challenges encountered by the different employees due to the outbreak of the pandemic. They represent the socio-psychological difficulties that the company has had to handle to maintain its workforce's motivation and productivity.

Job loss fear: the COVID-19 health crisis has strongly impacted the economic structures of countries around the world. These effects are reflected in the decline and stagnation of countries' GDPs(Song & Zhou, 2020). Similarly, the study conducted by Heyer and Timbeau (2020) entitled "The assessment of the COVID pandemic on the world economy" shows a decrease of 19%ofthe worldwide economy's value added in April 2020 as a result of the measures (containment, border closures, etc.) undertaken by countries. In addition, all economic sectors are affected directly and/or indirectly by the crisis, but the degree differs from one activity to another (reference).

The Moroccan economy is already affected by the collapse partner countries' economies. This facthas driven many companies to temporarily or permanently stop their activities. Besides, many employees and households' reality have felt destabilized by this unprecedented event (HCP 2020). The statements of the employees interviewed support this assumption. The interviewee 1 stresses "*of course, we have experienced some worrying moments, and we have asked ourselves questions: should we reduce salaries, and should we cancel the bonuses, etc.?*"

Work-life balance: It is true that remote work is an interesting alternative that allows organizations to ensure the continuity of their activity flows. However, the use of this method of work disrupts the boundaries between the private and professional spheres of employees(Anderson & Kelliher, 2020; Gigauri, 2020; Sandoval-Reyes et al., 2021; Shirmohammadi et al., 2022). The results of our empirical study confirm this assumption.

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"*By staying connected at home, we sometimes stay until midnight. This is the first thing that bothers me, so I have never opted for remote work during this COVID-19 crisis, even during lockdown. Personally, remote work bothers me 200%, because every time I need someone or something, I have to call him and hold on if he is either reachable or not. To be able to work like that, employees have to get stuck in front of the computer's screen for long hours. What a real ordeal"*(interviewee 2 reports).

However, our interviewees' responses to the adoption of the telecommuting are not consistent. This fact has been by an internal survey carried out by the company itself. The survey has revealed that 60% of the company's workforces are for the return to the office. Conversely, 40% of the company's workforce agreed to work partially via telework. More specifically, the vast majority of the latter proportion represents women and mothers who seek to balance their work demands with their family and domestic responsibilities by virtue of telework (Prasad & Vaidya, 2021).

3.3. RH innovative practices embraced in the times of the COVID-19 crisis

The embracement of a managerial culture that focuses not only on economic profitability but also on the corporate's social, societal and environmental responsibilities is a vision that is not brand-new. This orientation is the outcome of a social management system based on the postulates of the socio-economic approach. Thus, social innovation is an avenue to sustainable development, especially in the context of the health crisis where a corporate is responsible in front of its various stakeholders. Among the innovative practices adopted by the company in this context of the pandemic, we cite the following points:

Communication and active listening: the socially responsible behavior demonstrated by the company leads its decision-makers to actively listen, brainstorm and reflect on ways to proceed in order to satisfy the expectations of their stakeholders, and consequently develop long-run visions and strategies. In this sense, the interviewee 1 points out that "*active listening to the stakeholders allows us to think deeply about the appropriate ways to meet their needs*".

Thus, this awareness of the importance of human capital as a strategic resource, especially for organizations operating in the ICT sector characterized by the war over talents (Hyrynsalmi et al., 2018) justifies the corporate's stakeholder-friendly managerial philosophy.

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Telework: Certainly, the use of telework technology is an innovative solution that is available to organizations to continue their operations during the confinement period(Buchanan et al., 2021). The accomplishment of tasks at home is often executed through the use of technological tools and digitalized devices. In fact, the digitalized working platforms have been widely developed and well established by the IT companies long before the COVID-19 crisis. According to the interviewees, their company has been working mainly with clients overseas. So, it is constrained to harness telecommuting. However, what is new for them is the use of these digital tools within the company as the employees used to meet and work together in the company's premises.

"It is true that during the COVID crises, we worked remotely by mobilizing technological tools, but this practice is not new for us, because we had mobilized them before, especially with our foreign customers. What is new in relation to the use of these telecommunication tools during the crisis is their use internally, with our employees and internal stakeholders, working together remotely, communicating and exchanging online with our internal stakeholders that we used to do it directly through meetings, discussions, exchanges, direct meetings and in face-to-face mode in the company's premises" (the interviewee 1 says).

Organizational communication: With the spread of Coronavirus in 2020, people have experienced feelings of fear and psychological instability. During this critical period, the company's management engaged in communication actions to make its employees aware of the virus dangerous health effects and to also reassure them of preserving their job positions.

"There was a massive communication to keep the employees abreast of the health situation inside and outside the corporate" the interviewee 1 says.

The interviewee 1 adds "*we have established an internal communication campaign to inform the employees that the company is financially fit as it has many projects to realize during the climax of the pandemic crisis in order to alleviate their concerns about their career in the firm*".

Also, these communication actions are done through innovative tools, such as Teams, Slack, phone calls, etc.

Working environment and conditions: During the confinement instituted by the Moroccan authorities at the beginning of 2020, companies opted for remote work to ensure their operations. With the gradual softening of the strict containment measures decided by the

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authorities in July 2020, organizations began to resume their activities. The return to the normal situation should be accomplished carefully by setting up working conditions to curtail the spread of the Corona virus. "*The company has provided its employees with hygienic products (such as disinfectants and liquid soap), masks and bibs to protect them from potential contamination. By the same token, it has allowed people feeling uncomfortable to stay home and work remotely. Besides, any employee suffering from corona symptoms can get a screening test for free*" Interviewee 4 says.

Therefore, in order to respect the health protocol, the decision-makers have proceeded with the combination of working modes."*We worked in alternation, 2 teams work in person, the other teams are in telework, to ensure that people keep the social distance and protect them from any contamination*" Interviewee 2 confirms.

3.4. The perception of HR innovation: indicators and reactions

The perception of job insecurity results from the cognitive evaluation of an environment set of indicators. After analyzing the verbatim, we come to distinguish between four types of indicators, namely: macro-environmental, sectorial, organizational and individual indicators.

3.4.1. Macro-environmental indicators

This is an aggregate of macro-economic indicators that have contributed to the rise of job insecurity among this company's workforce. Firstly, the Coronavirus pandemic has negatively affected almost all economic sectors. This risky situation has had sequels on the professional life of employee. Since then, they have experienced uncertain times and they have not realized what the world economic destiny would be.

Despite the fact that the company belongs to the IT sector, its managers have been constantly on the lookout for changes in customer demand. They were concerned about a potential domino effect as the economic sectors are closely linked. So, if a crisis affected a customer, the company would be hit hard directly or indirectly by this event.

Overall, the issue of job insecurity is not just related to the company, but mainly related to its customers and its markets.

3.4.2. Sector activity indicators

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Indeed, the fact of belonging to the ICT sector is globally seen as a privilege by the interviewees. The sector is steadily growing despite the pandemic crisis. As a result, the ICT companies constantly chasing rare talents (Hyrynsalmi et al., 2018). However, working in the private sector is still considered vulnerable and fragile. This explains the low attractiveness rate of this labor market. *"The State gives you guarantee and stability"* the interviewee 3 says.

The nomadic career plays in favor of engineers because they choose to lead an unstable professional life(Tremblay, 2003). This mitigates the effects of the pandemic crisis on the perception of job insecurity in this company. The interviewee 2 affirms that "*there is a very high turnover, which I can tell you, until 2020 it reached 15.6% compared to other sectors. In general, the turnover rate falls between 5 and 8 %*".

Despite the specificity of the ICT sector, some of the interviewed employees have depicted scenarios to face a probable loss of their positions.

3.4.3. Organizational indicators

At the beginning of the pandemic crisis, employees have been often waiting to be laid off. Some of the research participants have given vent to their concern about the business's owner possibility to shut it down. If that happened, no one had the power to stop it.

The interviewee 4 reports "*we think that maybe the boss may decide to put an end to the company's activities*". As he is "*MOUL CHEKARA (business angel in Moroccan dialect), the man has the last word*" (Interviewee 2 confirms).

If the company proceeded to dismiss five employees to maintain the company's financial stability in late 2020, this decision has given rise to rumors about the future career of the other survivors. As a result, this has let the other employees experience some feelings of insecurity because they have been waiting for their turn.

In this perspective, the interviewee 2 underlines the recurrent question among his colleagues "*Who are the next victims?*".

In this crisis context, the company has taken some austerity measures through the removal of bonuses for leisure and outings. Although this move has been agreed upon, it embodies a real benefit loss.

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3.4.4. Personal Indicators

The integration of remote work was a big challenge for the new recruits as they lacked the experience and autonomy to engage in their tasks independently of others. The inability of the newcomers to carry out their tasks in an autonomous manner has been a source of concerns for them as they may become worried about their chances to keep their job positions due to their lack of required skills to deal with such situation. This fact has driven the company to stake the appropriate ways to facilitate the task accomplishment in these unexpected circumstances.

Most of the interviewees have revealed their commitments to creditors. Thus, the concerns about their solvency in this difficult economic situation have preoccupied the employees. The interviewee 3 explains solvency was conditioned by the continuity of work. "*In fact, the purchase of a house and a car with a loan and having other investment funded by banks make it impossible to stop working*" (Interviewee 2 says).

Despite the fact that the participants in this study are computer engineers with profiles that are widely demanded in the national and international labor market, some of them talked about their inability to change other residence locations. Indeed, they have been under pressure to lose their job in the city (Marrakesh) where they want effectively to work in.

The interviewee4 points out "*I am not ready to leave my company because I have investments in Marrakesh. Sadly, it is hard to find a job in the ICT sector in the city as this market is not prospering here*".

The interviews conducted show that the perception of job insecurity is ubiquitous. Nevertheless, we note that this psychological phenomenon is not of the same acuteness for all of them. Several reasons explain this diversity, notably the position held, seniority and participation in decision-making. Therefore, the perceived professional instability decreases with the increase in the value and versatility of the skills, the number of years of work in the company and membership of the management committee.

The interviewee 2 explains *"For me, the probability of losing my job is 5%. Today I am the project manager. At the same time, I am the infrastructure manager (network manager) in Marrakech. This versatility is my stability warrant"*

3.5. HR innovation and the perception of job insecurity

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It is true that the various HR innovative practices carried out by the company at the beginning of the pandemic crisis have not led to the eradication of the perception of job insecurity among the people interviewed, but it has been noted that the intensity of this psychological phenomenon has been reduced.

On the communicative side, the company has engaged in a process of intensive communication in order to remain in permanent contact with its employees despite the social distancing measures. In this sense, the company has implemented a communication plan whose main device was the virtual meeting platforms. Thus, meetings have been organized on a regular basis to inform employees of the evolution of the company's activities during these delicate times. Taking stock of the situation aims to reassure them that their jobs will continue.

"*We set up a communication plan to cheer up all the employees and lessen their doubt about the company's future during the crisis*" (The interviewee 1 confirms).

The communication drive has not been limited to calming the employees' minds about the future of their jobs, but also to show that the organization has been vigilant and responsive during the lockdown period (Charoensukmongkol & Suthatorn, 2021). A strict prevention policy has been put into action to allow employees to closely follow the company's health situation through the publication of periodic bulletins and to prove that the company's activity has been immune to waves of viral contagion.

Regarding remote work, the company has already implemented a telecommuting system for ten years. This innovation in employment organization has allowed it to adapt easily to the constraints imposed by the spread of the pandemic. Certainly, this method of working has been a priori mobilized within the framework of the execution of projects in partnership with international teams, but the recourse to teleworking has become a solution to ensure the normal functioning of the company in order to transmit an image of its capacity to absorb external shocks. This has indirectly contributed to the alleviation of job insecurity.

The interviewee 1 confidently speaks out "*you can go to the set and you will see empty chairs because people are teleworking, so we haven't had any difficulty in that sense. There hasn't been a work stoppage, but there has been a stoppage in reporting to the office*".

However, the conviviality and human warmth provided by face-to-face work could not be guaranteed in all cases (Nappi & Ribeiro, 2021). This reality has led the manager to think about

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initiatives to revive this missing atmosphere. During the teleworking sessions, camera breaks have been held to allow members of the virtual teams to exchange ideas and discuss topics beyond the professional sphere.

The interviewee 3 explains "*We used to dour tasks inside the company's headquarter, we met in the company's lounges and cafeterias, but with the crisis we lost all that, we did everything online even playing together*".

The company's computer system has been very useful in the crisis times. Thus, the sharing of data between intra- and inter-teams has facilitated the work flows and provided an update on the status of the projects. This have given a clear image of how the work progress and whether the expected objectives have been achieved. As a result, employees have become less worried about the future of their positions since the company's operations have been able to make control of this critical situation.

"*Every time an employee completes his or her work, he must share it on our agency databases*" (interviewee 1 says).

To enhance its human capital's quality, the company has continued to provide training sessions to its employees. This initiative is of great importance for the employees, especially in the field of computer engineering where knowledge and skills are in constant evolution. Therefore, aware of the importance of employability in the labor market, distance learning has been likely to reduce the effect of the pandemic on perceived job insecurity.

The interviewee 4 explains "*Concerning our professional careers, there have been online trainings throughout the containment period*".

The company has created an ad hoc committee whose vocation is to ensure the well-being of employees. This organizational body is in charge of collecting the impressions and concerns of the personnel in order to elaborate action plans that meet their needs. Moreover, this device allows the company to listen attentively and regularly to its employees.

The manager reveals "*a committee called the labor council which serves to manage the well-being of employees has been established*".

In short, HR innovation takes many forms in this company. The creative spirit of its leaders allows it to take advantage of the assets of new communication and information technologies

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in order to ensure the normal functioning of production operation and to create a friendly atmosphere in the health crisis times. In addition, the organization has set up a committee whose mission is to secure the employees' well-being.

Generally, the company has mobilized the available tangible and intangible resources in an innovative way in order to alleviate the problems that have emerged due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Indeed, the challenges triggered by the crisis have accelerated HR innovation. Nevertheless, sense of innovation and creativity is actually rooted in the company's DNA.

3.6. The perceived organizational support: a moderating mechanism in the relationship between HR innovations and job insecurity

Aware of the importance of social support in coping with stressful situations (Bohle et al., 2018)particularly the impact of the pandemic on the future of a professional career Chen & Eyoun, (2021), the company set up a social innovation program. In this sense, the company has implemented several actions. For instance, professional support and assistance from the company's veterans have been provided to newly recruited employees.

"*We have collaborated with the new recruits during the day and even we have worked until midnight, so that we can encourage and support them*" (The interviewee 2 says).

The entrepreneur manager proclaims In addition, formal and informal meetings have been held regularly or whenever it has been possible, in order to reassure employees of their career stability and to contain the flow of rumors about some potential measures to be taken by the company, and which could endanger the collaborators' interests.

In addition, the manager proclaims "*I talk to them and try to convince them and discuss with them a number of points: for example, reassure them that the company will not reduce the workforce any further*".

The organizational support was not limited to meetings and encounters in which the employees have been reassured of the continuity of the employment relationship, the company has put in place such a strict sanitary protocol to prevent the spread of the fatal virus.

Roughly speaking, the organizational support actions carried out by the company have taken several forms. Between empathy, accessibility of information and availability of logistical

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means, all these tangible and intangible resources more or less explain the fact that the people interviewed for this research had a certain feeling of job security.

In the light of the data analysis, we come to elaborate a conceptual model reflects the studied reality in the Moroccan context. So, our conceptual model encompasses three variables, "HR innovation" as the independent variable and the "job insecurity" as the dependent variable. The negative causal unidirectional relation between these two variables is moderated positively by a third variable which is "Perceived organizational support".
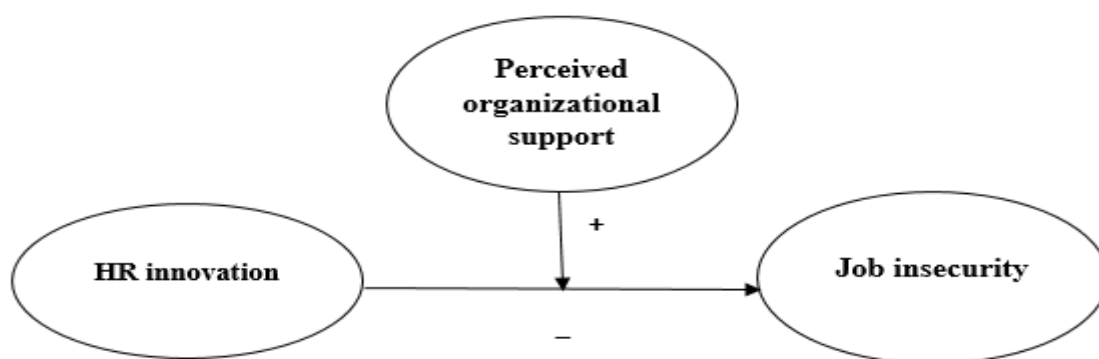
Figure1: Research Model

Source: authors.

CONCLUSION, LIMITS AND PERSPECTIVES

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis is an unprecedented event in contemporary human history. The perverse impact of this fatal virus on the lives of people and organizations is palpable. Thus, employees have become more and more worried about their career future and their jobs. In the same way, organizations, especially in the private sector, have seen their perspectives as dark and uncertain.

Our paper aims to shed light on the effect of HR innovation on the job insecurity perception in the Moroccan organizational context.

Taking into account this turbulent context, this study focused on the relationship between two phenomena: HR innovation and job insecurity in the context of the crisis of COVID-19. Based on an exploratory approach and focusing on the case of a Moroccan company operating in the ICT sector, the empirical results of this paper have been so rich and expressive. The findings show that HR innovation allows for adaptation to radical changes in an evolutionary

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environment. As an example, this company has proceeded to generalize remote work to its staff, virtual teams have been created to continue the realization of projects; and to make the employees feel comfortable while performing their tasks, virtual camera breaks, games and online exchanges have been held. In addition, the company has pursued a massive e-communication policy. In this connection, meetings have been taken place periodically to accompany and secure the health of its employees. In addition, distance learning courses have been made available to staff to update their skills and promote their employability. Generally, the innovative initiatives embraced in the era of health containment have been multiple. However, it appears that the flourishing of social innovation requires the existence of an enabling organizational context, including a participatory and adaptive management culture.

At the beginning and throughout the pandemic crisis, the internal and external environments of the organizationhaverevealeddanger signals regarding the continuity of the employment relationship in the future. Our analysis confirms this reality insofar as all the interviewees expressed concern about this point, even at different levels. This emotional reaction stems from the evaluation of certain indicators, mainly emanating from certain organizational decisions as well as the economic situation nationally and internationally. Nevertheless, the job loss fear remains somewhat moderate and below our initial expectations. This moderation is explained by the perception of organizational support by the employees.This support takes various forms both tangible (e.g. infrastructure) and intangible (e.g. empathy).

This research has great scientific and managerial implications. On the one hand, it constitutes an initiative to extent the existent literature about HR innovation and the perception of job insecurity in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Moroccan context. On the other hand, the research findings are seemingly utile. The manager can rely on HR innovation practices to deal with the unpredicted organizational and environmental events such as that of Coronavirus. The latter has increased the concern of the employees about the sustainability of their job positions. This can make the employees more engaged and more productive.

Although this research has attempted to strictly follow the appropriate methodological approaches to arrive at desired results, it would have been advisable to work on the case of firms belonging to various sectors to differentiate the sources of data and consequently generate richer and more relevant results. Moreover, the findings of this work remain relative and contextual as they reflect merely the reality of one company operating in the IT sector.

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Therefore, it is preferable to foster these results by conducting a confirmatory quantitative study.

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