

Major Challenges to the Effective Management of Human Resource Training and Development Activities

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Abstract

Human resource training and development (HR T&D) in manufacturing firms is a critical aspect of the development of a knowledge-workforce in Malaysia. The objective of this study is to examine challenges to the effective management of HR T&D activities in manufacturing firms in Malaysia. In order to achieve this objective, in-depth interviews were conducted with 58 HR managers managing employees' training and development, employing a purpose or judgmental sampling technique. The study revealed three major challenges to the effective management of HR T&D. These include a shortage of intellectual HRD professionals to manage HR T&D activities, coping with the demand for knowledge workers and fostering learning and development in the workplace. It is hoped that the findings of this study will

provide HR professionals with a clear understanding and awareness of the various challenges in managing effective HR training and development.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which organizations in Nigeria use various human resource management (HRM) practices, and the perceived challenges and prospects of these practices. Design/methodology/approach – A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was employed to gather information. Specifically, data were collected from 253 managers in selected firms. Descriptive data analysis is presented with respect to the use and execution of HRM practices such as recruitment, selection, performance appraisal and training and development. In addition,

information was collected and analyzed with regard to the challenges and prospects of HRM.

Findings

This study provides significant current information on HRM knowledge and practices in

Nigeria. The findings reveal that HRM practices, such as training, recruitment, compensation, performance appraisal and reward systems, are still in place. However, issues of tribalism, AIDS, training and development and corruption are some of the challenges identified that need to be addressed.

Practical implications

The study identified challenges and prospects of HRM in Nigeria. Organizations should employ requisite HRM practices to achieve excellent organizational performance.

Furthermore, the government may create policies to promote the above practices, since, in the long term, achieving organizational excellence will reflect positively on the economy. All these may be facilitated through proactive organizational and national human resource development initiatives.

Originality/value

The significance of the present study stems from the fact that very few studies

have explored the impact of human resource challenges and prospects in Nigeria. The results provide additional insights into HRM practices in Nigeria, a sub-Saharan African country. A region that has been neglected by management researchers and has therefore been less researched. Also, the insights gained from this study contribute to the future development of this line of research, particularly in a non- Western country like Nigeria.

Key Words: human resource training, major challenges, Africa, Nigeria, Human resource management, Privatization, Developing countries

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of transforming itself into a knowledge-based economy (k-economy), Malaysia, being a developing country, believes that building a knowledge-based workforce is imperative, particularly in the manufacturing sector. This is because manufacturing accounts for one third of the GDP and more than 70 percent of the country's exports, and contributes significantly towards its economic growth. As a result, training and development (T&D) of human resources in the manufacturing sector is vital in preparing a capable and skilled workforce with the expertise to meet current and future challenges by providing them with technological skills as well as critical thinking abilities. In supporting human resources' T&D, the Government has introduced and implemented the Human Resource Development Act (1992), and a range of support mechanisms, incentives and initiatives to assist the manufacturing sector. This is because the Government believes that investment in human capital is the key to the success of the country's economic growth. This policy includes a comprehensive privatization program of state-owned enterprises (SOEs). In his opening address to the National Council on Privatization, the president stated that there was a time when publicly owned companies were better than private organizations for stimulating and accelerating national economic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A range of challenges are faced by organizations and HRD professionals in managing and implementing effective HR T&D, particularly in the climate of globalization, and the new technological revolution begins with the importance of human capital in HRD practice, their education and technical

training, and also their communication and language skills. Human resources' learning and motivation are also described as important features of effective HRD practices. However, their deficiencies in supporting the

effectiveness of HR T&D pose a challenge to the development, management and implementation of effective HR T&D in organizations. Furthermore, the workforce's changing demographics are also seen to have an impact on HRD practices, alongside the organizations HR strategies and investments in HR T&D.

Education and Technical Training

The fundamental issues regarding human resources' lack of capabilities and intellectual abilities are said to be grounded in their levels of education and technical training. It has been reported that organizations are faced with a challenge in acquiring high caliber human resources with adequate levels of education. For instance, Silver (1991) reported that studies have shown that employees in British firms are seen to have low levels of educational and training qualifications compared to their competitor nations. Following this lead, if Britain, a developed country, is seen to have this problem, it is likely to be even more evident in developing countries. On this note, the International Labor Organization has reported that more than half of the workforce in manufacturing firms, particularly in the South East Asia Region, only possess educational qualifications at primary level or lower. The arguments arise that as well as possessing the required skills for the job and being knowledgeable and trainable, human resources should also be required to possess at least a college or university qualification. However, the generalization of this standard of education to all levels of employees is unclear and requires further empirical evidence.

Learning, Training and Motivation

Turning to the transfer of learning, the extent to which employees are able to apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during any HRD intervention into the job context is viewed as a key consideration in HRD practice. Indeed, it was suggested in the strategic framework of HRD practice that top management support and line managers' involvement is an important feature in the effective management and implementation. However, a lack of support, commitment, involvement and cooperation in the development of human resources has been criticized as affecting the efficiency of the HRD system and also affecting the effective development of employees' learning and motivation

METHODOLOGY

Research Methods

This study is a part of a larger piece of research on HRD practices in manufacturing firms in Malaysia, which employs a mixed-method concurrent research design, but the data for this particular part was

gathered through in-depth interviews with HR managers managing employees' training and development. In selecting the interview sample, a purpose or judgmental sampling technique was applied to select an

appropriate sample of individuals with experience and in-depth knowledge of the HR T&D function. Based on judgmental sampling with set criteria, a total of 58 HR specialists were selected for interviews. The managers interviewed in this study were from 58 manufacturing firms located in all thirteen states in Malaysia. Prior to the interview, these HR professionals were sent letters inviting them to participate in the study. The letters explained the objective of the study, and a copy of the semi-structured questionnaire was also faxed to them. The HR managers were then followed up with telephone calls to establish their willingness to contribute to the study, and appointments were made to conduct the interviews. Data from the interviews were analyzed immediately after each interview to identify constant and regular themes. Therefore, special attention was paid to respondents' body language and facial expressions in the interviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Lack of Intellectual HRD Professionals

It is considered in the literature to be important for employers to hire educated, skilled and knowledgeable employees in their organizations. Similarly, HRD practitioners are also deemed to be important human capital in organizations because of their knowledge, skills, experience and competence to manage a complex and broad function such as HRD. Unfortunately, the lack of intellectual HRD professionals, who are the main human capital in the HRD function, is regarded as impeding the effectiveness of the HRD function in manufacturing firms in Malaysia.

Moreover, the existing HR managers who are responsible for HRD are multi functional in their roles. These practitioners also viewed employees' training and development as a secondary role to managing human resources.

Performance appraisal

The interview data revealed a variety of informal systems that were used for appraisal, with half of the interviewees suggesting that a form of appraisal existed in their firm.

For example:

They are all having appraisals all the time because I am sitting there and talking with them or they are sitting there and talking with their colleagues.

The appraisal system has caused us a lot of problems – it differs from one department to another and not a lot of achievement results from it.

I believe in the appraisal system. The appraisal system here is very informal. It is not linked to anything, such as promotion, salary increases, etc.

Five of the interviewees (out of the 12 who practiced appraisal) expressed a caution about appraisals and the difficulties they had encountered in implementing them.

Prospects of HRM

When asked about the future prospects of HRM in Nigeria, the majority of the interviewees indicated that the merit system of recruitment, promotion and salary increases connotes that the best candidates are selected from among the pool of qualified candidates rather than recruiting candidates on the basis of nepotism, favoritism, or other considerations. This is not the case in most of the companies selected for this study.

For example:

Our promotion should be based on merit, which may help us to verify overall performance of the worker.

“We promote them based on experience. We find that many workers cannot cope with operating the machinery.... Advanced technology had caught up with them and they fall behind....we have to train them, but some people are too old to be trained. We can't demote or sack them, so we have to give them a different type of work that does not change....”

Fostering Learning and Development in the Workplace

The heavy workload on the production line is typically cited by line managers as the reason for their lack of cooperation and support of HR T&D activities. This analysis showed that managers viewed production output as more important than providing employees with the required training, hence their obstructive behavior. Another dilemma is employees' inability to transfer learning from the training programs attended and apply this learning to the workplace. This is due to supervisors' lack of support for

the transfer of training.

"....employees' attitudes.....this is the most challenging aspect of employees' training and development.....Skills are easy to enhance, but not attitudes.....service is not their top priority, they work as a employee....their mentality is as an employee.....they don't work to achieve profits and targets....." "Our main problem is workers' attitudes towards their jobs.....they are not committed to their jobs...they will take emergency leave for no reason at all....or they always come to work late, the most common reason being 'traffic jam'....don't tell me they get stuck in the traffic every day...."

"The worst is attendance, because in the manufacturing line, workers' attendance is very important..... Our line is running continuously on shifts: if, let's say, every shift we have ten workers to run the production, if two workers don't come in, that will effect the

production and many other problems will arise...."

However, some managers indicated that these employees actually have embedded pessimistic attitudes towards training. It was suggested that some workers are '*contented employees*' who are observed as being very comfortable within the organization, such that new changes are not a threat.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In general, the challenges faced by employers and organizations in the effective management of HR T&D varied from concerns about the lack of intellectual HR professionals to coping with the demand for knowledge-workers and fostering learning and development in the workplace. The core and focal challenge is the lack of intellectual HRD professionals in manufacturing firms, and this suggests that employers viewed HR T&D as a function secondary to HRM and perhaps considered it as being of lesser importance. This implication could lead to the ineffective implementation of HR T&D activities and increase ambiguity and failure in effectively managing HR T&D as a whole. As well as the major challenge presented by the lack of HRD professionals, HRD practitioners are

currently being confronted with the challenge of coping with the demand for knowledge-workers, with issues relating to the hiring, training and retention of a skilled and competent workforce. The aging workforce and

their positions within the company also pose a major challenge in terms of developing older workers to become knowledge workers, particularly with regard to their levels of education. However, the issue of "how HRD practitioners cope with an aging workforce, to develop knowledgeable and skilled workers to attain knowledge-worker status" requires further research.

Furthermore, the lack of commitment towards training can be seen throughout organizations, from top management to shop-floor employees. The top management and managerial level employees are found to

be uncooperative towards HR T&D, whilst lower level employees lack the commitment to participate in training and development activities. This suggests that employees may have embedded pessimistic attitudes

towards training and be fundamentally resistant to change. Of course, the phenomenon of change is often resisted, as it requires individuals to take aboard new learning and adopt new skills and competencies.

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