

HRM Practices: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract

Human Resource is the set of individuals who make up the workforce of an organization, business sector, or economy. Human Resource is considered as an important asset for any organization and is the source of achieving competitive advantage. "Human capital" is sometimes used synonymously with human resources, although human capital typically refers to the knowledge the individuals embody and can contribute to an organization. Managing human resources is very challenging as compared to managing technology or capital and for its effective management, organization requires effective HRM system. HRM system should be backed up by sound HRM practices. HRM practices refer to organizational activities directed at managing the pool of human resources and ensuring that the resources are employed towards the fulfilment of organizational goals. This research study is an effort to review the existing literature available on human resource management practices and how it is practically applied in different organization. After evaluating the existing literature available on human resource management practices it is founded that HRM practices get affected by external and internal factors and directly or indirectly affect other variables such as employee's attitude, employee employer relations, financial performance, employee productivity etc. and ultimately contribute to overall corporate performance.

Keywords: Human resource management, HRM practices, Innovative practices, Employees performance.

I. Introduction

Human Resource is of prime importance for the success of any organization. It is a source of strength and aid. Human resources are the wealth of an organization which can help it in achieving its goals. The human resources of an organization consist of all people who perform its activities. Human resource management (HRM) is concerned with the personnel policies and managerial practices that influence the workers in broader terms, all decisions that affect the workforce of the organisation concern the HRM function. Human resource management is concerned with the human beings in an organisation. No business or organisation can grow or exist without effective management of human resources.

This article also discuss about the types of HRM practices, various models of HRM practices and best HR practices of the companies operating in India. From time to time the researchers have also developed a conceptual framework on the basis of review of the present studies and implications have been suggested for HR departments.

II.Objectives of the Study

1. To study various Human Resource practices.
2. To study various models of Human Resource Management.
3. To find out the relationship between various HR practices and functions of the company.
4. To find out various human resource practices, prevailing in various companies, both Indian companies and foreign companies operating in India.

III.Types of HRM Practices

Many researches on HRM practices have been conducted from time to time and researchers have identified different practices by different names. As quoted in (Kok Jan de et al.,2003), researchers variously refer to certain sets of HRM practices influenced by the HRM profession as "best practice," or "high-performance" (Huselid, 1995), "formal" (Aldrich and Langton, 1997; de Kok and Uhlaner, 2001; Heneman and Berkley, 1999), "sophisticated"

(Golhar and Deshpande, 1997; Hornsby and Kuratko, 1990; Goss et al., 1994; Wagner, 1998) or as “professional” (Gnan and Songini, 2003; Matlay, 1999). Pfeffer (1994; 1998), argued the most appropriate term is “Best HRM Practices”.

But according to Chandler and McEvoy (2000) , one of the lingering questions in HRM research is whether or not there is a single set of policies or practices that represents a ‘universally superior approach’ to managing people . Theories on best practices or high commitment theories suggest that universally, certain HRM practices, either separately or in combination are associated with improved organizational performance. Researchers have also found that those well-paid, well motivated workers, working in an atmosphere of mutuality and trust, generate higher productivity gains and lower unit costs (Boxall, 1996; Lowe and Oliver, 1991; Pfeffer, 1994).

Several attempts have been made from time to time by different researchers to identify the type of HRM practices in different sectors. Initially Pfeffer (1994) identified 16 practices which denote best practice. This was later refined to the following seven practices: Employment security, Selective hiring, Self-managed teams/team working, High compensation contingent on organizational performance, Extensive training, Reduction in status difference, Sharing information

In one another study, Redman and Matthews (1998) identify an ‘HRM bundle’ of key practices which support service organizations quality strategies, these being:

1. Careful recruitment and selection, for example, ‘total quality recruitment’, ‘zero defects recruitment’, ‘right first time recruitment’.
2. Extensive remuneration systems, for example, bonuses available for staff willing to be multi-skilled.
3. Team working and flexible job design, for example, encouraging a sense of cohesiveness and designing empowered jobs.
4. Training and learning, for example, front line staff having enhanced interpersonal and social skills.
5. Employee involvement, for example, keeping employees informed of key changes in the organization.
6. Performance appraisals with links to contingent reward systems, for example, gathering customer feedback to recognize the work by employees over and above their expected duties, which in turn is likely to lead to a bonus for staff.

Recently, Saxena and Tiwari (2009) examined the HRM Practices implemented by leading IT Companies such as TATA, Infosys and Wipro in India. They developed the 3cTER Framework of HRM practices and identified Training and Development, Employer-Employee Relations, Recognition through Rewards, Culture building, Career Development, Compensation and Benefits as important HRM Practices.

IV.Review of Literature of Human Resource Management Practices

Many researches on HRM practices have been conducted from time to time and researchers have identified different practices by different names. According to the research conducted by Colin Dicke, Jake Holwerda, and Anne-Marie Kontakos, Centre for Advanced Human Resource Study (CAHRS) 2006 about the global applicability of HR practices they have found that as the business organisations continually expand across an increasingly global business environment, they strive to find new and ever more effective ways through which they can improve their competitive positions. In recent years, the relentless march of globalization and technical advance has begun to threaten, and, in some cases, whittle away many of the sources of competitive advantage that drive firm performance. As a result, MNCs have come to view their employees—as well as the human resources systems and practices that support them—as an essential component of securing sustainable competitive advantage.

On the basis of the studies conducted by Mir Mohammed Nurul Absar and Monowar Mahmood, it revealed the significant difference on adoption of new HRM practices between public and private sector industrial enterprises of Bangladesh. Employees in the private sector organizations appeared to be more satisfied than public sector organizations with organizational HRM practices.

In the light of the research conducted by Muhammad Azhar Sheikh, Wusat-ul-Qamar and Fariha Iqbal it is found out that there is a positive relation exist between various HRM practices like, career development opportunities, supervisor support, working environment, rewards and work-life with employee retention. Employee retention refers to the ability of the organisation to retain its employees.

According to the research conducted by Pankaj Tiwari on HRM practices high lights that The review of the literature on HRM practices have shown that to effectively manage the human resources the organizations have to implement innovative HRM practices. The organizations which implements such practices with dedication, remains ahead of their competitors because such practices affects other variables such as competitive advantage, job satisfaction, financial performance, employee turnover, service quality, employee commitment etc. in a positive manner and leads to overall corporate performance.

According to the research conducted by Sikora and Ferris on HRM practices, it is found that the implementation of effective human resource (HR) practices typically rests with line managers. The line manager HR implementation is influenced by organizational culture, climate, and political considerations. Subsequently, HR implementation is anticipated to drive employee outcomes

According to the research conducted by DeNisi, Michel and James, it is found that there is a relation between research and practices in HRM. They argue that research and practice in the field were virtually synonymous, and there were clear links between the two. But there seems to be consensus that research and practice have diverged over recent decades

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V. Various Models of Human Resource Management

There are several types of human resource management (HRM) models practiced in most companies. Basically, human resource management models span across different industries and could fall into one of two types of general categories: strategic and traditional. Often referred to as hard HRM, the strategic model typically manages the operational function between a company and employees. Traditional human resource management models, or soft HRM, deals with the strategic relational function between companies and employees. Various models of HRM have been developed from time to time by different teams of the researchers. All these models have helped the HR practitioner to effectively manage the human resources. Some of the important models have been discussed as follows:

The Harvard Framework; Michigan model; Guest's Model of HRM; Warwick model; Best Practice Model; Patterson's Model of HRM; Best Fit/Contingency Model

The Harvard Model

The Harvard school suggested that HRM had two characteristic features:-

1. Line managers accept more responsibility for ensuring the alignment of competitive strategy and personal policies
2. Personnel has the mission of setting policies that govern how personnel activities are developed and implemented in ways that make them

The Harvard Framework

Employees are significant stakeholders in an organisation. They have their own needs and concerns along with other groups such as shareholders and customers

The Harvard Framework outlines four HR policy areas

1. Employee influence : - delegated levels of authority, responsibility, power
2. Human resource flows: - recruitment, selection, promotion, appraisal, termination, etc
3. Reward systems: - pay systems, motivation, etc
4. Work systems: - design of work and alignment of people

Which in turn lead to the 'four C's' or HR policies that have to be achieved: Commitment; Congruence; Competence; Cost effectiveness

Beer et al (1984) proposed that long-term consequences both benefits and costs of human resource policies should be evaluated at three levels: individual, organisational and societal. These in turn should be analysed using the four C's

Guest's Model of HRM

David Guest's (1989, 1997) model of HRM has 6 dimensions of analysis:

HRM strategy, HRM practices, HRM outcomes, Behaviour outcomes, Performance outcomes, financial outcomes

1. The model is prescriptive in the sense that it is based on the assumption that HRM is distinctively different from traditional personnel management and rooted in strategic management.
2. It is idealistic, implicitly embodying the belief that fundamental elements of the HRM approach (essentially those of the Harvard map) such as commitment have a direct relationship with valued business consequences.
3. However, Guest has acknowledged that the concept of commitment is 'messy' and that the relationship between commitment and high performance is difficult to establish. It also employs a 'flow' approach, seeing strategy underpinning practice, leading to a variety of desired outcomes.

Best Practice Model

The 'best practice' school of HRM is based on universalism. The assumption here is that a set of practices aimed at high commitment or high performance will benefit all organisations regardless of context

The elements of best practices identified by Pfeffer (1998) are now widely recognised, if not universally accepted:

Employment Security/ Job Security, Sophisticated Selection /Selective Hiring, Team-working and Decentralisation, High wages linked to organisational performance, Extensive Training, Narrow Status Differentials, Communication and Employee Involvement.

Patterson's Model of HRM (1997)

HRM practices can improve company performance by:-

1. Increasing employee skills and abilities
2. Promoting positive attitudes and increasing motivation
3. Providing employees with expanded responsibilities so that they can make full use of their skills and abilities

The above factors provide a basis for determining 'good' or 'high performance' HRM practices.

Best Fit or Contingency Model

Argument: HR strategy becomes more efficient when it is linked/tailored to its surrounding context or environment of the business

There are 2 elements:

1. **External Fit:** The fit is linked to the operations strategy/ marketing strategy etc. That is, the competitive strategy of the overall business Schuler and Jackson (1987) developed the connection between competitive advantages. Employee behaviours and HR practice
2. **Internal Fit:** HR policies and practices must be coherent. Policies which work in opposite direction should be avoided. For example, encouraging teamwork but rewarding individual performance.

VI.HRM Practices and other Variables

HRM practice directly or indirectly affects several other variables in the organization. The following relationships have been identified in the literature.

HRM Practices & Employee-Employer Relationship

A human resource professional plays a key role in binding the employees together. He/she must undertake certain activities which help in strengthening the bond among the employees and bring them closer. The individual taking care of the HR activities plays a key role in involving all the employees into something productive which would give them an opportunity to know each other well. Individuals are so engrossed in their daily routine work that they hardly get time to interact with each other. Many of them don't even know the full names of the person sitting next to their workstations. The human resource department must ensure that several group activities are being organized at the workplace to bring all employees on a common platform.

Research says that if the employees are satisfied with their job responsibilities, they tend to remain happy and avoid conflicts with each other. Individuals develop a feeling of trust and loyalty towards their organization and don't waste their time and energy in unproductive tasks. Guzzo and Noonan (1994) considered HRM practices as a communication channel between employer and employees. Rousseau and Greller (1994) proposed HRM practices as contract-shaping events.

HRM Practices & Growth and Innovation

Human Resource Management (HRM) may be defined broadly in terms of all management activities impacting relationships between organization and employee (Beer et al., 1984) or more specifically as a system of operational functions such as staffing, selection, job design, training and (career) development, performance appraisal and compensation (e.g. Pfeffer, 1998). Further, there is an increasing tendency to also consider more strategic level functions such as human resource planning and forecasting (Koch and McGrath, 1996). Although there is considerable discussion regarding the relative importance of specific HRM practices and how they should be configured, there is general agreement concerning the importance of alignment between HRM practices and organizational strategy (e.g, Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall 1988).

In recent years, the relationship between HRM and innovation has been explored from various angles. One direction this research has taken assumes that HRM systems in general or HRM systems comprised of specific practices that influence innovation capacity indirectly.

HRM Practices and Technology

Technology has changed the business world many times over. In the Information Age, the advent of computers and the Internet has increased that impact significantly. Many businesses cannot even function without the use of computer technology. This impact is seen in nearly all areas of business, including human resources, where technology continues to have a significant impact on HR practices. It is important to look forward for the changing trends in technology which can have an impact on the HR practices. Understanding these changes will help smart managers to adapt and flourish. Once you exploit these changing trends, you can very well have the advantage over other players in the global market.

HRM Practices and Trust

Vanhala and Ahteela (2011) in their study found that employee trust in the whole organization is connected to perceptions of the fairness and functioning of HRM practices. Such practices can therefore be used in order to build the impersonal dimension of Organizational trust.

HRM Practices and Effective Management of Employees

Tripathy and Tripathy (2008) found that the majority of the IT companies sampled, institute such HRM practices that are complex in nature and a majority of the IT companies do follow such HRM practices which can be termed as adaptive in nature. They suggested that offering job plus education referral recruitment, online and open house tests (in case of recruitment & selection), flexible training choice, skills & project centric training (in case of training & development) and lastly, transparent appraisal systems, above average salary, more non- salary benefits, flexi timing and opportunity for growth are some of the selective practices which, if followed with rigor, would help managing enhance human resources of an IT company.

HR Practices and Job Satisfaction

HR practices and job satisfaction are studied widely in different parts of the world. It is assumed that HR practices are closely associated with job satisfaction (Ting, 1997). Because many scholars and practitioners believe that sound HR practices result in better level of job satisfaction which ultimately improves organizational performance (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg and Kalleberg, 2000). Steijn (2004) found that HRM practices had positive effect on job satisfaction of the employees of Dutch public sector whereas individual characteristics such as age, gender, and education had insignificant effect on job satisfaction. Gould William (2003) showed that use of specific HR practices in local government organizations in the United Kingdom (UK) was associated with a greater degree of job satisfaction, workplace trust, commitment, effort, and perceived organizational performance.

VII. Best Practices of Indian Companies: Leading Examples

Organizational innovation has been viewed as an essential weapon for organizations to compete in this competitive business environment. One of the ways to amplify the organizational innovation is through effective human resource management (HRM) practices. HRM practices attract, develop, motivate, and retain employees. They also ensure effective implementation and the survival of the organization and its members. Besides, HRM practices are also conceptualized as a set of internally consistent policies and practices designed and implemented to ensure that a firm's human capital contributes to the achievement of its business objectives. HRM practices differs from one organization to another and from one country to another but the outcome remains the same

Organisations HRM Practices

1. JK Lakshmi Cement- Special Task Force, Young Leaders Forum, and Periodic Blood Pressure check up camps, Quiz competitions, Open House Communication meetings and outbound training programmes.

2. Grasim Industries Limited- It has been awarded as the best place to work, by Hewitt's and Economic times in the year 2007 and has implemented several innovative HRM Practices.

3. Godrej: GOLD (Godrej Organization for Learning and Development): Web-based learning tied up with UK – based NetG to distribute e- learning modules among the workforce. The company gives equal importance to soft skill training. "Out of box thinking is more important", the sponsored the Edward De Bono certification of lateral thinking for two of its managerial employees, so they could teach in – house. This learning creates a leadership pipeline.

4. TATA AIG General Insurance Co.Ltd.- Friday Movie Mania (Popular movies are screened on demand), indoor games and competition annual theme parties like WOW

(World of World) where the children of the employees can spend time in their parents place of work, a rewards and recognition program ,called “The Success Matrix”, rewards employees on monthly, quarterly and annual basis along with on spot recognition also. At all branches citations and awards are displayed on the “Wall of Fame”.

5. Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL)- Maruti has changed the whole perspective of HR from merely being paper pusher and time keeper to a more active strategic business partner. Newer initiatives were adapted in performance appraisals competency mapping and job rotations .Communication become more open and transparent by involving active participation of the people in the whole process, excellent teams emerged and the best compensation was offered in the industry for motivating the workforce.

7. LG India- LG India spends close to Rs.15-17 crores in a year on HR Training .The basic idea behind this is to make employees believe that nothing is impossible.

8. Pantaloons (India) Limited- Pantaloon Retails has talent management programs like ‘GURUKUL’ for training frontline staff just before they join.

These innovative HRM practices have resulted into building image of the company in the mind of the employees and it is very clear that these companies are performing well in their sectors.

Findings and Recommendations

Due consideration should be given to link the HRM practices with the long term objectives and the strategies of the organization.

1. The HRM practices should be evaluated from time to time by conducting a survey among the employees and the provisions should be made to incorporate changes from time to time.
2. The traditions of the organization and the past practices should be kept in mind while designing and implementing HRM practices.
3. The top management should provide fullest possible support (financial as well as moral) to the HR department in designing and implementing the HRM practices.
4. The HR managers should keep themselves up to date with state of art HRM practices.
5. The HRM practices differ from one country to another and from one organization to another, so due consideration should be given to the organization and the country’s specific environment.
6. The line managers should be involved in the process of the design of the HRM practices because line managers are the people who deal with the employees in their department and they can provide valuable insights.
7. There is a need to critically examine the actions of the competitors because it directly or indirectly affects the organization.
8. The power centre and the politics that is prevailing in the organization should be properly studied.
9. If trade unions exist in the organization, then the proper opportunity of representation should be given to them.

VIII. Conclusion

The review of the literature on HRM practices have shown that to effectively manage the human resources the organizations have to implement innovative HRM practices. The organizations which implements such practices with dedication, remains ahead of their competitors because such practices affects other variables such as competitive advantage, job satisfaction, financial performance, employee turnover, service quality, employee commitment etc. in a positive manner and leads to overall corporate performance. While designing and implementing such practices, one important thing is to be kept in mind that the HRM practices should be analysed from time to time and it should be updated accordingly. Line managers should be involved in designing HRM practices and survey should be conducted among employees to know their opinion about HRM practices. This will help the organization to take corrective actions at the right time.

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