Complexities of Contemporary Issues in Human Resource Management: A Review of Literature

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Abstract: This study examined contemporary issues and their complexities faced by human resource managers in managing organizations. The study reviewed the literature on some of the foremost challenges confronting today's organizations. The contemporary issues posing challenges to the functions of the human resource manager include workforce/workplace diversity, legislative issues, technology, workforce training and development, globalization, leadership development, attracting and retaining top talent, benefits and compensation, health and safety, and management changes. The study concluded that to manage the complexities of these challenges in the organization, the human resource manager must build a standard structure that could manage the diverse workforce issues, adhere to legislative laws and make training and development a priority. This study indicates that relevant and appropriate HR strategies, policies, and procedures should be developed and implemented for effective human resource management in organizations.

Keyword: Contemporary issues, human resource managers, globalization.

Introduction

Organizations globally are battling with low productivity, high competition in the business world, and low employee and organizational performance. This scenario has placed Human Resource (H.R.) managers at a cross-road in managing the challenges of the organizations' complexities.

The efficiency and effectiveness of organizations depend on their managers' ability to acquire, develop, protect and utilize their available resources to achieve their organizational goals. For every organization, one of its most important resources is the human resource who are involved in the production and distribution of goods and services (Jones & George, 2006)

Today's organizations cannot effectively operate in this 21st-century business world if their human forces are not well equipped with the current technology and techniques. This falls within the function of the human resource manager to properly train the workforce to compete favorably in the current market. However, due to rapid changes in the business world, globalization, change in customer taste and habits, new techniques of production, competition in the market place and diverse workforce issues, the human resource manager is faced with many challenges (Hashim & Hameed, 2012).

This study reviewed some of the contemporary issues challenging the human resource manager's function in the organization's management and suggested possible ways of tackling them to have a competitive advantage and achieve organizational goals.

The Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study were

1) To examine contemporary issues and their complexities faced by human resource managers.
2) To evaluate strategies to be adopted by the H.R. manager.
3) To identify gaps in the current literature.

Methodology of the Study

This study used secondary data from relevant literature, books, and databases on the Web like Research Gate and Google Scholar. Different works of literature were reviewed and used for the study

Review of Literature

Human resource managers are faced with changes in organizations occasioned by societal changes. Globalization being top in the change brought about stiff competition in the marketplace, new techniques, and new products and services. Therefore, the H.R. manager must be proactive to foresee events before they occur and plan requisite actions to align same.

Human resource managers, in a bid to achieve their organizational goals and compete favorably in the business world, battle with many challenges and contemporary issues ranging from diversified workforce and workplace, issues of legislation, technological considerations, e-commerce, attracting and retaining of talents, leadership development, training and development of workforce and

many more (Hashim & Hameed, 2012). In their view, Dessler (2006), Decenzo & Robins (2001) pointed out that globalization, technology, e-commerce, ethics of the organization, and workforce diversity affect the organization's competitive advantage.

Workforce/Workplace Diversity

With globalization, organizations set up new openings, extended locations, products, services, and processes. The success of such organizations depends on the H.R. Manager's ability to manage a body of diverse talents from different backgrounds, regions, cultures, races, and gender with innovative ideas, perspectives, and meaningful views towards their work (Chan, 2005).

Orga & Ogbo (2013), quoting Thomas (1992), pointed out that the scope of workplace diversity, among others, spans age, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, military experience, religious beliefs, parental status, and work. Due to the issue of diverse cultures, especially in local teams, the H.R. Manager faces the challenge of adhering to the local policies and procedures. Therefore, the need for H.R. managers to organize cultural awareness programs and team-building activities to integrate employees of different cultures and unite them towards the organization's common goal.

In the case of multinational organizations that operate globally, employing people from different countries, and ethical and cultural backgrounds, the H.R. manager must be mindful and adopt a "Think Global, Act Local" strategic approach in most cases. The H.R. manager also faces the personnel challenge of a change in the 'mix of the workforce, values of the workforce, demands of employers and government demands.' These changes vary from the need for formal education for the entire workforce to more female employees, especially in service organizations, married female employees, and working mothers (Flippo, 1980).

Local H.R. managers may also need to undergo cultural-based management training to gain more skills and abilities to motivate highly qualified professionals, hence reassuring the local ones that the foreign talents are not a threat to their career progress.

As multinational organizations need to adopt strategies to compete favorably in the marketplace, the H.R. manager is faced with the challenge of adopting and making policies and practices to suit the culture and environment of operation. (Hashim & Hameed, 2012) In agreement with the above, Narkhede & Joshi (2007) noted that even in India, one fall-out of global expansion was a clash of "cultural mindset and behaviorism."

Legislative Issues

As employment laws and regulations keep changing, most organizations find it difficult to comply and ignore them. They tend to forget that such negligence could lead to audits, lawsuits, and possibly closure of organizations by the authorities of the operating environment. (Orga & Ogbo, 2012). For instance, the government has laws affecting almost every aspect of the H.R. manager's function ranging from fixing of wages, legislation on labor and materials procurement, training and development, compensation, integration, and release of employees from organizations (Orga & Ogbo, 2012, & Udeze, 2000).

Madubuko (2009) lamented the 'god-father' and ever-changing government policies due to the ruling political party's unpredictable agenda. Employments are done without due process, and a quota for employment is given without consideration of qualification. This scenario places the human resource manager in a difficult situation of not being able to implement sound policies.

Technology

The advancement of technology has made the world globalized in nature leading to the integration of new markets, enabling organizations, individuals, and countries to move around freely in the world (Zanko, 2003). The setting of the workplace is changing because of technology. Most work processes are being changed by information technology. For instance, work done in factories by machines is being replaced by information and knowledge work in offices or computer terminals. Telecommuting, telework, and remote reporting relationships are becoming the pattern most organizations employ (Sudhakar & Swetha, 2017).

Human resource in organizations has information and ideas that are essential assets to the system. The human resource manager, therefore, faces the challenge of creating an environment that will foster training, development, and retention of such valuable human resources to adapt to the technological changes. (Hashim & Hameed, 2013). In addition, technology encourages H.R. managers to analyze data to assess the employees, organizations, and work processes towards achieving an organizational goal (Nwoka, 2015).

The flexibility of work schedules and arrangements are more "technology-based" changes that improve productivity. However, the human resource manager must ensure mutual agreement between the employee and the employer and work definition. In addition, flexible work schedules involving telecommuting and telework need motivation and discipline, which most employees lack. It challenges the human resource manager to train and enforce. The new technology also creates unemployment in organizations and a scarcity of skilled workforce bringing difficulties and challenges to the H.R. manager (Srivastava & Agarwal, 2012).

Workforce Training and Development

In the world of today, most employees leave their jobs due to a lack of training and development opportunities. Training makes employees stimulated, committed, and loyal to the organization. Training and developing the lower-level workers could be challenging due to a lack of resources for the H.R. manager. However, with the recruitment of skilled and talented top managers, this could be achieved as they can be used to mentor the lower-level workers on the job. Therefore, the H.R. manager must fashion relevant, continuous, and flexible e-learning training programs to position the organization for a competitive advantage (Garavan, 1991).

For multinational corporations, preparation and training for cross-cultural interactions are essential. It is a wrong assumption that managerial skills and processes are universal. Therefore, the challenge to the H.R. manager is to plan for cultural training, language instruction, and familiarity with the organizational procedures. Japanese organizations were noted to have recorded more successes than their U.S. counterparts due mainly to their training programs (Gupta, 2014). Cross-cultural training eases the expatriates' adjustment to the new environment by improving interactions with the individuals of the host country and reducing misunderstandings, anxiety, and cultural shock. (Anmstrong, 2009).

Globalization

Globalization is the flow of goods, services, capital, ideas, information, and people. It has presented the business world markets as a battleground where foreign and local organizations compete to have a maximum market share and advantage over others. The H.R. manager is posed with the challenge of upgrading and recruiting a knowledgeable and skilled workforce and making strategies to develop and retain their valuable human resource to enable the organization to have a competitive advantage. The H.R. managers are also faced with foreign laws, languages, practices, competitions, attitudes, management styles, and work ethics (Srivastava & Agarwal, 2012).

Leadership Development
Leadership development is essential in modern organizations as it helps keep the management team engaged and motivated on the job and equips them for future responsibilities. It is a challenge to the H.R. manager to create opportunities for human resource personnel to exercise their strength in accomplishing goals, motivating them to develop their skills. Talented employees need to be shown that they are valued. Through regular training programs, they can perceive their career progression path and potential for leadership growth and will be proud to invest in that growth (Orga & Ogbo, 2012).

Attracting and Retaining top Talent

Organizations are faced with the problem of acquiring high-caliber human resources with adequate educational levels and skills. The H.R. manager, on the other hand, has the challenge of creating capabilities that will increase and promote organizational performance. To achieve this, the need to attract and retain the best talents with managerial and professional skills is highlighted. Attracting top talents needs discernment and investment of time and money. (Alhgig & Mehta, 2018). To retain old talented employees, organizations must integrate a big budget for retirement plans, expensive insurance plans, bonuses, good wages, and compensations as employee turnover is more expensive and would negatively impact the growth of the organization (Lloyd, 2002).

In retaining top talents, employees should feel proud of working for the organization by giving them opportunities to exhibit their talents through national and international paper presentations or included as members of academic institutes or industry (Norkhede & Joshi, 2007). Most importantly, the H.R. managers must find out why people leave the organization and address the critical issues behind them. From the work of Abdullah (2009), in Malaysia, human resource managers were faced with the challenge of the demand for knowledge workers, as it was noted that they had issues relating to hiring, training, and retention of a skilled and competent workforce.

The study of Ardichvili & Gasparishvili (2001) indicated that a stronger emphasis was evidenced on selection and recruitment than on training and development of employees. The H.R. manager, therefore, needs to be proactive and source skilled and talented professionals through social media, portals, and direct calls to individuals (Nwoka, 2015).

Benefits and Compensation

In this fast-changing business world of technology, employee salary though important, does not take the place of compensation. Creating a reward system for employees encourages excellent performance and reduces turnover outcomes. Amah (2006) noted that an organization could decide to be a leader in the employment industry regarding pay, which will accord them the privilege of having the most competent and experienced employees.

Incentive programs such as profit sharing, bonuses, holiday outings, wellness programs, commuter benefits, free snacks, flex time, and unlimited vacation time may be incorporated by the H.R. manager to foster employee loyalty while combating the challenges ahead.

Health and Safety

Employee well-being is critical to organizational performance, especially as regards health and safety, and so presents a challenge to the H.R. manager. An employee's health or psychological well-being may go down due to high work demands or workload, limited time, and general employee burnout, affecting their job performance (Cheng & Ho, 2001). A safe and conducive working environment promotes employee confidence, cooperation, and commitment to work. Therefore, the H.R. manager must create a room or open-door policy to discuss employee issues relating to work and unfair expectations that may hinder productivity (Sudhakar & Swetha, 2017).

Management Changes

With the growth of businesses and change in the business world, organizations institute new strategies, structures, and internal processes for their growth. Employees may not adapt quickly to these changes, which could challenge the H.R. manager. Therefore, the H.R. manager needs to communicate and clarify to employees the reason, need, time and the process of such change to gain their loyalty (Hashim & Hameed, 2012).

Gap in Literature

Only a few pieces of research were done in organizations like the one Malaysian manufacturing firm to exemplify the complexities of the human resource issues in organizations. Therefore, more research should be conducted to examine practically the issues reviewed in this work, not mainly theoretical research.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The contemporary issues in human resource management that create complexities in managing organizations are innumerable. However, only a few of them are highlighted in this study, such as managing workforce diversity, legislative issues, globalization, technology, attraction and retention of employees, training and development, leadership development, and many more.
In conclusion, therefore, the human resource manager, the focal figure between the workforce and the organization, needs to be proactive and plan strategies to build standard structures that could manage the complexities arising from contemporary issues in human resource management.
Overcome the challenges of contemporary human resource issues requires very conscious efforts; this is why the following has been recommended:
1. Training programs be adequately incorporated into the H.R. policy of organizations to deal with employees' cultural, technological and skill development.
2. The H.R. policy should be designed to accommodate the different nationalities in the workplace and not see diversity as a challenge.
3. The Human Resource manager should be trained to acquire the requisite capabilities to be able to manage issues of globalization and the complexities of human resource management in organizations.

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