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## Current Trends in Human Resource Management

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The world of work is rapidly changing. As a part of organization, Human Resource Management (HRM) must be prepared to deal with effects of changing world of work. For the HR people it means understanding the implications of globalization, work-force diversity, changing skill requirements, corporate downsizing, continuous improvement initiatives, re-engineering, the contingent work force, decentralized work sites and employee involvement. Let us consider each of them one by one.

### **1. Globalization and its implications**

Business today doesn't have national boundaries – it reaches around the world. The rise of multinational corporations places new requirements on human resource managers. The HR department needs to ensure that the appropriate mix of employees in terms of knowledge, skills and cultural adaptability is available to handle global assignments. In order to meet this goal, the organizations must train individuals to meet the challenges of globalization. The employees must have working knowledge of the language and culture ( in terms of values, morals, customs and laws) of the host country.

Human Resource Management (HRM) must also develop mechanisms that will help multicultural

individuals work together. As background, language, custom or age differences become more prevalent, there are indications that employee conflict will increase. HRM would be required to train management to be more flexible in its practices. Because tomorrow's workers will come in different colors, nationalities and so on, managers will be required to change their ways. This will necessitate managers being trained to recognize differences in workers and to appreciate and even celebrate these differences.

## **2. Work-force Diversity**

In the past HRM was considerably simpler because our work force was strikingly homogeneous. Today's work force comprises of people of different gender, age, social class sexual orientation, values, personality characteristics, ethnicity, religion, education, language, physical appearance, marital status, lifestyle, beliefs, ideologies and background characteristics such as geographic origin, tenure with the organization, and economic status and the list could go on. Diversity is critically linked to the organization's strategic direction. Where diversity flourishes, the potential benefits from better creativity and decision making and greater innovation can be accrued to help increase organization's competitiveness. One means of achieving that is through the organization's benefits package. This includes HRM offerings that fall under the heading of the family friendly organization. A family friendly organization is one that has flexible work schedules and provides such employee benefits such as child care. In addition to the diversity brought by gender and nationality, HRM must be aware of the age differences that exist in today's work force. HRM must train people of different age groups to effectively manage and to deal with each other and to respect the diversity of views that each offers. In situations like these a participative approach seems to work better.

## **3. Changing skill requirements**

Recruiting and developing skilled labor is important for any company concerned about competitiveness, productivity, quality and managing a diverse work force effectively. Skill deficiencies translate into significant losses for the organization in terms of poor-quality work and lower productivity, increase in employee accidents and customer complaints. Since a growing number of jobs will require more education and higher levels of language than current ones, HRM practitioners and specialists will have to communicate this to educators and community leaders etc. Strategic human resource planning will have to carefully weigh the skill deficiencies and shortages. HRM department will have to devise suitable training and short term programmes to bridge the skill gaps & deficiencies.

## **4. Corporate downsizing**

Whenever an organization attempts to delayer, it is attempting to create greater efficiency. The premise of downsizing is to reduce the number of workers employed by the organization. HRM department has a very important role to play in downsizing. HRM people must ensure that proper communication must take place during this time. They must minimize the negative effects of rumors and ensure that individuals are kept informed with factual data. HRM must also deal with actual layoff. HRM dept is key to the downsizing discussions that have to take place.

## **5. Continuous improvement programs**

Continuous improvement programs focus on the long term well being of the organization. It is a process whereby an organization focuses on quality and builds a better foundation to serve its customers. This often involves a company wide initiative to improve quality and productivity. The company changes its operations to focus on the customer and to involve workers in matters affecting them. Companies strive to improve everything that they do, from hiring quality people, to administrative paper processing, to meeting customer needs.

Unfortunately, such initiatives are not something that can be easily implemented, nor dictated down through the many levels in an organization. Rather, they are like an organization wide development process and the process must be accepted and supported by top management and driven by collaborative efforts, throughout each segment in the organization. HRM plays an important role in the implementation of continuous improvement programs. Whenever an organization embarks on any improvement effort, it is introducing change into the organization. At this point organization development initiatives dominate. Specifically, HRM must prepare individuals for the change. This requires clear and extensive communications of why the change will occur, what is to be expected and what effect it will have on employees.

## **6. Re-engineering work processes for improved productivity**

Although continuous improvement initiatives are positive starts in many of our organizations, they typically focus on ongoing incremental change. Such action is intuitively appealing – the constant and permanent search to make things better. Yet many companies function in an environment that is dynamic- facing rapid and constant change. As a result continuous improvement programs may not be in the best interest of the organization. The problem with them is that they may provide a false sense of security. Ongoing incremental change avoids facing up to the possibility that what the organization may really need is radical or quantum change. Such drastic change results in the re-engineering of the organization.

Re-engineering occurs when more than 70% of the work processes in an organization are evaluated and altered. It requires organizational members to rethink what work should be done, how it is to be done and how to best implement these decisions. Re-engineering changes how organizations do their business and directly affects the employees. Re-engineering may leave certain employees frustrated and angry and unsure of what to expect. Accordingly HRM must have mechanisms in place for employees to get appropriate direction of what to do and what to expect as well as assistance in dealing with the conflict that may permeate the organization. For re-engineering to generate its benefits HRM needs to offer skill training to its employees. Whether it's a new process, a technology enhancement, working in teams, having more decision making authority, or the like , employees would need new skills as a result of the re-engineering process.

## **8. Contingent workforce**

A very substantial part of the modern day workforce are the contingent workers. Contingent workers are individuals who are typically hired for shorter periods of time. They perform specific tasks that often require special job skills and are employed when an organization is experiencing significant deviations in its workflow. When an organization makes its strategic decision to employ a sizable portion of its workforce from the contingency ranks, several HRM issues come to the forefront. These include being able to have these virtual employees available when needed, providing scheduling options that meet their needs and making decisions about whether or not benefits will be offered to the contingent work force.

No organization can make the transition to a contingent workforce without sufficient planning. As such, when these strategic decisions are being made, HRM must be an active partner in these discussions. After all its HRM department's responsibility to locate and bring into the organization these temporary workers. As temporary workers are brought in, HRM will also have the responsibility of quickly adapting them to the organization. HRM will also have to give some thought to how it will attract quality temporaries.

## **9. Decentralized work sites**

Work sites are getting more and more decentralized. Telecommuting capabilities that exist today have made it possible for the employees to be located anywhere on the globe. With this potential, the employers no longer have to consider locating a business near its work force. Telecommuting also offers an opportunity for a business in a high cost area to have its work done in an area where lower wages prevail.

Decentralized work sites also offer opportunities that may meet the needs of the diversified workforce. Those who have family responsibilities like child care, or those who have disabilities may prefer to work in their homes rather than travel to the organization's facility. For HRM, decentralized work sites present a challenge. Much of that challenge revolves around training managers in how to establish and ensure appropriate work quality and on-time completion. Work at home may also require HRM to rethink its compensation policy. Will it pay by the hour, on a salary basis, or by the job performed. Also, because employees in decentralized work sites are full time employees of the organization as opposed to contingent workers, it will be organization's responsibility to ensure health and safety of the decentralized work force.

## 10. Employee involvement

For today's organization's to be successful, there are a number of employee involvement concepts that appear to be accepted. These are delegation, participative management, work teams, goal setting, employee training and empowering of employees. HRM has a significant role to play in employee involvement. What is needed is demonstrated leadership as well as supportive management. Employees need to be trained and that's where human resource management has a significant role to play. Employees expected to delegate, to have decisions participatively handled, to work in teams, or to set goals cannot do so unless they know and understand what it is that they are to do. Empowering employees requires extensive training in all aspects of the job. Workers may need to understand how new job design processes. They may need training in interpersonal skills to make participative and work teams function properly.

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