

CHALLENGES OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The paper focused on the challenges of human resource management in the 21st century. It gave a clarification of the concept of human resource management. It also highlighted some functions of human resource management and discussed them and presented a brief history of human resource management. Challenges facing human resource management were identified and discussed. These challenges include but not limited to globalization, ethical issues, change in technology, change in production environment, legal environment, etc. Based on the identified challenges, recommendations were made. These include:- organizations should consistently lobby lawmakers to make laws that are favourable to them, organizational structures should be relatively permanent and organizations should devise ways and means of adapting to technological changes.

There is no denying the fact that every organization all over the world is established to pursue some designated goals. That means that no organization is set up without the founder or founders having something in mind for doing so. For example, while some organizations are set up to engage in the production of goods and services for human consumption, others are established to distribute the goods and services so

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produced. In the same vein, while an institution of learning is established to impact knowledge that of a church organization is established to engage in evangelism or bring people to repentance or closer to God. Even other organizations come into being purposely to protect the territorial integrity of a nation.

The foregoing indicates that there is no purposeless organization or organization that has no purpose to pursue. Each person or group of persons establishing an organization, no matter the complexity, has some goals in mind and the organization so established must act to actualize those goals. In pursuance of those goals, the organization must engage in activities necessary and appropriate for goal attainment. These activities include acquiring necessary resources and means which are indispensable for the realization of the goals. There are several forms of resources which an organization can employ to realize its objectives. These include human resource, material resource, as well as time and financial resources. For the purposes of our discussion in this paper, we shall single out and concentrate on human resource, which is at the core of all activities geared toward goal attainment.

We say that human resource is at the core of other activities because it harnesses and prudentially applies other resources toward realizing the goals of the organization. Without human resource, it would be practically impossible for other resources to undergo the input-through-output processes, which ultimately lead to goal attainment. It is in the light of the above that we say that human resource occupies an important, indispensable and critical position in an organization's march toward growth, development and greatness.

It should be realized that human resource management's road to helping organizations achieve greatness has not been a bed of roses. The road has always been littered and in most cases, bedeviled with mounting challenges that are to a very large extent daunting. This is the fulcrum of this paper. But before we delve into these challenges, let us ex-ray the concept of human resource management.

Concept Clarification

Several definitions of human resource management abound in the literature on management. These definitions were proffered by several authors and from several perspectives. For example, Armstrong (1999) defined human resource management as a term used to describe formal systems devised for the management of people within an organization. To Weihrich and Koontz (2005), human resource management is a function in an organization designed to maximize employee performance in service of

an employer's strategic objectives. Human resource management aims at acquiring, developing and retaining human talent with the objective of ensuring a link between the organization and the workforce. To Susan (2015), human resource management is a function within an organization that focuses on the recruitment of, management of, and providing direction for the people who work in any organization.

Human resource management, to a very large extent, is the pivot upon which the wheel of an organization's progress revolves. It does not only serve as a link between the employers and the employees but also ensures that a conducive environment is always provided for the employees to act to realize corporate goals. Further, the much needed career growth and development expected of an employee is enhanced by human resource management and as Donnelly, Gibson and Ivencewich put it, human resource management aims at hiring and developing employees so that they can become more valuable to the organization.

History

The concept of human resource management evolved over time. Here, the authors intend to present a brief historical development of human resource management. It all began in the early part of the 21st century when researchers started documenting ways of ensuring business value through the careful management of workforce. At that time, the concern of human resource management was on how to develop an effective payroll and benefits administration system. Much later, the focus of human resource management shifted to that of mergers and acquisitions, talent management, succession planning, industrial and labour relations as well as issues relating to workforce diversity.

Functions of Human Resource Management

We have previously opined that human resource management activities are all embracing. This means that there is virtually no aspect of the organization's life or its members that is not affected by the activities of human resource management. This observation presupposes that human resource management performs important functions in an organization. These functions include but not limited to the following:

1. **Employee Benefits:** Determining what manner of remuneration that is due to an employee.
2. **Employee Recruitment:** This aims at hiring and filling vacant positions.
3. **Labour Movement:** According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (2015), labour movement aims at ensuring that workers represent and campaign for better working condition and treatment from their employers.

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4. **Training and Development:** This function ensures that employees are made to acquire more skills in order to add more value to the organization.
5. **Performance Evaluation:** This ensures that employees are constantly appraised to determine their level of fitness.
6. **Industrial Relations:** This is a multidisciplinary field that deals with employment relations. It deals with relationships between employees and management.

Other functions of human resources include but not limited to handling employee complaints, dealing with labour unrest, promotions, transfers, demotions, punishment, etc.

Challenges of Human Resource Management

We have hinted in the introductory section that the job of human resource managers is not an easy one. This is consequent upon the heap of challenges facing human resource management, especially in the present day world that is constantly changing. These challenges are highlighted and discussed below.

1. **Change in Legal Environment:** There are regimes upon regimes of laws affecting the activities of human resource management. Laws are factors that do not only affect human conduct but also the operations of organizations all over the world. No one can have control over laws but must submit to the dictates of laws. Human resource management is not an exception as its activities must come under the purview of the law. There are laws that human resource management must contend with. These include but not limited to laws relating to labour issues, employment, equal opportunities, minority issues, etc. These laws do not remain constant but are changed from time to time and sometimes may impinge on the ability of human resource management to carry out its functions.
2. **Change in Organizational Structure:** The structure of an organization is a framework through which it achieves its objectives. As the business climate changes, it is necessary to change the structural configuration to meet the changing business climate. Factors like expansion and strategy can necessitate change in structure which in turn puts strain on human resource management. Most times, change in structural configuration can put a constraint on human resource management and it must handle such situation to the benefit of the organization.
3. **Workforce Diversity:** This is another challenge facing human resource management. Simply defined, workforce diversity means being able to have a

workforce that represents different viewpoints, background and cultures. Present day organizations hardly employ people from the same cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Even if their employees are of the same ethnic and cultural background, they certainly cannot have the same viewpoints. So differences in viewpoints, background and cultures are issues the human resource manager must contend with. He must endeavour to blend these elements to the benefit of the organization and this is a herculean task.

4. **Technological Changes:** Technology, according to Onwuchekwa (1993) means knowledge or ways and means of doing things. Perrow who carried out a pioneer work on technology in 1965 said that technology is a technique or complex of techniques employed in production. As technology changes or advances, methods of doing things in organizations must also change. This means that organizations must strive to keep abreast of changes in technology. This puts a strain on human resource management because it must ensure that employees keep abreast of technological changes.
5. **Ethics:** Ethical issues are of serious concern to human resource management. Ethics deals with issues relating to good or bad. Ethical issues are viewed from several perspectives by several organizations. While one organization in one part of the country views a particular ethical issue as good, another may view it as bad. The same is applicable to individuals or organizational members. Most times, handling ethical issues puts human resource management in a dilemma as it strives to strike a balance between the views of one group and the other over some organizational practices that may be regarded as good or bad.
6. **Globalization:** Globalization, according to Greengard (1995), is a system of interaction among the countries of the world in order to develop the global economy. Almost all the countries of the world have keyed into the idea of globalization as it is hoped that the entire world would be better off when countries pull resources together (both mental and physical) to develop the global economy. The struggle to develop the global economy is a good one but it puts strain on human resource management. This is because it must restructure the organization and develop strategies that aid globalization.
7. **Production Environment:** Production environment deals with factors and issues that affect production. Organizations are required to produce hygienic, safe and high quality goods that are fit for human consumption. They are also required to keep the

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environment safe and clean as well as provide safe and conducive work environment for the workers. It is the role of human resource management to ensure that organizations comply with these requirements and this is certainly an uphill task.

Conclusion

The job of human resource management has been greatly hampered by a series of challenges. Consequent upon this, the impact of human resource management has not been really felt by most organizations. These challenges, which are daunting, are many, including globalization, ethics, changes in technology, among others. This paper has attempted to highlight these challenges with a view to suggesting ways and means of reducing them to the barest minimum.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following as a way of reducing the negative impact of challenges of human resource management.

1. Organizations should endeavour to engage in consistent and continual lobbying of lawmakers to make laws that would help them reduce the crucial contingencies arising from challenges the human resource management unit faces.
2. Organizations should have a relatively permanent structure that can withstand shocks arising from technological changes and or strategies.
3. Again, organizations should endeavour to devise ways and means which would help them to adapt to technological changes at little or no cost.

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