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Line Managers and the Application of the Harvard HRM Model

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Abstract:

The line managers are the leaders who are in contact with the human capital in organizations and the performance and sustainability of the organizations depend on their ability to lead the followers in task performance. The 21st Century organizations are working in teams and the managers are members of the teams and it is important that they should know how to manage the human resources for the high performance of the organization. This paper is a study of the role of line managers in their Human Resources Management practices, the effects on the individuals and the organizations, and the impacts of applying the Harvard Human Resources Management (HRM) model. The paper discusses on how the line managers can use the model to understand their roles as pertains to the human capital. The purpose of this study is to enlighten the line managers on what is expected of them on the line of human resources and to highlight that they are responsible to the organization for the effective performance of the tasks and the sustainability of the organization.

Keywords: Line manager, Human capital, teams, performance

1. Human Resources Management (HRM)

1.1. Role of HRM

An organization must grow and make profits for future development and it must be able to perform the tasks as stated in its objectives. It is necessary for the organization leadership to appreciate that the organization exists because of the people involved in it and these are whom they lead (Deaconu, Rasca, & Manolescu, 2010). The 21st Century organization trends consider employees as 'assets' and like all assets, they must make a profit for the organization otherwise they would be discarded which would mean the end of the organization (Gabcanova, 2011). A leader may be very qualified in the technical aspects but ultimately, the actual performance of the tasks will only succeed through the performance of the followers and since the 21st Century organizations are working through teams, then the success of the tasks will depend on how a line manager leads the followers in the team which makes the human capital performance a significant element in any organization (Deaconu, Rasca, & Manolescu, 2010).

1.2. HRM and Line Management

The Human Resources (HR) function is an important service department whose role is to ensure that the employees at all levels of the organization structure have the skills to perform their tasks efficiently for the achievement of the organizational goals (Mwaniki & Gathenya, 2015). The role of the line manager is to lead the followers in the execution of the tasks allocated to them as a team and the role of the HRM is to ensure that the line managers have acquired the knowledge on team leadership. However, the HRM goes only as far as the advisory service for it is the line managers who have the 'hands on' function and are responsible for the actual task performance. For the line managers to be effective, they need leadership skills (Renwick, 2003). If the line managers cannot handle the human capital well, then the organization's performance will be low. The 21st Century is an era of technology which has led to globalization, diversity, agility, team-work and fast decisions and these trends have made the market very competitive and turbulent and so the line managers are now being more involved in HRM functions to ensure efficient task performance from the followers. There is therefore the need to communicate to the line managers on their Human Resources aspects through training them on their HRM roles (Cochrane, 2014; Larsen & Brewster, 2003).

1.3. The McGregor's Theory 'X' and Theory 'Y'

The line management should be acquainted with what the academics call 'HR Models' which are theories that describe concepts of the HR function and they are of two types which have arisen from the McGregor's theory 'X' and theory 'Y' (Kopelman, Prottas, & Davis, 2008). Theory 'X' states that employees are reluctant to work unless pushed to do so and even then, they willingly work well in a task only if they can expect rewards according to their performance which utilizes the Vroom's Expectancy theory of motivation (Islam & Eva, 2017). Theory 'X' is considered as favoring the

organization's management with the concept of enforced discipline without much consideration for the employees (Bobic & Davis, 2003). Theory 'Y' however states that employees will work well and devotedly if properly handled and motivated and this has led to many theories of motivation on the concept that 'a happy employee is a productive employee' (Davis, 2010). From these contrasting theories, the HR Models were developed also in two categories called the 'Hard' models from theory 'X' and the 'Soft' models from theory 'Y' with the four common ones being the Fombrun Model, The Guest Model, The Warwick Model and the Harvard Model (Broncano, Estévez, & Andrés, 2018; Druker, White, Hegewisch, & Mayne, 2010).

2. The Harvard HRM Model

The Harvard model was formulated at the Harvard University (and hence the name) and is also called 'the map of HRM territory' (Bondarouk, & Brewster, 2016). It has been accepted as not only comprehensive but also practical on the HR duties as related to line management. It is a soft model dealing with five issues of concern to the organization's human capital. These include the stakeholders' interests, the organization's situational factor, the HRM policies, the targeted outcomes of HR strategies, and the long-term impacts of the organization's HR practices on sustainability (Brunetto, Farr-Wharton, & Shacklock, 2011). The Harvard model covers what the line managers need to know about the human capital and so it is useful as a tool for the HRM department to use in training them on their Human Resources functions for the efficient operations of the teams and the achievement of organizational goals (Ogedegbe, 2014).

2.1. Stake-holders

It is important for the line managers to understand the importance of stake-holders in the organization for these are the ones who make the organization to exist. In most organizations, the stakeholders are the shareholders, the organization's management itself, the employee groups, the government, and the community among whom the organization operates (Pajunen, 2006).

2.2. The Shareholders

The shareholders own the organization and they expect a return on their investment. They are concerned with the efficient operation of their organization which includes the performance of the management with profitable returns on their investment (Zamfir, Daniela, & Ionescu, 2016). They have the right to approve major decisions which include the appointment of such senior officials like the directors and so through the senior officials, the shareholders have control of the employees for if they do not perform, the directors will lose their jobs so in turn, they ensure that the line managers are operating efficiently and these in turn need their human capital. So the line managers cannot fail to consider the effects of their performance on the shareholders (Maseko, 2015). The line manager should realize that the interests of the shareholders are on the financial results and so it is crucial for each manager to take measures on the financial management of the unit and ensure that the followers follow the guidelines stipulated by the financial policies and practices of the organization and keep within the laid down budgets (Caldarola, 2016). There have been instances of conflict between the organizations' management and the shareholders and in most cases, these arise due to the poor financial performance which is strongly influenced by the standards of performance by the teams under the direction of the line managers (Ogedegbe, 2014).

2.3. The Organization Management

The element of line manager's relationship with the overall organization management and the team members is a touchy one. The managers are in the mainstream management itself and yet they are members of an operational team from whom is expected the best output. The team also expects the most from a line manager and balancing the two groups could be a problem. The line manager acts as a trade unionist who represents the team in the upper hierarchy and presents the team's problems and proposals while with the team, the manager executes the management policies and practices which might not be conducive to the team but yet, until they are changed, the manager has to ensure that they are followed strictly. Since the Harvard model is a soft one, the manager ensures that the views and recommendations of the team are brought to the attention of the organization management but if the management does not accept the team's proposals, then an industrial conflict could arise and the line manager ends in the middle of the conflict, sometimes unable to be accepted by both sides (Townsend & Hutchinson, 2017).

2.4. Employee Groups

In a soft model, the employees need to work in cohesion with one another and be motivated to operate willingly and with commitment to the organization's performance. As [Rahman](#) (2015) states, 'team-work is the secret to organization success'. The line managers require the knowledge of how to lead this human capital not just at the work place but also in other team activities including social ones (Bang & Midelfart, 2017). The line manager has the responsibility of leading the team in the formulation of team strategies which includes the decisions on the appropriate composition of the teams and the roles of the individual members during the strategy implementation. The line manager, as the team leader organizes the members in their different work specialties to work in synergy and so get maximum benefit from the combined members' contributions to the task performance. For this synergy, team communication is an important element and the leadership style should promote communication on all relevant issues so that team decisions are through the contribution of all the members which makes each member to feel responsible for the successful performance of the task due to the participation in the decision making. The line manager should act as the coach and mentor for the members to develop an efficient and committed team (Fu, Keating, & Crowley-Henry, 2019).

2.5. Government Regulations

Apart from the company policies and regulations, there are government labor laws which every line manager should be conversant with and these are on diverse issues ranging from industrial safety to industrial relations (Raravi & Timmanagoudar, 2014). Failure to understand the rules and policies relating to the performance of a task and the context of the organization can lead to serious disciplinary measures by the government including the closure of the business operations or even its deregistration. Failure to understand labor regulations can also disrupt the organization performance with industrial conflicts including strikes (Gollan & Patmore, 2013).

2.6. The Community

The organization is part of the surrounding communities and there is need for the line manager to ensure that the team members act ethically in their community relations. As one of the marketing strategies, organizations are turning to the operationalization of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as one of the strategies in the marketing function for the creation of acceptable public image and culture. Line managers play crucial roles in ensuring that the team members understand the concepts of CSR and the team involvement in community affairs as it is the team members who are in direct contact with the community and each should portray an ethical image as an individual and as an organization employee. The line manager needs to understand that the above issues on the stakeholders are affected by the changing situations. The characteristics of employees as teams or individuals will end up developing the organizational culture which will also affect the marketing functions and overall performance. It is the role of the line manager to ensure that the characteristics develop a positive image of the company (Lin, Baruch, Shih, 2012; Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, &Shabbir, 2012).

3. The Situational Factors

3.1. Organizational Strategy

The successful implementation of organization strategies is dependent on every employee's commitment and ability to effectively perform the allotted tasks with the line managers being the first line of leadership. The line manager should be involved in the formulation of the organization strategies and should understand those which affect the operations of the team and communicate the same to the followers while ensuring that the team achieves its stated goals as laid down in the strategies. Failure of a team leader to present the capabilities of the team in relation to the task could end up with the team being allotted responsibilities in the strategy implementation for which they are not qualified and the failure in performance could lead to low morale (Rani, 2019; Thang, &Buyens, 2008)

3.2. The Labor Market

It is the role of the line managers to keep abreast of the labor market for this will affect the teams' competitive ability. They are responsible to the HRM department for advice on the labor availability for effective task performance according to the demands of the task. Since the followers are assets, then the leaders responsible for the investments of those assets should understand the labor market offers for all the team tasks. The 21st century organizations are driven by the application of the rapidly developing technologies (Cochrane, 2014) and as the manager develops knowledge of the latest technology, so also should be the need to ensure that the followers are current with the latest developments. While this can be done through training, it might be necessary to recruit new followers with the appropriate technical knowledge (Madhani, 2018). It is the line manager's responsibility to advise the HR department on the requirements and availability of the followers and the required technical knowledge. It was this development in technology that led to globalization and the massive retrenchments of the 1990s but the globalization trend made it possible to recruit qualified labor from any part of the world (Manjuri, 2011; Pekarskiene, Laskiene, Saboniene, & Susniene, 2017).

3.3. Advances in Technology

As stated above, the line manager must keep abreast of the latest technological developments effecting the organization operations but this should also apply to the followers. This is the advantage of teams in that instead of individual learning, the team can pool their knowledge and keep all of them conversant with developing technology and this coordination is the role of the line manager as part of the team's development (Imran, 2014). This local training makes the followers proud of their department and organization and it is one of the means of creating employee loyalty and dedication to the organization and the team which is important for task performance (Ayodeji & Tunde, 2011).

3.4. Organizational HRM Policies

There is need for the line managers to be conversant with their organizations' policies as regards the human capital for these are determinants in HRM activities and decisions including the recruitment of new employees, their promotions and their performance appraisals. This extends to issues like discipline and terminations which are done according to the policies and practices and the government labor regulations and it is not good enough to leave it to the HRM department for it is the line managers who are directly involved as the operational leaders of the teams and answer to the organization for the performance (Katou & Budhwar, 2007). The line managers must also understand the rewarding policies of the organization for the recommendations as the team leaders. This cannot be effectively done without a good grasp of the policies which determine the working systems and ensure that the teams also adhere to them (Walker, Rossi, Hoover, & Russell, 2013).

3.5. Performance Outcomes

Every organization expects positive impacts from performance and line managers at any level should realize that the handling of the human resources element has long-lasting effects on the organization. They are responsible for evaluating the positive or negative outcomes of the HR leadership in order to make the changes in leadership styles for effective performance. With adequate training, the team becomes more effective in task performance and develops self-efficacy as a team and as individuals leading to the team cohesion and synergy for higher task performance (Bititci, Turner, Mackay, & Walters, 2007; Carter, Nesbit, Badham, Parker, & Sung, 2018). The line manager is responsible for controlling the team's budget and to ensure that the team operates according to the organization's financial systems and practices which make the team operations cost effective and lead to profits, growth and sustainability of the organization (Bradley, Folz, White, & Wise, 2006).

The line manager needs to be conversant with motivational factors for effective team-work as ultimately, the individual employees will end up affecting the team. Motivational factors include salaries and the need for equitability not only in the organization but also in the industry because fair and reasonable salaries are appreciated and make the employees to be dedicated for they would not like to lose their well-paying jobs and jeopardize their careers. Good salaries also give pride to the employees and make them proud to be working in the organization. The equitability in salaries should also be related to equitability in promotions and training opportunities. Promotions based on favoritism due to nepotism or race demoralizes the other followers and negatively impacts on the task performance. Team effectiveness is evaluated by its performance. Since a leader leads people, it follows that the effectiveness of the team is related to the line manager's ability to lead the team to acceptable levels of task performance with long-term effects on the profitability of the organization, its morale, and business advantage. If the line manager does not perform effectively, then the team will not be seen as being effective and will be viewed as a drag on the development and sustainability of the organization (Durmaz, Dusun, & Demir, 2015).

4. Conclusion

The 21st Century calls for agility in every aspect of an organization's activities and this can only be possible with effective leadership from the line managers. With the turbulence caused by technology, and with the current diversity in both the human capital and the products, a line manager must learn to handle both for it is the human capital which is used in the performance aspect. The speed of decision making and the stiff competition does not allow for the line managers to wait for action from the HRM. They must take action and it must be the right one and the role of the HRM is to train the managers on how they are to be responsible for their own followers, using the HRM for consultation only. Line managers are also motivated by the effective performance of the followers and there is need to train them to be effective with the teams for after all, their own performance appraisal are evaluated through the performance of the followers (Bhurte, & Adhikari, 2016). The HRM therefore has an important role in enlightening the managers on how to run their human capital effectively and to act as a consultation agency on HR practices to the managers,

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