

The Significance of the Human Resources Role in the Hotel Sector in Harare, Zimbabwe

¹Isaac Wisikoti, ²Marcus Mutanga, ³Dr. Nhuta

¹Human Resources Manager for Servcor (Pvt) Ltd., Zimbabwe

^{2,3}Midlands State University, Graduate School of Business Leadership, Zimbabwe

Abstract

There is generally a world wide view that internationally the Hotel and Catering Industry has a number of personnel related problems and poor employment practices and conditions. This view is supported by a study of the Hotel and Catering Industry which revealed that the industry was dogged with problems of low wages, long working hours and unstable shift hours, poor or non-existent career structures, over reliance on informal recruitment methods, lack of evidence of good human resources practices and high labour turnover. Therefore this research sought to assess the level of significance given to the Human Resources function in order to find meaningful solutions to employment practices and personnel problems experienced in the Sector. The research focused on the 1 star to 5 star rated and registered hotels in Harare, Zimbabwe. The hotel ratings are according to the ratings. This study was based on a descriptive survey research design. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. For this study a questionnaire was chosen as the data collection instrument. The findings indicated that there was need for a paradigm shift for the HR function from being implementers to formulators of business strategy. The HR function should achieve this by becoming a strategic partner through spending less time on administrative activities and participating more effectively in the hotel processes and activities that define its strategy.

Keywords

Significance of HR, Strategic Role, HR Integration, Communication and Participation, Retention

I. Introduction

The field of human resources management (HRM) has evolved over the years. HRM has evolved from being a mere policing function focused on the custodianship of policies and procedures to being more involved in the strategic direction of organizations. The tourism sector has not been spared. Internationally, the continuing growth of world markets increase in the availability of technological and management know-how in different countries, progress in telecommunications and the political and economic integration world wide have led to the increase in globalisation of Tourism and Hospitality organisations. Resultantly, this has brought about some challenges in terms of how organisations approach a range of human resources issues. Globalization of business has made it critically important for organisations to embrace the significance of human resources management. However, there is generally a world wide view that internationally the Hotel and Catering Industry has a number of personnel related problems and poor employment practices and conditions. This view is supported by a study of the Hotel and Catering Industry by [5] which revealed that the industry was dogged with problems of low wages, long working hours and unstable shift hours, poor or non-existent career structures, over reliance on informal recruitment methods, lack of evidence of good human resources practices and high labour turnover.

According to [14] the Hotel sectors in African countries have

also been negatively affected by these poor employment practices which have been exacerbated by economic cycles and fragile political systems. In Zimbabwe, organisations in the Hotel sector particularly in Harare are facing similar problems. Such problems emanate from poor working conditions, increased labour court cases, low remuneration, high labour turnover, poor or non-existent career structures, and lack of professionalism. The above state of affairs questions the significance given to the Human Resources role in the Hotel sector in Harare.

Therefore this research sought to assess the level of significance given to the Human Resources function in order to find meaningful solutions to employment practices and personnel problems experienced in the Sector. The research focused on the 1 star to 5 star rated and registered hotels in Harare. The hotel ratings are according to [15] ratings.

II. Literature Review

According to scholars; [2-3,10], effective human resource management is strategic in nature and depicts certain characteristics such as summarized below.

- It emphasizes the strategic management of the human capital of the organisation.
- It is a comprehensive and coherent method to the provision of mutually supporting employment policies and practices. It means the development of integrated human resources policies and practices, thus configuration or bundling.
- It places importance on gaining commitment to the organisation's mission and values. Therefore it is commitment oriented.
- It treats people as assets for the organisation rather than costs. Thus, people are seen as a source of competitive advantage as well as human capital to be invested in.
- It is an approach to employee relations which is unitarist and not pluralist. The belief is that employees share the same interests as employers emphasizing on the principle of mutuality.
- It stresses that the performance and delivery of human resources management activities is a line management responsibility.

A. The Evolution of the HR Function

All scholars agree that the role of the HR function has evolved over the years, and should therefore be viewed from the newest perspectives in organizations. However some organizations seem to still lag behind these trends. Scholars [4] view the role of HRM in the digital age as having evolved from the Personnel Administrative function to Human Capital Management function. This is seen as having made electronic HR becoming important in knowledge management. [1] sees the role of the HR function as increasingly being seen as to be business oriented. But citing Francis and Keegan, (2006), Brockbank (2005b), [1] notes the tendency for HR to focus on business performance outcomes instead of employee well being which should also remain a critical function of HR work. According to [11] when an organization's HRM

system supports and facilitate the behaviours and competencies needed for organizational success, the HRM system and the needs of the organization are in a state of strategic alignment. Vertical alignment exists when the HRM system fits with all other elements of organizational environment. Horizontal alignment exists when all of the HR policies and practices that comprise the HRM system are consistent with each other and present a coherent message to employees concerning how they should behave at work. This view is shared by [1] citing Guest, D (1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1991). [1] citing Legge (1989) also notes that human resource policies should be integrated with strategic business planning. [1] goes on to note this view as being shared by Sisson, K (1990), Storey, J (1989). [6] also note that the HR role has changed from administrative services to business partner, and that the newest view which is less developed in most corporations is that of a strategic partner. [12] share this view and note that HR professionals bring business, change, consulting, and learning to their partnership with line managers, so that together they create value.

From the literature, it is clear that HR should play a significant role in organizations, which entail being involved in overall business Strategic issues, as well as integrating HRM policies and practices. This entails that HRM should also play a pivotal role in communication as well as ensuring employee participation, as well as retention, as retention is critical to Human Capital Management.

This literature was used as a guide in finding out how the HR function has positioned itself in the hotel sector in Zimbabwe.

III. Methodology

This study was based on a descriptive survey research design. For this study a questionnaire was chosen as the data collection instrument. Primary data was collected from the respondents' answers given in the researchers' questionnaires. Secondary data from the research findings based on reviewed literature related to the research problem.

Stratified sampling was used to group the hotels into five strata in relation to the [16] ratings to ensure that the hotels in each rating category of the population were appropriately captured and represented in the overall sample.

The targeted study participants selected through purposive sampling included General Managers, Human Resources Practitioners and Line Managers at each hotel. Participants in this study were chosen because they dealt with human resources related issues daily and possessed more and relevant information in the area of study.

IV. Results

The first study objective was establishing the level of Human Resources function involvement in business strategy formulation in the Hotel sector in Harare.

The findings show evidence that the majority of the hotels in the sector have a formal HR function whilst the minority do not have.

The second objective was to establish the level of HR involvement in as far as developing corporate strategy in the hotels is concerned. The findings reveal that although the majority of the hotels in Harare have a formal HR function, the function however is involved less in the critical role of strategy formulation and more in implementing and programming. The same findings also revealed that the HR role was more involved in administrative activities rather than strategic activities [8]. The implication is that the HR function as mere implementers will remain stuck in the reactive

role in strategy of the business. The results in this study agree with the research findings carried out [8], which revealed that there was no clear evidence of HR partnering with senior executives on strategy formulation.

The findings revealed that 29 out of 35 respondents or 82.86% agreed that the HR strategies supported corporate strategy in the hotels under study. There is a correlation between the results where 27 respondents agreed to the presence of documented HR strategies in selected hotels and the results where 29 respondents approved that the strategies support the hotels corporate strategy.

The findings reveal that there is evidence of the HR function's effort to regulate and create a modicum of balance between the employer and the employee relations. From the findings there is evidence of the HR effort in involving employees in the hotel activities and HR practices. The findings reveal that the HR function plays an integral and critical role to ensure that moral and ethical values to treat employees fairly are enshrined in management as argued [9].

On the question of HR integration into line management The response trend supports the UK based research findings [13] that revealed that HR was integrated into line managers responsibilities and that line managers reported working closely with their HR counterparts as a partnership, but contrary to the assertions of [7] that despite the fact that the HR function was seen to be significant it was widely recognised in the hotel sector as a role oddly disconnected to the line function.

Although the findings showed that line managers are engaged in people management decision making, the responses reveals that they lack the adequate skills and ability. In relation to the above responses, it is observed that devolution can become a nightmare where line managers are inexperienced and unable to deal with HR issues resulting in dismally affecting the whole process.

The fourth objective of this study was to establish the level of Human Resources function involvement in resourcing in the Hotel sector in Harare. According to the views of the respondents, although employee resourcing activities are basically the line management responsibility the major role of HR is to develop resourcing policies, job descriptions and person specifications.

V. Conclusion

There is presence of a formal Human Resources department and/ or HR Practitioner in the hotel sector in Harare. Despite the presence of the HR function in the hotels, its critical strategic role is insignificant because its involvement in business strategy is more on implementation than formulation. Thus the role is not considered as part of the business strategy development. The implication is that critical HR issues in the hotels might not be seriously and appropriately considered, again giving rise to labour related problems.

There is greater involvement of the Human Resource function in the role of employee resourcing in the hotels of interest is its involvement in the development of resourcing policies, recruitment and selection and HR planning. The involvement of HR in these activities ensures that the hotels draw important resources i.e. human capital to increase their competitive advantage HR function's involvement in retention programmes is lacking. Retaining the most important resource which is the human capital is critical considering that the sector thrives on skilled manpower. This compromises the resourcing process in that it creates a gap between the HR function's recruitment efforts and the retention of important skills The gap might give rise to poor or non existent career structures, low remuneration and labour turnover.

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Isaac WISIKOTI is a holder of an HND in Human Resources Management from the Institute of People Management of Zimbabwe, an Executive Diploma in Business Leadership from the Zimbabwe Institute of Management and an Executive Masters in Business Administration degree from the Midlands State University. He draws on over 12 years experience in Human Resources and Administration in the Printing, Iron and Steel and Hotel and Catering industries. Currently he is the Human Resources Manager for Servcor (Pvt) Ltd, Vice President for the Hotel and Catering Employers Association of Zimbabwe and a full member of the Institute of People Management of Zimbabwe.



Marcus MUTANGA holds a Bachelor of Business Studies Honours degree and a Master of Business Administration degree all from the University of Zimbabwe. He has close twelve years experience in Finance and Administration drawn from the Ministry of Finance, Cotton industry and Humanitarian Organizations. Currently he is a lecturer at the Midlands State University, in the Graduate School of

Business Leadership department.



Dr. Stephen Nhuta holds a Ph.D in Business Administration from the Washington International University, a Master of Business Administration and Bachelor of Science (Business Administration) both from United States International University Africa. He has over thirty years working experience at Senior and Executive managerial level in the airline industry. Currently he is a lecturer at the

Midlands State University, in the Graduate School of Business Leadership.