Measuring Human Resource Management Function's Effetiveness for Improved Performance in Nigerian Organizations

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Abstract

The role of the Human Resource Management function has been evolving over time. Although it began as a purely administrative function, most human resource executives now see the function's major role as being much more strategic. However, this evolution has resulted in a misalignment between the skills and capabilities of members of the function and the new requirements placed on it. Virtually every human resource management function in top companies is going through a transformation process to create a function that can play this new strategic role while successfully fulfilling its other roles. This transformation process is also going on globally. This review study, explores the measurement approaches for assessing the effectiveness of the human resource management

function for improved performance in Nigerian organizations. The study observed that there are two approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of human resource management practices, that is, the audit approach and the analytic approach. These measures can form the basis for planning ways to improve organizational performance. The research also recommended that human resource executives should strategically manage the human resource management function just as the firm must be strategically managed. This requires that human resource managers should develop measures of the function's performance through customer surveys and analytical methods.

Key Words: Human Resource Management, Effectiveness, Organization, Performance, Function, Executives, Measuring

Introduction

The strategic decision making process for the human resource management function requires that decision makers should have a good sense of the effectiveness of the current human resource management function. This information provides the foundation for decisions regarding which process, systems and skills of human resource employees that need improvement. Often human resource management functions that have been heavily involved in transactional activities for a long time tend to lack systems, processes, and skills for delivering state-of-the art traditional activities and are thoroughly unable to contribute in the transformational arena. Thus, diagnosis of the effectiveness of the human resource management function provides critical information for its strategic management.

In order to understand the transformation going on in human resource management, one must understand human resource management activities in terms of their strategic value (Wright, Snell and Jacobsen, 1999). These activities can be classified as: (1) Transactional activities e.g. day-to-day transactions such as benefits administration, recordkeeping, and employee services, are low in their strategic value. (2) Traditional activities such as performance management, training, recruiting, selection, compensation, and employee relations are the nuts and bolts of human resource management. These activities have moderate strategic value because they often form the practices and system to ensure strategic execution. (3) Transformational activities create long-term capability and adaptability for the firm. These activities include knowledge management, management development, cultural change, and strategic redirection and renewal. Obviously, these activities comprise the greatest strategic value for the firm.

Research has proved that human resource management functions spend the vast majority of their time on transactional activities, with substantially less on traditional ones and very

little on transformation activities (Tsui and Gomez-Mejia, 1988). However, virtually all human resource management functions, in order to add value to the firm, must increase their efforts in the traditional and transformational activities. To do this, however, requires that human resource executives (1) develop a strategy for the human resource management function, (2) assess the current effectiveness of the human resource management function, and (3) reengineer, or outsource human resource management processes to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Approaches for Measuring Human Resource Management Function's Effectiveness

There are two commonly used approaches for evaluating the effectiveness of human resource management practices: the audit approach and the analytic approach (Tsui and Gomez-Mejia, 1988).

Audit Approach

The audit approach focuses on reviewing the various outcomes of the human resource management functional areas. Both key indicators and customer satisfaction measures are typically collected. These measures include staffing, equal employment opportunity, compensation, benefits, training, performance management, safety, labour relations, and succession planning. The development of electronic employee database and information systems have made it much easier to collect, store, and analyze the functional key indicators than in the past, when information was kept in file folders. Thus, human resource management functions can become much more customer-oriented as part of the strategic management process. If, infact, the function desires to be more customer-focused, then one important source of effectiveness data can be the customers. Just as firms often survey their customers to determine how effectively the customers feel they are being served, the human resource management function can survey its internal customers.

One important internal customer is the employees of the company. Employees often have both direct contact with the human resource management function, through activities such as benefits administration and payroll, and indirect contact with the function through their involvement in activities such as receiving performance appraisals, pay raises, and training programmes. Many organizations use their regular employee attitude survey as a way to assess the employees as users/customers of the human resource management programmes and practices (Ulrich, 1997). However, the problem with assessing effectiveness only from the employees' perspective is that often they are responding not from the standpoint of the good of the firm, but, rather, from their own individual perspectives. For example, employees notoriously and consistently express dissatisfaction with pay level, but to simply ratchet up pay across the board would put the firm at a serious labour cost disadvantage.

Thus, many firms have surveyed of top line executives as a better means of assessing the effectiveness of the human resource management function. The top level executives can see how the systems and practices are impacting on both employees and the overall effectiveness of the company from a strategic standpoint. This can also be useful for determining how well human resource employees' perceptions of their function's effectiveness align with their views of their line colleagues. For example, a study of 14 firms by Wright, McMaham, Snell, and Gerhart (2000), revealed that human resource executives and line executives agreed on the relative effectiveness of human resource's delivery of services such as staffing and training systems, which were most and least effectively delivered, but not on the absolute level of effectiveness. Therefore, human resource executives' ratings of their effectiveness in different roles also diverged significantly from line executives. In addition, line executives viewed human resource management as being significantly less effective with regard to human resource management's actual contributions to the firm's overall effectiveness.

Analytic Approach

The analytic approach focuses on either (1) determining whether the introduction of a program or practice like a training programme or a new compensation system, has the intended effect or (2) estimating the financial costs and benefits resulting from an human resource management practice. This means how firms can determine a training programme's impact on learning, behaviour, and results. Evaluating a training programme is one strategy for determining whether the programme works. Typically, in an overall evaluation of effectiveness, we are interested in determining the degree of change associated with the programme.

The second strategy involves determining the money value of the training programme, taking into account all the costs associated with the programme. Using this strategy, we are not concerned with how much occurred but rather with the money value, that is, costs versus benefits of the programme. The human resource accounting approach attempts to place money value on human resources as if they were physical resources like plant and equipment, or financial resources like cash. Utility analysis attempts to estimate the financial impact of employee behaviours such as absenteeism, turnover, job performance, and substance abuse.

Also, wellness programmes are a popular human resource management programme for reducing health care costs through reducing employees' risk of heart disease and cancer. Erfurt, Foote, and Heirich (1992) in a study evaluated four different types of wellness programmes. Part of the evaluation involved determining the costs and benefits associated

with the four programmes over a three year period. A different type of wellness programme was implemented at each site. Site "A" instituted a programme involving raising employees' awareness of health risks such as news articles, blood pressure testing, health education classes. Site "B" set up a physical fitness facility for employees. Site "C" raised awareness of health risks and followed up with employees' who have identified health risks. Site "D" provided health education and follow up counseling and promoted physical competition and health-related events. The analytic approach is more demanding than the audit approach because it requires the detailed use of statistics and finance.

Benefits of Measuring Human Resource Management Function's Effectiveness

Good measures of human resource management function's effectiveness provides the following benefits says Tsui and Gomez-Mejia (1988):

1. **Marketing the Function:** Evaluation is a sign to other managers that human resource management function really cares about the organization as a whole and is trying to support operations, production, marketing, and other functions of the firm. Information regarding cost-savings and benefits is useful to prove to internal customers that human resource management practices contribute to the bottom line. Such information is also useful for gaining additional business for the human resource management function.
2. **Providing Accountability:** Evaluation helps determine whether the human resource management function is meeting its objectives and effectively using it budget.

Improving Human Resource Management Function's Effectiveness

Once a strategic direction has been established and human resource management's effectiveness evaluated, leaders of the human resource management function can explore how to improve its effectiveness in contributing to the organization's competitiveness. Often the improvement focuses on two aspects. First, within each activity, human resource management needs to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness in performing each of the activities. Second, often there is a push to eliminate as much of the transactional work as possible, and some of the traditional work, to free up time and resources to focus more on the higher-value-added transformational work (Wright, McMahan, Snell, and Gerhart, 1998). Redesign of the structure, that is, reporting relations, and processes through outsourcing and information technology enables the function to achieve these goals.

Restructuring to Improve Human Resource Management Function Effectiveness

Traditionally human resource management functions were structured around the basic human resource management subfunctions such as staffing, training, compensation,

appraisal, and labour relations. Each of these areas had a director who reported to the Deputy General Manager of human resource management, who often reported to Deputy Manager of finance and administration (Recardo, 1994). However, for the human resource management function to truly contribute strategically to organization's effectiveness in Nigeria, the senior human resource person must be part of the top management team, that is, reporting directly to the Chief Executive Officer, and there must be a different structural arrangement within the function itself.

Restructuring the internal human resource management function and redesigning the processes represent internal approaches to improving human resource management effectiveness (Kinni, 1994). However, increasingly human resource executives are seeking to improve the effectiveness of the systems, processes, and services, the function delivers through outsourcing. Outsourcing entails contracting with an outside vendor to provide a product or service to the firm, as opposed to reproducing the product using employees within the organization.

Improving Human Resource Management Effectiveness through Process Redesign

In addition to structural arrangements, process redesign enables the human resource management function to more efficiently and effectively deliver human resource management services. Process redesign often uses information technology, but information technology applications are not a requirement. Thus, we will discuss the general issue of process reengineering and then explore information technology applications that have aided human resource management in process redesign.

Reengineering is a complete review of critical work processes and redesign to make them more efficient and able to deliver higher quality. Reengineering is especially critical to ensuring that the benefits of new technology can be realized. Applying new technology to an inefficient process will not improve efficiency or effectiveness. Instead, it will increase product or service costs related to the introduction of the new technology. According to Kinni (1994), reengineering can be used to review the human resource management practices such as work design or the performance management system. The reengineering process involves four steps: identify the process to be reengineered, understand the process, redesign the process, and implement the new process.

Identify the Process

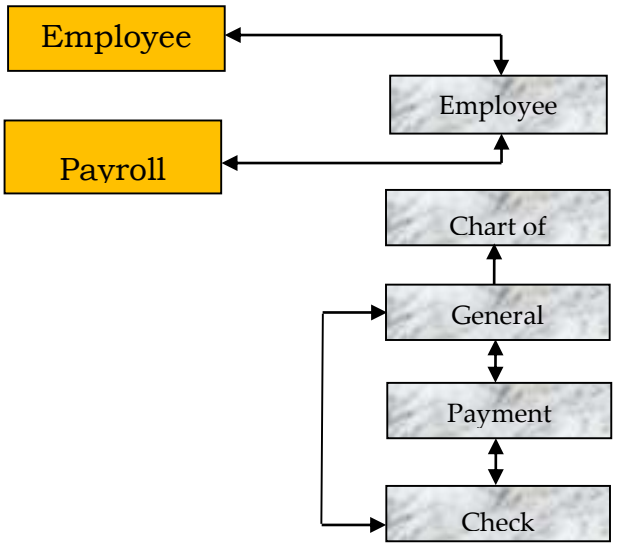
Managers who control the process or are responsible for functions within the process, sometimes called "process owners", should be identified and ask to be part of the reengineering team. Team members should include employees involved in the process, to

provide expertise, and those outside the process, as well as internal or external customers who see the outcome of the process.

Understanding the Process

Various techniques are used to understand processes. Data flow diagrams are useful to show the flow of data among departments. Figure 1 shows a data-flow diagram for payroll data and the steps in producing a payback. Information about the employee and department are sent to the general account. The payroll check is issued based on a payment voucher that is generated from the general accounting ledger. Data entity relationship diagrams show the types of data used within a business function and the relationship among the different types of data.

Figure 1: Data Flow Diagram for Payroll Data



Redesigning the Process

During the redesign phase, the team develops models, tests them, chooses a prototype, and determines how to integrate the prototype in the organization.

Implementing the Process

The firm tries out the process by testing it in a limited, controlled setting before expanding companywide. For example, J. M. Huber Corporation, a New Jessey-based conglomerate

that has several operating divisions scattered throughout the United States, used reengineering to avoid installing new software into inefficient processes (Greengard, 1994). Human resource staff began by documenting and studying the existing work flow and creating a strategy for improving efficiency. Top management, middle level managers, and human resources staff worked together to identify the processes that they most wanted to improve. They determined that the most critical issue was to develop a client –server system that could access data more easily than the mainframe computer they were currently using. Also, the client-server system could eliminate many of the requisitions need to get access to data, which slowed down work. The HRM department's efforts have streamlined record-keeping functions, eliminated redundant steps, and automated manual processes. The fully automated client-server system allows, employees to sign up and change benefits information using an interactive voice-response system that is connected to the company's database. In addition, managers have easier access to employee's salary, job descriptions, and other data.

Improving Human Resource Function's Effectiveness through Using New Technologies – HRM Information Systems

Several new and emerging technologies can help improve the effectiveness of the human resource management function. New technologies are current applications of knowledge, procedures, and equipment that have not been used previously. New technology usually involves automation that is, replacing human labour with equipment, information processing or combination of the two (Quillen, 1989).

In human resource management, technology has already been used for three broad functions; transaction processing, reporting, and tracking: decision support systems; and expert systems (Broderick and Boudreau, 1992). Transaction Processing refers to computations and calculations used to review and document human resource management decisions and practices. These include documenting relocation, training expenses, and course enrollments and filling-out government reporting requirements. Decision support Systems are designed to help managers solve problems. They usually include a "what if" feature that allows users to see how outcomes change when assumptions or data change. These systems are useful, for example, for helping companies determine the number of new hires needed based on different turnover rates or the availability of employees with a certain skill in the labour market. Expert Systems are computer systems incorporating the decision rules of people deemed to have expertise in a certain area. The system recommends actions that the user can take based on the information provided by the user. The recommended actions are those that a human resource management expert would take in a similar situation such as a manager

interviewing a job candidate.

The newest technologies being applied to human resource management include interactive voice technology, client server architecture, relational database, imaging, and development of specialized software. These technologies improve effectiveness through increasing access to information, improving communications, improving the speed with which human resource management transactions and information can be gathered, and reducing the costs and making it easier to administer human resource management functions such as recruiting, training, and performance management. O'Connell (1995), and O'Connell (1996) concluded that technology enables.

1. Employees to gain complete control over their training and benefits enrollments, that is, more self-service.
2. The creation of a paperless employment office.
3. Streamlining the human resource management department's work.
4. Knowledge-based decision support technology, which allows employees and managers to access knowledge as needed.
5. Employees and managers to select the type of media they want to use to send and receive information.
6. Work to be completed at any time and place.
7. Closer monitoring of employees' work.

There is evidence that new technology is related to improvement in productivity. Improvements in productivity have been credited largely to downsizing, restructuring, and reengineering. But technology is also responsible because new technology has allowed companies to find leaner, more flexible ways of operating (Brynjolfsson and Hitt, 1993). A study of companies in a variety of industries by Total Quality Newsletter (1994) found that investments in computers provided a better return than investments in other kinds of capital. Technology requires companies to have appropriately skilled and motivated people and streamlined work processes. In some cases technology is replacing human capital (Rigdon, 1995).

Interactive Voice Technology

Interactive voice technology uses a conventional personal computer to create an automated phone-response system. This technology is especially useful for benefits administration (Greangard, 1993).

Networks and Client-Server Architecture

Traditionally, different computer systems, with separate databases, are used for payroll,

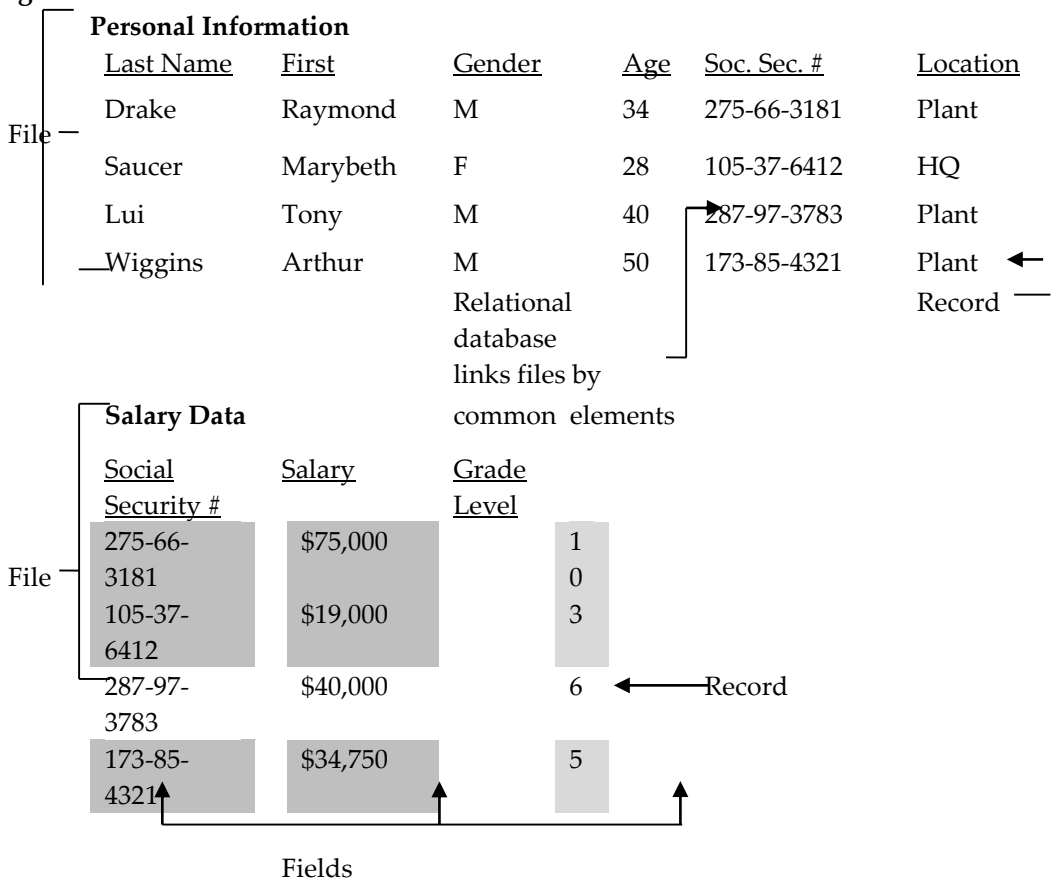
recruiting, and other human resource management functions. A network is a combination of desktop computer terminals, and mainframes or minicomputers that share access to databases and a means to transmit information throughout the system. A common form of network involves client- server architecture. Client-server architecture provides the means of consolidating data and applications into a single data, that is, the client (Hunter 1992; Busbin, 1995). The data can be assessed by multiple users. Likewise, software applications can be stored on the server and borrowed by other users. Client-server architecture allows easier access to data, faster response time, and maximum user of the computing power of the personal computer.

Rational Databases

Databases contain several data files, that is, topics which are made up of employee information, that is, records containing data fields. A data field is an element or type of information such as employee name, social security number, or job classification.

In a rational database, information is stored in separate files, which look like tables. These files can be linked by common elements (fields) such as name, identification number, or location. This contrasts with the traditional file structure, in which all data associated with an employee was kept in one file. In the relational database shown in Figure 2, employees' personal information is located in one file and salary information in another, but both topics of information can be accessed via the employees' social security numbers.

Figure 2: Rational Database



Users of relational database can file and retrieve information according to any filed or multiple fields across different tables or databases. They provide an easy way to organize data. Also, the number of data fields that can be kept for any employee using a rational database is limitless. The ability to join or merge data from several different tables or to view only a subset of data is especially useful in human resource management. Databases that have been developed to track employee benefit costs, training courses, and compensation, for example, contain separate pieces of employee information that can be accessed and merged as desired by the user. Rational technology also allows databases to be established in several different locations. Users in one plant or division location can access data from any other company location.

Imaging

Imaging refers to scanning documents, storing them electronically, and retrieving them Lederer (1993). Imaging is particularly useful because paper files take a larger volume of space and are difficult to access. Imaging has been used in applicant tracking and in benefits management. Applicants' résumés can be scanned and stored in a database so that they will be available for access at a later date. Some software applications such as "Resumix" all the user to scan the résumé based on key items such as job history, education, or experience (Fowler, 1994).

Expert Systems

Expert systems are technologies that mimic a human expert. Expert systems have three elements:

1. A knowledge base that contains facts, figures, and rules about a specific subject.
2. A decision-making capability that draws conclusions from those facts and figures to solve problems and answer questions.
3. A user interface that gathers and gives information to the person using the system.

The use of expert systems in human resource management is relatively new. Some companies use expert systems to help employees decide how to allocate their money for benefits, help managers schedule the labour requirements for projects, and assist managers in conducting selection interviews.

Groupware

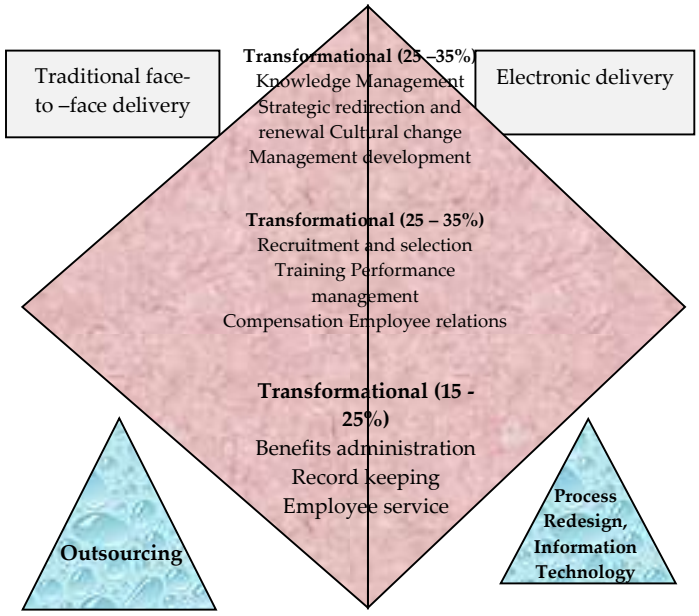
Groupware is electronic meeting software, is a software application that enables multiple users to track, share, and organize information and to work on the same document simultaneously (Clark and Knoonce, 1995; Townsend, Whiteman, and Hendrickson, 1995). A groupware system combines such elements as electronic mail document management, and an electronic bulletin board. The most popular brand of groupware is Lotus Notes.

Software Applications for Human Resource Management: Improving HRM Effectiveness through New Technologies – E-HRM

Over the past years, as human resource management functions sought to play a more strategic role in organizations, the first task was to eliminate transactional tasks in order to free up time to focus on traditional and transformational activities. Part of building a strategic human resource function requires moving much of the transactional work away from being done by people so that the people can have time available to work on strategic activities. Consequently, the use of technology can both make human resource more strategic and by doing so increase the value that human resource adds to the business

(Shrivastava and Shaw, 2003). As shown in figure 3, outsourcing of many of these activities provide one mechanism for reducing this burden. However, more relevant today is the focus on the use of information technology to handle these tasks. Early on this was achieved by the development and implementation of information systems that were run by the HRM function but more recently have evolved into systems that allow employees to serve themselves. Thus, employees can access the system and make their benefit enrollment, changes, or claims online. Clearly, technology has freed HRM functions from transactional activities to focus on more strategic actions. However, the speed requirements of e-business force HRM functions to explore how to leverage technology for the delivery of traditional and transformational HRM will be executed over the Web, but that a number of HRM activities currently delivered via paper or face-to-face communication can be moved to the Web with no loss, and even gains, ineffectiveness and efficiency. The examples are recruitment and selection, compensation and rewards, and training and development.

Figure 3: Change in Delivery
E-Enabled Delivery of HRM



Recruitment and Selection

Traditional recruitment and selection processes have required considerable face-to-face communications with recruitment firms and potential employees, labour-intensive assessment devices, and significant monitoring of managerial decisions to ensure that hiring patterns and decisions do not run afoul of regulatory requirements. However, technology has transformed these processes. Thus, technology has enabled firms to monitor hiring processes to minimize the potential for discriminatory hiring decisions.

Compensation and Rewards

Compensation systems in organizations probably reflect the most pervasive form of bureaucracy within HRM. Inspite of the critical role they play in attracting, motivating, and retraining employees, most systems consist of rigid, time consuming, and ineffective processes. Managers fill out what they believe to be useless forms, ignore guidelines, and display a general disdain for the entire process. O'Reilly and Caldwell (1998) believe that leveraging technology may allow firms to better achieve their compensation goals with considerably less effort.

Training and Development

Exploring different vehicles for delivering training such as PC, Video, and the like, certainly is not a new concept. In addition, a number of firms have begun delivering training via the Web. Their experience suggests that some types of training can be done effectively via the Internet, whereas others might not. For example, companies such as IBM and Dell both boast that they have developed Internal-based training for some parts of their workforce (Galagan, 1994). Interestingly, the challenge of speedy deliver of HRM services brings the concept of Internet-based training to the forefront. In today's competitive environment, firms compete to attract and retain customers and talented employees. How well a firm develops and treats existing employees largely determines how well it achieves these outcomes. Yet the challenges of speed, project focus, and changing technology create environments that discourage managers from managing their people, resulting in a situation where employees may not feel respected or valued. This presents a challenge to firms to provide the incentive and the skills for managers to treat employees as assets rather than commodities. Thus, technology allows firms to deliver training and development for at least some skills or knowledge faster, more efficiently, and probably more effectively. It can quickly merge training, communication, and immediate response to strategic contingencies.

Conclusions

The roles required of the human resource management function have changed as people have become recognized as a true source of competitive advantage. This has required a transformation of the human resource management function from focusing solely on transactional activities to an increasing involvement in strategic activities. Infact, research has proved that human resource management function is in a process of transformation. The strategic management of the human resource management function will determine whether human resource management will transform itself to a true strategic partner or simply be blown up.

Human resource management today must play roles as an administrative expert, employee advocate, change agent, and strategic partner. The function must also deliver transactional, traditional, and transformational services and activities to the firm, and it must be both efficient and effective. Human resource executives must strategically manage. This requires that human resource management develop measures of the functions performance through audit and analytic approaches. These measures can form the basis for planning ways to improve performance. Human resource management performance can increase through new structures for the function, through using reengineering and information technology, and through outsourcing.

Recommendations

Based on the past works reviewed and conclusions, following recommendations are made for the effectiveness of Human Resource Management Function in Nigerian Organizations.

1. Human resource executives should strategically manage the human resource management function just as the firm must be strategically managed.
2. Human resource management function, should truly be strategic in its orientation, it must view itself as a separate business entity and engage in strategic management in an effort to effectively serve the various internal customers.
3. Human resource strategy team needs to identify, the specific people issues that will be critical to address in order for the business to succeed.
4. Human resource management strategy should be communicated to the relevant parties, both internal and external to the function.
5. Human resource strategy should also seek to address business issues, and should involve those incharge of running the business in order to increase the quality of information from which the human resource strategy is created.
6. Strategic decision making process for the human resource management function requires that decision makers should have a good sense of the effectiveness of the current human resource management function.

7. Audit approach should focus on reviewing the various outcomes of the human resource management functional areas.
8. While estimating the financial costs and benefits resulting from human resource management practices, analytic approach should be employed.
9. Once a strategic direction has been established and human resource management's effectiveness evaluated, managers of the human resource management function should explore how to improve its effectiveness in contributing to the firm's competitiveness.
10. Traditional human resource functions such as staffing, training, compensation, appraisal, and labour relations should be structured around the basic human resource management subfunctions.
11. Restructuring the internal human resource management function and redesigning the processes should represent internal approaches to improving human resource management effectiveness.
12. In some cases organizations should contract with an outside vendor to provide a product or service to the firm, as opposed to producing the product using employees within the firm.
13. In addition to structural arrangements, process redesign should also be employed which will enable the human resource management function to more efficiently and effectively deliver human resource management services.
14. Organization's reengineering effort should completely review critical work processes and redesign to make them more efficient and able to deliver higher quality. It should also be used to review the human resource management department functions and processes or specific human resource management practices such as work desigbn or the performance management system.
15. Managers who control the process or are responsible for functions within the process should be identified and ask to be part of the reengineering team. Team members should also include employees and customers who are the outcome of the process.
16. Data-flow diagrams should be used to show the flow of data among departments.
17. New technology should replace human labour with equipment and information processing. It should also be used for transaction processing, reporting, and tracking; decision support systems; and expert systems.
18. Technologies applied to human resource management should include interactive voice technology, client server architecture, relational database, imaging, and development of specialized software. These will improve effectiveness through increasing access to information, improving communications, improving the speed with which HRM transactions and information can be gathered, and

reducing the costs and making it easier to administer HRM functions such as recruiting training, and performance management.

19. Electronic Human Resource Management (E-HRM) should be adopted to HRM effectiveness.
20. Technology should be used to transform manpower recruitment and selection processes, compensation and reward systems, and training and development programmes.
21. Organizations should make the top human resource job a member of the senior management team and should report directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

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