

Research Article

HRM in Libraries: Issues and Challenges in the Indian Perspective

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A B S T R A C T

Human resources are the most essential and important asset of any organization including libraries. Library human resources perform various important and technical functions to achieve the targeted goals of the libraries they are working in. Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a crucial role in the strategic planning and execution in order to make a decisive impact on the organization's overall performance. Hence, proper management and administration of human resources in libraries is extremely essential in the present digital era like other business and ICT sectors. The present paper discusses the concept, objectives, characteristics, and functions of HRM and the various issues and challenges faced by the librarians in the proper management of human resources in the libraries the world over in general and in India in particular.

Keywords: HRM, Human Resource Management, Human Resource Development, Libraries, Library Administration, Library Management, Staffing

Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) may be referred to as the practice where in the employees of an organization are recruited, hired, deployed and managed. In simple words it is often termed as Human Resources (HR). It deals with various important issues related to compensation, performance management, organization development, safety, wellness, benefits, employee motivation, training and others. HRM plays a strategic role in managing people and the workplace culture and environment. HRM plays a vital role in achieving the targeted goals of an organization. No resource, even in this age of globalization, is more important than human resource. It has great importance in the improvement of the total ability and efficiency of an organization, society, agency, country and a nation.

People can be transformed into human resources by way of getting equipped with sufficient knowledge, skills and competencies in the fields and areas they are dealing with.¹ The success of an organization depends upon the knowledge, skills and abilities of its employees, particularly as they help in establishing a set of core competencies that distinguish an organization from its competitors.² Revolution in Information Communication Technologies (ICT) leading to digitization and virtualization has made the tasks of human resources of an organization more critical, complicated, competitive and even more sophisticated. Highly knowledgeable and skilled workforces have become an urgent need to handle any organization effectively. Likewise, the Library and Information Science sector also requires a number of quality human resources for the purpose of providing readily accessible knowledge services

¹Roknuzzaman, M. (2007). Status of Human Resource Management in Public University Libraries in Bangladesh. *The International Information & Library Review* 39. pp. 52-56.

²Deb, Tapomay. (2006). *Strategic Approach to Human Resource Management: Concept, Tools and Application*. New Delhi: Atlantic, 2006.

to their users in accordance with their specific needs and requirements. Ironically, most of the libraries do not have the requisite and adequate professional and qualified manpower to support information and knowledge activities. Moreover, the library human resources world over have been suffering a lot for a long time because of their lower social dignity, professional status and pay scales. But the success of any library depends completely upon the effective functioning of its manpower. Therefore, like other business and ICT sectors, proper management and administration of human resources in libraries is extremely essential in this digital era.³

HRM: Definition and Concept^{4,5}

Human Resource Management (HRM) may be characterized as the way towards overseeing and managing workers in an organization and it can include procuring, terminating, preparing and persuading them. HRM is the process by which an organization recruits new staff members and trains them with a view to get best out of their potential for the benefit of the organization. Strategic human resource management refers to the process of drawing in, brushing up of skills, compensating, and maintaining the workers for the overall benefit of both, the individual employees as well as the organization. HR managers hold the responsibility of finding and implementing intelligent solutions for the various matters related to the employees, which have an effect on the ability of the organization in enhancing its efficiency and attainment of its objectives, targets and goals. HRM handles and manages various key issues pertaining to remuneration, execution of duties and responsibilities, performance management, organization development, wellbeing, health, benefits, stimulation and motivation of employees, guidance & training and others. HRM assumes a vital job of overseeing individuals and keeping good working environment culture in their organizations.

There are several other definitions of HRM. According to one, HRM is the practice of managing people in organizations in a structured and thorough manner. It includes the various functions like recruitment (employing), maintenance of individuals, setting and handling of salary and other benefits, management of the performance of both the employees as well as organization, adjustment and management of any type of change, and handling the exits from the organization to improve and refine the activities. Another definition of HRM takes into account the management of people in organizations from a large-scale perspective i.e. organizing and supervising the employees in order to develop good cooperation among the employees and the management. This move concentrates on the

goals and results of the HRM task. This denotes that the HR function in the advanced organizations is about the idea of facilitating, grooming and motivating its individuals (employees) in order to develop such a sound liaison that results in the accomplishment of the mutual goals in best possible manner.

It is a fact that to prosper in the hectic and unstable business environment, the establishments need to constantly innovate and be ahead of the curve in terms of business practices and strategies. It is from this motivation to be at top priority that HRM becomes a valuable tool for management to ensure success. One of the factors behind organizations giving a lot of attention to their people is the nature of the establishments in the current unstable environment. Given the fact that there has been a steady movement towards an economy based on services, it turns out to be imperative for the organizations and institutions connected to the service sector to keep their staff motivated and productive. In order to ensure a profitable existence in the highly competitive environment, even the organizations involved in the production and conventional sectors are required to set up and implement policies and approach in order to make efficient use of their resources. Such a transformed industrial setting has taken place due to the change in the way of handling the staff (employees) by the organizations and institutions as more than just resources. The organizations have adopted a people first approach by way of developing and brushing up the skills of their employees.

Objectives of HRM

The principal objective of HRM is to make sure of the presence of proficient and keen employees in an organization. HRM objectives may be divided into the following four categories:

- Societal
- Organizational
- Functional
- Personal

Societal Objectives

To take up the ethical and social responsibility of the needs, requirements and other sensitive issues of the society and the employees in such a way that these demands should not affect the organization in negative way.

Organizational Objectives

To help and assist the organization in the attainment of its goals in an effective manner. In simple words, the purpose of the HR department is to serve the whole organization for its excellence and prosperity.

³Roknuzzaman, op. cit.

⁴<https://www.tuturself.com/>

⁵<https://www.managementstudyguide.com/>

Functional Objectives

To contribute for the excellence and proper functioning of the organization at a level that best fits to its needs and requirements. The working approach of the HR department must be tailored to be in accordance with the needs and demands of the organization.

Personal Objectives

To employ the skills and abilities of the employees efficiently and to assist them in the accomplishment of their individual goals for the benefit of the organization. In order to keep the employees preserved and motivated, their personal goals must be properly taken care of otherwise their productivity and performance will decline and they may also start leaving the organization.

Characteristics of HRM

Some important characteristics of HRM are as under:

It is a Science and an Art

The art and science of HRM is in a highly versatile fact. HRM is the art of handling and supervising individuals by way of opting and applying to innovative and creative styles. It is a science too because of the precision and careful application of the requisite theory.

It is Persistent

Expansion of HRM encompasses all the stages and classes of the individuals, and also the management and of the working staff without any sort of partiality. All the individuals entrusted with the responsibility as managers have to perform human resource management. Due to its requirement in all the departments of an organization, it is also persistent by nature. It is mandatory for all kinds of organizations to adhere to the practices of HRM.

It is a Constant Practice

It is a practice involving various tasks to be executed in continuum starting with HR planning, selection, employment, training and development, positioning, professional development, evaluation of the performance, management of incentives, management of discipline, staff affairs, redressal of complaints, staff welfare, and termination. Moreover, HRM is a continuous, constant and never-ending process.

It is an Assistive Task

All the operative divisions of an organization are served and assisted by HRM. However, the Line Managers always hold the vital job. HRM plays the role of facilitating and assisting the employees. The HR Manager has line authority only within his/her own division, but has staff authority in all the other divisions of the organization.

It must Follow the Rules and Regulations

The crucial task of HRM has to be carried out in accordance

with the legal rules and regulations. While selecting and recruiting employees, it is necessary to ensure that no partiality of any kind should be done. HRM must take extra care that the persons from all the communities including tribes and farmers should be given equal opportunity in the organization, strict following of equal pay for equal work rule, and non-violation of human rights.

It is Comprehensive and Constantly Evolving

HRM includes benefits, safety, staff, personnel management, and also keeps sound and healthy connection with the staff and industrial relations. It is a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary task as it makes use of the understanding and inputs from various disciplines like psychology, sociology, economics, etc. It continues to constantly evolve and change itself in conformance with the changing environment. It has evolved itself in principle and practice from mistreatment of the employees and workers for treating and handling them as colleagues and equal partners in achieving the common goal of the development of the organization.

It is Performance and Result Oriented

HRM focuses on results and it encourages people to give their best to the organization. It attempts to obtain the best from the employees by winning their devoted support and cooperation. It works towards bringing people and the organization together along with their mutual interests in such a way that the goals of each of them are met.

It is Individual-centric

It involves individuals at the workplace both as a people and a group. It focuses on and tries to facilitate the employees to enhance their abilities. It involves various functions related to the individuals like appointing, training and development, performance evaluation, healthy working atmosphere, etc. It is concerned with developing manpower. Individuals are essential for accomplishing institutional targets and goals. The achievements of an organization rely on the employees' excellence.

It is Logic of Human Relations

It is a logic with a central premise that the employees are humans and not a manufacturing item like land, labour or capital. HRM understands peculiarity and disparities among the individuals. In order to be successful, every manager is required to have social skills to govern individuals having different requirements.

It is an Exhaustive Approach

HRM in its ambit includes important aspects like workers, employee wellbeing, and Industrial affairs. It is exhaustive because it focuses not only on procurement, but also on expansion, growth, consumption, deployment and preservation.

Functions of HRM^{6,7}

These functions of HRM are classified into two major categories: (A) Managerial and (B) Operational.

Managerial Functions

These functions include:

Planning

It is concerned with making decisions for the future. It is said to be the process of determining enterprise objectives and choosing the best possible future courses of action to be undertaken towards achieving them successfully. Planning of employees in the present day prevents a crisis tomorrow. It is the responsibility of the HR manager to devise suitable guidelines and procedures pertaining to employment, selection and training of the staff.

Organizing

It is basically concerned with making appropriate combinations of staff activities, allocation of different groups of tasks and activities to the different individuals, and delegation of authority. The creation of an accurate structural framework is the main task.

Directing

This function involves guidance and supervision of the staff. The HR manager has to be an efficient leader capable of building successful teams. The HR manager, while being concerned about accomplishment of the desired goals and results, must also take care of the needs and expectations of the staff at all levels.

Controlling

It involves checking and measuring the performance of the staff, correction of the negative deviations and ensuring the effective achievement of the goals and plans. This step lets an employee know about his/her performance via review reports, records, and employee audit programmes. It further makes sure that the various activities have been performed in compliance with the stated goals and plans.

Operative Functions

Operative functions include:

Recruitment/Hiring

It is concerned with procuring the people having required knowledge, ability and skills for the purpose of achieving the organizational goals.

Job Analysis

It is a function of collecting information relating to the procedures and liabilities concerning a particular job.

Job Design

It is concerned with organization of various tasks and responsibilities for the purpose of having a fruitful unit of work. Its main purpose is to assimilate the needs of the employers to suit the requirements of an organization.

Performance Appraisal

It is the logical and objective procedure of checking and evaluating the work-related behaviour and potential of the employees. It involves determining and informing an employee about his/her performance and establishing a plan for improvement.

Training and Development

It is a continuous process through which employees learn skills, gain knowledge, abilities, and attitudes for the accomplishment of personal and organizational goals. It also involves developing managerial skills and capabilities in the employees through appropriate programmes and activities.

Salary and Incentives Administration

This function involves determining of wages for different types of jobs. Nowadays, many organizations also offer incentives in addition to basic wage structure based on the actual performance of the employees.

Employee Welfare

It includes the services, amenities and facilities provided to the staff within or outside the vicinity of the organization for their physical, psychological and social well being like, provision of accommodation, transportation, education and recreation facilities.

Maintenance

It aims at minimizing the number of employees while keeping and maintaining the best performing staff in the organization.

Labour Relations

For the purpose of achieving industrial growth and higher productivity, harmonious industrial relations between labour and management are very essential. It is the duty of both the labour as well as management to understand the significance of openness, trust and collaboration in their daily routine. It is extremely beneficial for the prosperity of the organization as well as the employees.

Personnel Research

It is an important process of evaluating the efficiency of various human resource policies, procedures and practices related to salaries, working conditions, career

⁶<http://bankofinfo.com/definition-of-human-resource-management/>

⁷<http://careerbuilderforemployers.co.in/products/broadbean-analytics-suite/>

advancements, employee welfare, etc. for the purpose of either keeping the existing ones or developing more appropriate ones, if required.

Personnel Records

It involves filing, keeping, handling, organizing and retrieving various information and records related to the employees including complete history of their employment, working hours, history of financial benefits disbursed to them, etc.

HRM Challenges for Libraries and Librarians

Librarians face the following challenges in the management of human resources:

Globalization: Due to the advancement of the Internet and ICT, the resources of libraries are easily accessible globally. Managing diversity, complexity and ambiguity across the globe is a big challenge for the Librarians.

Emerging Technologies: A large number of new technologies have emerged in a very short span of time and many are waiting in pipeline to be adopted and implemented in the libraries and information centers. Provision of training to the staff for their better performance in provision of quality library services to the users is another challenge for the Librarians.

Personnel: In order to satisfy the needs and requirements of the users, highly skilled personnel are required in the libraries. Selecting and recruiting suitably skilled personnel is a big challenge for the Librarians.

Knowledge Management: With the continuous and exponential growth in every field of knowledge, managing knowledge in the libraries for the future is very important. The challenge for the Librarians is to formulate such a knowledge management system that addresses and takes care of both the development of knowledge and its utilization.

Workplace Issues: With the significant changes in the profile of the workforce, the demands and requirements of people on various issues like, employee privacy, prevention of sexual harassment, employee ethics, etc. has attained great importance and priority. Intelligent handling and management of all these critical issues in the libraries is another challenge for the Librarians.

Curtailing of Funds: Almost all the organizations, establishments, firms, universities, colleges, institutions, etc. including libraries have been experiencing a continuous curtailment of their funds every year due to which the organizations have been downsizing, outsourcing, and leasing human resources but at the same time ensuring enhancement in the productivity. This is also a big challenge for the Librarians too.

HRM Issues and Challenges in Indian Libraries⁸

Indian libraries and their parent bodies too, are going through the transition from personnel to HR management. It is a big challenge to ensure that the libraries are operating in compliance with the policies and procedures of the concerned university or institutions with respect to human resource issues and that the library managers are applying those procedures appropriately, consistently, and equitably. Ironically, HR functions still remain far removed from the jurisdiction of library managers who should take the lead in screening skills that fit the library work. Staff selection and recruitment processes for Library staffs in majority of universities and institutions in India are handled in a centralized manner.

The faith on training alone does not guarantee a smooth route in the HRD processes. Library schools and their up-to-date programmes too have a part to play in the Indian universities to promote or delay a librarians' career development. There is no full time library training within many districts of Indian states. This might be a constraint to the local staff. In some states, librarians have lost their academic status, which would give the usual rewards and incentives to employees who advance themselves. There are no funds allocated for the training of library staff in a majority of institutions in India. In many Indian states, the uncertainty over the academic status works against both the library manager and the employee for being uncertain even about the promotion criteria to be followed at any given time. Although senior librarians under UGC, ICAR, MCI, CSIR, AICTE, BCI, etc. in India are categorized as academics, there is still a lot of discrimination with respect to the age of superannuation, promotion and other policies. These conditions break a logical continuum in the HRM for Indian libraries, and dissatisfied staff may hardly contribute optimally to these library services attaining their goals.

Employment, Employee and labour relations are an important key in creating harmony for workers, clients and organizational success. Indian libraries like others, find themselves at the centre of this equation where serving, meeting and satisfying diverse library information users is a factor. Not only are the relations of all these parties to be managed, but also the rights of various groups are to be protected. The elasticity of management from senior-most to the apprentices should enable staff to be managed and for each to manage oneself in all respects. Sometimes it appears that the library managers are deliberately shying away from the subject, timidly giving it a blind eye or coerced from participating or associating in industrial relations.

There are certain sections in the libraries of various

⁸Mangi, Leela Dhar. (2014). HRM in Libraries: An Indian Perspective. Asian Journal of Management Research 5(1). pp. 1-15

institutions that may pose health hazards. For example, bindery units that apply highly toxic substances like glues and other pasting materials, whose continuous exposure to workers are unsafe; archives preservation procedures that continuously involve fumigation; very low temperatures suitable for storing brittle archival collections but unsuitable for humans; and frequent mal-functionality of some escalators and lifts operating on multi-storey library buildings are a challenge before the Librarians to attentively address these HRM issues, which require a special handling jointly with the HR directors in their respective organizations.⁹

Conclusion

The 21st century library environment is extremely competitive and continuous improvement has now become a necessity. Utilization of human resources is the area in any organization where changes are frequently made keeping in view the emerging technologies and their applications. Assessing potential when appointing or promoting staff; creating flexible organizational structures, which will help all the employees to achieve a better work-life balance; and developing intrinsic motivation in employees are all ways in which organizations can find and hold onto the treasure of human resources. There has been a drastic change in the role of the library professionals and the Librarians. It has become imperative that both theoretically and practically, HRM/HRD strategies should be integrated at all levels of professional trainings. Several institutes in India provide short-term courses and additional training programs for the persons requiring specialized training in the field of ICT. Manpower is also trained through short-term courses on Computer Applications, Website Designing and Library Automation and Networking. In India a few organizations are well-equipped with the necessary facilities and expert manpower to impart training and develop human resource in the domain of science communication, and library and information sciences for meeting the challenges of current times.

In India there is a lot of discrimination in service conditions of the Librarians with respect to age of superannuation, promotion and other policies. These conditions break a logical continuum in the HRM for Indian libraries, and dissatisfied staff may hardly contribute optimally to these library services attaining their goals. The funding and regulating agencies must pay attention towards reforming the service conditions and removing the anomalies that exist in them and are a big cause of unrest among the Librarians and the library professionals.

Several organizations and institutions in India have also started hiring Librarians, library professionals and other

library support staff either on Ad-hoc or contractual basis against permanent vacant posts. This is another cause of unrest because of the lack of security of the job among them. Instead of giving their fullest to the libraries, institutions and the organizations concerned, they are often found trying to search for better opportunities in other establishments. The most successful organizations will be the ones which can attract, develop and retain individuals who have the ability to manage a global organization like a Library that is responsive to its clients (users) and opportunities being presented by technology.

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⁹Mangi, Leela Dhar. (2014). HRM in Libraries: An Indian Perspective. *Asian Journal of Management Research* 5(1). pp. 1-15