

Recent Trends in People Resourcing : Global Context

Md. Sharif Hasan*

Abstract: The main resources of modern organisation are their human resources i.e. people. People resourcing policies are aimed to extract optimal performance from the employees through ensuring effective attraction, retention and advancement of employees inside the organisation. The ultimate target is survival of the organisation through improving the efficiency of the employees. As organisations are not isolated from the external environment, various factors such as globalisation, technological development, competitive advantage, life expectancy, feminisation of workforce, ethnic diversity etc largely influence the various policies and functions of organisations including those related to people resourcing. Failure to cope with the changed scenario in the long run will cause their extinction. In this article, attempts have been made to analyse the recent changes being taken place in the people resourcing policy throughout the globe. Attempts have also been made to make predictions about the futuristic trend of this field although it is not very easy to make accurate predictions about the future specially, where man, machine and above all society are involved.

1. Introduction

In order to survive in the highly competitive and continuously evolving business environment, successful management of change is crucial to any organisation, irrespective of size, structure and function (By 2005). Failure of adapting properly to the changed scenario has been severely punished with the demise of the individual or species (Martin, 2001). It is argued that contemporary organisations are immersed in a virtual cyclone of change as they need to adapt to the ever increasing demands from domestic and global markets (Siegal et al 1996). A variety of internal and external influences cause, trigger and drive change (Morden, 1996). Organisation's capability to identify future needs and managing the changes required for reaching that target is crucial (Burnes, 2004). Contemporary management requires high managerial skill due to the urgency of change in management (Senior, 2002). Organisations need to utilise flexible labour policies to meet anticipated future people resourcing needs, performance and quality service agendas (Arrowsmith and McGoldrick, 1996).

2. What is People Resourcing?

It is evident in the relevant literature that people resourcing evolves around a number of interrelated issues i.e. attracting, retaining and developing of personnel within certain organisations. Recruitment and retention are problematic in people resourcing. Therefore, a response is increasing to "cast the net more widely" (Reynolds and Brue, 1990). Maintaining and ensuring service within a competitive climate is necessary while attempting to reduce costs (Graves, 1990). Problem of

* Assistant Director, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, Savar, Dhaka.

low standards and required improvements to commitment must be overcome (Walsh, 1995). Within this context, flexible labour is an essential prerequisite for organisations (Doogan, 1992). Although questions relating to equal opportunities issues need to be addressed (Freathy, 1993). The need for job satisfaction for ensuring high levels of commitment and staff retention should be addressed (Rogers et al., 1994). People resourcing is concerned with ownership, sector size development stage of organisations; degree of turbulence or dynamism in the competitive or task environment and degree of influence of the external environment; attitude and imagination of key management people towards personnel; enacting unitary, neo-unitary and pluralistic approach to employment relationship; and monitoring the competence, reputation and track record of personnel for developing their skills and capacity (Pilbeam and Corbridge 2002). Therefore, it is management's job to ensure that the industry focuses on employees capable of performing the service (Kathawala and Elmuti, 1991).

3. Influence of External Environment

Organisations are influenced by external environment, which plays a vital role to shape the way of business. The instances of external influences include competition, levels of funding, economic climate, state policy, technological development and social change. Scanning the external environment, seeking to interpret the implications and planning or responding accordingly are the preconditions to successful people resourcing (Pilbeam and Corbridge 2002).

3.1 Globalisation

As a result of globalisation, attracting foreign investment, increasing exports and developing international alliances to penetrate new markets, has become a world-wide trend. Some developing countries could perceive it as undesirable and as a threat. Globalisation does not mean elimination of differences, imitating others, or allowing developed nations to impose their models. It means integrating differences, putting together individual strengths, building from the differences and ability to join efforts for a win-win process. Globalisation is a worldwide pressure for change (Granell, 2000). In a recent study, data were collected from seven regions, interviewing 232 Chief Executive Officers, HRM academics and consultants. In the findings, globalisation was seen as one of the most important and frequent external trends and a pressure for change (42 per cent). The other factors identified include technology advances (40 per cent), skill shortages (36 per cent) and competition (33 per cent). However, the order of importance of globalisation is different in various regions. Globalisation is seen as one of the strongest trends in European, Japanese and American companies. On the other hand, other

trends such as domestic and global instability, technology and competition have the first places in Asia-Pacific, Canadian and Venezuelan Companies (Wright, et al., 1999).

Globalisation seemed to offer the Western world a new horizon of business opportunities during 1980s. The negative impact on the labour market became evident since 1990s. The statistics of Germany's labour shows a picture of job cut in the wake of globalisation. During the period of 1991-96, a total of 0.98 million German workers lost their jobs. The number of employee redundancy is 0.5 million including 0.3 million manufacturing workers in 1996 alone. Firms contend with heightened international competition and low wages in the former Eastern bloc and Asia and they have turned to cost-cutting through shedding labour inside Germany itself. Jobs either disappear altogether or are relocated. The predictions of Karl Marx about capitalism are eventuating in a process by which firms become ever more profitable at a cost of large-scale unemployment. The process of rationalisation and wage reduction proceeds at an alarming pace through computerisation, strategic alliances, the manipulation of trade unions and so on (Bloch, 1998).

3.2 Quest for Competitive Advantage

Competitive advantage is considered an influential drive for people resourcing. The term 'competitive advantage' can be defined as the asymmetry or differential in any firm attribute or factor that allows one firm to serve the customers in a better way than others and thus create better customer value and achieve superior performance (Ma, 1999). It is argued that in the short run, the competitiveness of organisations derive from the price/performance related factors of the products being manufactured at present. Most of the competing firms are in existence in the competitive arena by converging on similar and formidable standards for product cost and quality. On the other hand, competitiveness derives from the ability to build at a lower cost than the competitors in the long run. Managements' ability to consolidate corporate wide technologies and production skills into competencies that empower the concerned organisation to adapt to the changing scenario quickly is considered the real source of competitive advantage (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990).

It is opined that it is possible to achieve competitive advantage through innovation. There should be innovation in a broader sense by introducing new technologies and new/developed ways of doing things. New product design, new production process, new marketing approach and a new way of conducting training can pave the way for competitive advantage. Huge investment in skill and knowledge is also needed to achieve this objective (Porter, 1990).

Search for competitive advantage has fundamentally changed the

development of international economy. The power of the trans-national companies (TNCs) is determined by their efficiency in production and transporting the capital across borders. Their ability to move from costlier location to lower cost ones gives them enormous bargaining power in relation to workers. Roughly two third of the world is covered by these TNCs, thus they stand at the forefront of globalisation and promote it relentlessly and consistently (UNCTAD, 1995).

3.3 Flat Organisations and 'Interim Managers'

Organisations today are becoming much flatter and slimmer than they were 20 years ago to face the challenges of a changing business environment. Core operations are smaller, supported by out-sourced non-core activities (Handy, 1989). The forward looking and dynamic companies are opting for flatter, more horizontal structures that in the long run will enable them responding more effectively to the turbulent business environment in which they find themselves (Daft, 1998). 'Flat organisations' denotes to fewer management levels and more brands being managed by relatively junior brand managers. Research reveals (Hankinson and Cowking, 1997) that many brand managers (31 percent) manage three to five brands with a further 15 percent managing six or more. Flatter structure is a shift from vertical decision making to horizontal collaboration and cross-functional cooperation (McCalman, 1996). Managers learn to share information across the company and to promote a culture characterised by transparency and trust (Hankinson and Hankinson, 1999). It is argued that in theory at least, flatter organisational structures may be in a better position to deliver better service to the stakeholders (Hankinson, 1999). However, the concept of completely flat organisation (organisation without hierarchy) is a myth. Some sort of control, supervision or facilitation is needed to run any type of organisation. Moreover, flatter structure of organisation can create frustration among employees because such structure diminishes the promotional prospect.

Short-term contracts are often used to replace full time workers. Interim managers or consultants or contractors working on projects are the significant features of current workplace. There is no one single cause for such a change. A series of drivers can be detected in the business environment to which organisations react and adapt. Such drivers of change are fairly constant. The survival of organisations largely depends upon their ability to adapt to these drivers (McGreevy, 2003). For example, in the workforce of China, performance has replaced the traditional criterion i.e. seniority as the determinant factor for people resourcing (Glover and Trivedi, 2007; quoted in Beardwell and Claydon, 2007). Moreover, the recruitment and selection practices are being more influenced by economic and market concerns than political bureaucracy

that results in increasing number of job-cut in both public and private sectors (Zhu and Dowling, 2002).

3.4 Virtual Organisations

Companies need to become super efficient to survive in the competitive global arena. As a result, a number of fashionable strategies of corporate transformation, downsizing and reengineering, and the concept of the "virtual organisation" have emerged. Virtual organisations are small core operating company that outsource most of its services. The company can be large in trading terms but small in terms of permanent staff. The overall network of companies is large and each component specialises in a small subset of activity (Franks, 1998). Each of the component companies in the virtual corporation is built around expertise and specialised knowledge. Knowledge is said to be the true resource of a company. An organisation cannot organise itself without knowledge and it would be unable to maintain itself as an active entity (Davenport and Prusak, 1988).

On the other hand, it is argued that practical examples of virtual organisation are difficult to find and any existing guidelines are almost impossible to put into practical effect (Thorne, 2005). Moreover, flexible, technology-driven, virtualised work arrangements have adverse impacts on social interaction and personal identity. Moreover, the need for face to face contact cannot be ruled out completely (Bunzel, 2001).

3.4 Flexitime

Flexitime schemes split the working day into flexible time and core time. Employees are expected to be at work in the nominated core periods, but can vary their start, finish and lunch break times. Hours are recorded over a defined period (e.g. a month or four weeks) and employees have to balance their actual hours worked with total contracted hours. A small number of credit or debit hours may usually be carried over into the next accounting period. Extra hours may be converted into leave (www.cipd.com).

Over 10% of UK employees (around 2.5 million) work flexitime. About 40% of people on flexitime work in public administration and defence. Managerial, professional and technical staff account for nearly 33%, and 22% are administrative and secretarial staff. Relatively few manual workers are on flexitime (ibid). The 2002 Employment Act provided opportunities for the UK employees to request flexible working arrangements from their employers. Since 2003, fathers are also allowed to take up to two weeks paid paternity leave (Hyman and Summers, 2007). Moreover, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has recognised flexibility as an effective instrument to remove unnecessary

obstacles retarding parents from achieving their full potential within the labour market (Taylor, 2001).

Flexitime can improve work-life balance by making it easier to accommodate domestic and work commitments; help recruitment and retention; make it easier to accommodate fluctuations in workload; improve motivation and job satisfaction (www.cipd.com).*

On the other hand flexitime involves cost. And it may mean that staff 'clock watch' (more emphasis on the time schedule than the need of the organisation); result in staff working according to their personal preferences rather than business needs; give problems in maintaining cover at certain times; make it difficult to schedule meetings. But most of the problems can be tackled by setting clear guidelines and most organisations have reported that flexitime is rarely abused (ibid).

3.5 Feminisation of Workforce

The advancement of women into positions of power and influence in organisations is essential if women are to achieve equality of opportunity worldwide (Schein, 2007). Studies reveal that women's participation in workforce is increasing. In nearly 20 countries, including Austria, Germany, Greece, Israel, Peru, and Singapore, around 20 to 30 percent of legislative, senior official, and managerial positions are held by women. In 16 countries including New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, and the UK, women occupy between 31 to 39 percent of such jobs (Writh, 2001).

However, in countries like the Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka, women hold less than 10 percent of legislative, senior official, and managerial positions (Ibid). In 26 African countries, women's participation in management and administrative positions averages 15 percent (United Nations, 2000).

The share of women in managerial jobs has increased by only between 1 and 5 percent in 26 countries between 1996-1999 and 2000-2002 respectively. While a few countries, such as Costa Rica showed steep increases (23.5 percent), others, such as Canada, and Ireland experienced declines (ILO, 2004).

Being influenced by increasing participation of women in the workforce, there have been shifts towards making work-life boundaries more permeable. Policy interest stems from the economic desirability of raising levels of employment participation of young mothers (Hardy and Adnett, 2002). It is accompanied by a growing sensitivity to tensions of the employees between work and non-work lives, particularly regarding child-care. Work-life tensions are closely linked to various factors such as work intensification, long working hours etc. (Green, 2001) as well as extended shift working and unpredictable (and often unpaid) overtime to

meet extended work schedules (Hyman et al., 2003). As a result of the interaction between these factors, stress-related illness and absence have reached significantly (Cooper, 2000). Moreover, the UK equal opportunity and work life balance policy has been largely influenced by the European Employment Strategy, (Hardy and Adnett, 2002) where a social justice case for family-friendly working is founded in the forms of greater equality of opportunity for employed parents, especially women, in terms of pay, advancement and in working conditions (Roper et al., 2003).

3.6 Technological Innovation

People exchange knowledge across the functional areas of business by using technology and established processes (Awad and Ghaziri, 2003). The proportion of Knowledge Workers in the workforce has increased dramatically, as organisations are shifting from manual production to a more automated, and knowledge-driven, production. Knowledge Workers are rapidly becoming the single largest group in the work force of developed countries (Drucker, 1999). However, the scenario was quite different in the past. In 1920, the ratio of manual workers to Knowledge Workers was 2:1 (Davenport, 2002). By 1980, the ratio was 1:2. In 1956, "white-collar" workers outnumbered their "blue-collar" counterpart i.e. manual workers (Thomas & Baron, 1994). It is noted that the pace of the shift from manual work to knowledge work appears to be nearing steady state (Nickols, 2000). The emergence of Knowledge Workers is seen as a consequence of a broader shift from an industrial to a post-industrial society (Drucker, 1988).

In short the drivers include: globalisation, new technology, currency and stock market fluctuations, changing product life cycles, significant financial failures, mergers, acquisitions and alliances, interactions of political and economic issues and power realignments; ethnic and environmental issues; and the haves and have not imbalance (Rabey, 2003).

4. Prediction about the Future

It is predicted that as a result of technological innovation and emergence of new management techniques, only 20% of the existing workforce will be needed in near future (Rifkin, 1995). In China, during 1998-2001 and 2002-2005, the number of public sector employees losing jobs is 25 million and 14 million respectively (Glover and Trivedi; quoted in Beardwell and Claydon, 2007). The worsening unemployment situation is likely to become more acute throughout the globe in course of time. The failure of governments to combat the unemployment problem may give rise to various anti social activities such as drug addiction, mugging, theft, prostitution etc.

Public-private partnership is getting more popularity. Therefore, there will be more lateral entry and exchange of manpower between public and private sectors. In this age of technological innovation, more technical personnel will be needed than in the past. More virtual and relatively flat structured organisations are likely to emerge. The concept of 'interim manager' will gain more popularity because of the dynamic nature of the organisations. As a result of globalisation, the concept of 24x7 is gaining much popularity throughout the world (www.peoplemanagement.co.uk). Therefore, more organisations will go for 'flexi time'. 'Grey labour' (Lyon and Mogendorff, 1991) can be effective to address the particular management needs of the organisation (Finn, 1990). Research indicates that age is a poor indication of ability and performance (Waldman and Arolio, 1986) with job performance, motivation and satisfaction tending to increase rather than decrease. Compared with their young counterparts, the need for entertainment is much lesser among the 'grey labour'. As a result, the latter can discharge their duties with least interruption. Renowned British super shops such as TESCO, Sainsbury, ASDA etc. are employing the 'grey labour' in increasing number particularly at shop level (Humm and Sharp, 1991). Therefore, old age would be an advantage for employment particularly in service sector in near future. The tenure of service may be extended because the life expectancy is increasing. As an outcome of globalisation, there will be more ethnic diversity in workforce actually, there will be free flow of labour all over the world. It may cause high turnover of employees. Governments will have to play a vigilant role to curb discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, religion, age etc. and thus provide equal opportunities for workers and job seekers. Specific and pragmatic policies against sexual harassment, ethnic and religious discrimination can contribute a lot towards creating an equitable situation in the workplace.

5. Conclusion

Organisations do not exist in isolation and 'people resourcing' does not come from the vacuum. They live in and are influenced by the external environment (globalisation, technological innovation, competition, state policy, feminisation etc). The main resource of an organisation is its people. Organisations have to change their policies specially those relating to people in order to cope with the changing environment and thus arrest the entropic process. Otherwise they will face extinction. Accurate prediction about the future trend of people resourcing is very difficult. But it can be said that people resourcing in the future will be more complex and diverse in nature as a result of changes in the social and technological fields.

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