

Assessment of Human Resources Management Practices and Workers' Commitment to Work

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper was to explore human resources management (HRM) practices and workers' commitment to work. The HRM practices-ways of handling workers' welfare issues, recruitment and selection, training and development, human resource (HR) planning and workers' skills may determine how the worker copes with temporary work structures that make workers uncertain about their future and lead to reduced productivity and thus poor project delivery. The paper discovered that human resource management is the most daunting of all management's responsibilities and perhaps the most popular subject of research and experiment. Human resources have an unlimited capacity for creativity, resourcefulness, and productivity. In this light, the paper concluded that the human resource management function is seen as proactive as opposed to the reactive nature of the personnel management function. This confirms that managers, including human resource managers, are influenced to take action by their beliefs or assumptions. One of the recommendations made was that the human resource manager should aspire to get the best workforce through proper recruitment and training. This will result in the outstanding employees being employed, as it will also lead to job fit.

KEYWORDS: Human Resources Management, Commitment to Work and workers' commitment.

Introduction

The construction industry in Ghana is an upcoming industry, a sector regarded as a catalyst for growth, while its performance serves as an indicator for the nation's economy. However, a study that relates human resource management (HRM) practices to workers' productivity in Ghana is not apparent; a need therefore exists to explore the correlation between HRM practices and workers' productivity in Ghana. This is directed towards filling a literature dearth in this aspect, and the need to stimulate improvement in productivity through HRM practices. Organizations are increasingly looking at HRM as a unique asset that can provide them with a sustained competitive advantage (Krishnan and Singh, 2007). The organization's philosophy on how to manage its workforce, its practices and policies, therefore, needs to be well defined to improve workers' productivity in the construction industry in Ghana in order to provide it with the required competitive advantage of HRM practices that influence worker productivity in the construction industry in Ghana.

The state of HRM practices generally in the country leaves room for improvement, especially within the construction industry. Indigenous firms have not had their fair share of major construction activities in the country, as they are often awarded to their foreign counterparts who are considered more technically and managerially superior and efficient in fund acquisition, HRM, and project execution (Ogbebor, 2002; Oseni, 2002; Akintude, 2003). In the past, indigenous firms have been plagued with understaffing, under-capitalization, and poor project performance in terms of meeting completion dates, work quality, and capital management, which has often led to bankruptcy and, in extreme cases, project abandonment. Preliminary studies conducted have shown that in Ghana, a few large companies control a large percentage of the total workload of the construction industry, while a large number of small and medium-sized companies, which make up the class of indigenous firms, share a very low percentage of the construction workload. It is in this vein that this research seeks to review the HRM practices and policies of indigenous construction firms (ICFs) and multinational construction firms (MCFs) operating in Ghana, thereby identifying the best practices and the level of use adopted by these MCFs to increase worker productivity, with the goal of assisting ICFs in improving their HRM practices for effective project delivery.

The Concept of Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices

A review of definitions of the HRM concept resulted in a number of definitions as researchers have over the years defined the concept differently. These definitions, however, according to Heijltes and Witteloostuijn (2001), maintained certain basic principles which the authors outlined as that:

- People are crucial in organizational success;
- Goals of organization and HRM policies are mutually reinforcing;
- The personnel function should move to decentralized units and line management; and finally, that
- Organizations should integrate components of HRM.

Most definitions found during the review did not represent the full picture of the HRM function. For example, Armstrong (2003) defined it as "a strategic and coherent approach to the management of an organization's most valued assets: the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives." This author, for instance, did not specify in his definition that it involves first managing the people as a resource and then managing their individual inherent characteristics, which are also resources to the organization. Harris (2000) defined HRM as "programs, policies, and practices for managing an organization's workforce." This is very brief and straight to the point, but it seems too generic and will not provide the necessary insights that a reader would want to derive from a definition. Another definition by Mathis and Jackson (2000), which described the concept as that which "deals with the design of formal systems in an organization to ensure the effective and efficient use of human talent to accomplish organizational goals," can be said to touch the surface of the iceberg of the definition of the concept. Additional definitions by authors, including Mullins (2002), Horwitz (1991), Bratton and Gold (2003), Sapru

(1993) and even the Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia Standard (2004), did not provide a satisfactory definition to fit the purpose of this research.

However, these definitions and more that exist in the literature confirm the basic principles described by Heijltes and Witteloostuijn (2001). Pfeffer (1998) noted that "the real sources of competitive leverage are the culture and capabilities of your company that derive from how you manage your people." Champy (1996) added that the whole emphasis on people, as one of the most important competitive advantages a company can create, demands that top management attract, cultivate, and keep the best work force they can possibly find. This will include and cover everything from when planning the manpower or human resource needs of the organization starts, what will be done to aid in the employment of the right personnel, what provisions will be made for these personnel during employment to ensure development, satisfaction, and retention, and when this employment is terminated.

The Concept of Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment (OC) is defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization, the employee's state of commitment to the organization, as well as the employee's identification with the organization's values and goals. The role of managers and the organization's human resources department in the 21st century has grown increasingly complex when it comes to motivating and retaining people (Idris, 2014). The globalization of the workforce due to advances in computer technology and telecommunication has created more challenges for managers, as their role in attracting talents and ensuring an environment where those employees can contribute as long-term assets to the organization is becoming increasingly difficult (Singh & Gupta, 2015).

Faloye (2014) suggested that when organizations can recruit, train, and then retain skilled individuals, the overall stability of the organization is maintained, both in terms of productivity and financial viability. Employees' OC has been assessed as a predictor of employee retention in several studies (Tuna et al., 2016). OC has also been investigated as a predictor of employee effectiveness in carrying out the mission and vision of the organizational leadership (e.g., Singh & Gupta, 2015). Employee commitment is an attachment to the organization, characterized by the intention to remain in identification with the values and goals of the organization and a willingness to exert extra effort on its behalf" (p. 604). Individuals consider whether their personal goals and values align with those of the organization, and if so, there is a greater likelihood of organizational commitment, loyalty, and attachment by the individual to the organization. An individual will remain committed until certain situational pressures create a need for the employee to conduct a cost-benefit analysis to leave the organization. This behavioural aspect is unique to each individual, and cannot be adequately accounted for when determining long-term employee commitment to the organization.

Determinants of Employee Commitment

In order for firms to be competitive, they must retain their competent and motivated employees. For that reason, they should understand the determinants of employee commitment. These determinants of employee commitment are given below:

- ✚ **Realistic Job Information:** Pitt and Ramaseshan (1995) found that individuals who displayed a higher tendency to leave their jobs were those who perceived that the job previews they received during the interview process were not realistic. Where job preview is perceived as realistic, organizational and job commitment are enhanced. Therefore, companies must state what must be done and spell out how it should be done. It is desirable to have the job preview procedures written down to ensure that HRM policies are applied consistently and in accordance with both legal requirements and ethical considerations. The existence of a written job description and well-publicized procedures ensures that everyone knows precisely what steps to take when dealing with significant and possibly recurring employment issues.

- ✚ **Supervisor Support:** Firth, Mellor et al. (2004) found that emotional support from supervisors and self-esteem mediated the impact of stressors on stress reactions, job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and intention to quit. It is suggested that to mitigate the intention to quit and enhance commitment, managers need to actively monitor workloads and the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. Monitoring workloads and supervisor-subordinate relationships by management may enhance commitment and reduce the intention to quit and subsequent turnover, thereby saving organisations the considerable financial costs and effort involved in the recruitment, induction, and training of replacement staff. Supervisors who show love and care for their employees gain their employees' full cooperation and, as a result, reduce their intention to quit (Bass and Avolio, 1994). Whereas bad supervisors encourage quits, loving supervisors induce organisational commitment.

- ✚ **Career Development:** Career management consists of the processes of career planning and succession management. Career planning shapes the progression of individuals within an organization in accordance with an assessment of organizational needs and the performance, potential, and preferences of individual members of the organization. Career planning can be regarded as forming part of a career system, which, as defined by Sonnenfeld et al. (1992), is a set of policies and practices an organisation uses to provide for its human resource requirements. Career development describes how career progression takes place; the ways in which people move through their careers, either upwards through promotion or by enlarging or enriching their roles to take on greater responsibilities or by making more use of their skills and capacities.

However, Miller and Wheeler (1992) found that a lack of meaningful work and opportunities for promotion significantly affected employees' intentions to leave an organization. Thus, organizations were able to improve their employees' retention rates and commitment by adopting job enrichment programmes and enhancing their advancement opportunities. In addition to promotion opportunities, the evaluation criteria used in the promotion and reward systems also had significant effects on employees' turnover intentions (Quarles, 1994). Ineffective performance appraisal and planning systems contribute to employees' perceptions of unfairness, thereby making employees more likely to consider leaving than commit to the organization (Dailey and Kirk, 1992).

HRM Practices and Work Commitment

An organization cannot exist and function well without formal "rules of engagement" in managing people. These are general guidelines that express how management intends to manage people and what is expected of workers in the workplace (Cuming 1985; Armstrong 2006). Such guidelines include human resource policies. Other guidelines could be in the form of memos, circulars, codes of ethics and conduct, or standing orders. Policies could be implicitly embodied in the organisation's vision and mission statements or explicitly established in its strategic plan and/or human resource strategic plan. Before considering any HRM practices and policies, managers should ask themselves a series of questions, because developing HR policies to address specific areas of HRM is an investment that, in theory, should have positive effects and returns in terms of facilitating decision making and creating a motivating environment for the worker (Armstrong 2006). HRM practices have the following effects on firms:

- (1). Human resource practices help managers to ensure that people management is in line with corporate values. It is not an easy task to solicit workers' commitment to the organization if what is contained in the corporate vision, mission, and values is not further developed and put across in such a way that both managers and workers feel that the organization is not just paying lip service.
- (2). It is all about ensuring that HRM practices are observed consistently. Managing employees entails making decisions and carrying out human resource intentions across the entire spectrum of employment terms and conditions. Human resource policies provide a reference and guidance for avoiding inconsistent decision-making by substantive managers or those who make decisions on similar matters, thus affecting different workers over time. This builds confidence and trust between managers and workers.
- (3). It minimises inequality in the treatment of workers. Although the mere presence of human resource policies cannot guarantee equality in the treatment of workers in various areas such as training, employment benefits, or gender, the lack of specific policies can create even more disparity between workers. It becomes difficult for workers to demand equal treatment when there are anomalies and when there are no clear definitions and criteria for judging equality.
- (4). Human resource policies facilitate decentralisation, delegation and local empowerment. Staffing decision-making can be delegated to lower levels of management without the risk of the wrong decisions being taken because the policy will provide guidance on how certain issues or problems with staffing should be handled. The human resource policy document becomes the source of power and authority for those entrusted with the execution of duties affecting workers' work and welfare.
- (5). When people are well trained and highly motivated, they learn, develop their abilities, and care about customers. It is difficult to imagine another resource that can match committed and talented workers. These qualities imply that human resources have enormous potential. Effective management of human resources can form the foundation of a high-performance work system in an organization in which technology, organizational structure, people, and processes all work together to give the organization an advantage in the

competitive environment (Cherrington, 2001). As technology changes the ways organizations manufacture, transport, communicate, and keep track of information, human resource management must ensure that the organization has the right kinds of people to meet the new challenges. Maintaining a high-performance work system entails the development of training programs, recruitment of people with new skill sets, and the establishment of rewards for such behaviors as teamwork, flexibility, and learning.

A review of the literature on HRM practices as they affect work commitment reveals that there are two types of studies. Earlier studies dealing with this issue focused on testing the direct impact of HRM practices on work commitment (Gaertner and Nollen, 1989; Konovsky and Cropanzano, 1991; Ogilvie, 1986). For instance, Ogilvie (1986) found that employees' perceptions of two bundles of HRM practices (namely, merit system accuracy and the fairness of promotions) had direct influence on employees' commitment to the organization. In a similar vein, Gaertner and Nollen (1989) showed a clear connection between employees' perceptions of employment practices and psychological commitment in a Fortune 100 diversified manufacturing firm. They found that employees' commitment had a direct association with both actual and perceived HRM practices, including internal promotion, training opportunities, career path and employment security. In general, commitment within the workplace typically results from the interaction and the relationship that an employee has with an organization (Scholl, 2003). Along these lines, Richard and Walton (1985) looked at the establishment of commitment in an organization with a very broad framework. They argued that stretching objectives, providing assurances to employees, encouraging employees to have a voice, and compensation policies affect attitudinal outcomes. Recent studies, on the other hand, have assumed that the links between HRM practices and employees' work commitment are indirect or conditional. Using a sample of 281 employees from general organisations, Meyer and Smith (2000) found that relationships between employees' evaluations of HRM practices and their commitment to the organizations were mediated by perceptions of organizational support and procedural justice.

Moreover, Whitener (2001) observed that the actual reward system of firms moderated the positive relationship between employees' perceptions of organizational support and organizational commitment. Specifically, the positive association between the perceived organizational support and the organizational commitment of employees becomes stronger when a firm practices a reward system that has high internal equity. Although the design of the effects of HRM practices on employee commitment is neither direct nor unconditional, it nevertheless suggests that commitment has multiple dimensions depending on the objectives of the organization. Such objectives include work group, occupation, union, and one's job (Cohen, 1999). Following the recent empirical findings of the aforementioned studies, it is reasonable to state that there were some intervening factors that mediated the relationship between HRM practices and employees' work commitment, including organizational commitment and job involvement. Because of the limited number of studies that examined mediators between HRM and work commitment, there are now a variety of speculations among researchers in this field as to what would be the important factors that mediate this relationship. Nevertheless, some studies of Person-Environment (PE) fit provide an important insight into this matter (Lauve and Kristof-Brown, 2001; O'Reilly et al., 1991). Thus, in recent years, management scholars have expressed growing interest in the

concept of person-environment fit, since it offers many insights into the links between an organization's policies and practices and employees' attitudes and behaviours (Lauver and Kristof-brown, 2001). Human behavior is now increasingly recognized as a joint function of the person and the environment.

Conclusion

Human resource management is the most daunting of all management's responsibilities and perhaps the most popular subject of research and experiment. Human resources have an unlimited capacity for creativity, resourcefulness, and productivity. In this light, the human resource management function is seen as proactive as opposed to the reactive nature of the personnel management function. This confirms that managers, including human resource managers, are influenced to take action by their beliefs or assumptions.

Recommendations

1. Human resource manager should aspire to get the best workforce through proper recruitment and training. This will result in the outstanding employees being employed, as it will also lead to job fit.
2. To make the worker achieve, managers should look upon labour as a resource rather than a problem.

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