

# HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A UNIVERSITY

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## **Introduction**

The traditional function of universities is teaching and research. The teaching activities are geared towards the training of the human resource of a nation, and to equip students to take on high-level administrative and professional jobs. The research activities cover both basic and applied research for the advancement of knowledge and the betterment of mankind.

A university's activities must centre around the problems, needs and conditions of a nation and its society. With internationalization of universities, rapid social changes and changes brought by globalisation we need to consistently relook and re examine the contents of programmes and the methodology of teaching. This is critical if Universities are to remain relevant in the development of nation and humanity.

A university must be staffed with high calibre academics to maintain a high standard of teaching and research. Universities around the world are highly heterogeneous in terms of organization and governance, including the status and conditions of recruitment and employment of academic staff. The human resources of universities are also characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity of experts and specialists to run the diverse programs in science, medicine, technology and humanity. Managing academic human resource is therefore, a very challenging task.

For one, there is no traditional structure of a superior leading and managing a subordinate, but instead it is a situation of leading or managing one's own peers. Thus the usual principle of people management may not be applicable in the academic world.

## **Paradigm Shift in Human Resource Management**

Thus there has to be an awareness of a paradigm shift in the treatment of workers in human resource management. The human capital approach has taken precedence over the traditional approach that regarded workers as asset. Thomas Davenport (1999) argued that when human capital owners (the academics) have the upper hand in the market, they behave more like the owners of a valuable commodity. They contribute it carefully and demand value in exchange for their contribution. Davenport concluded that workers produce the greatest value for companies when companies generate the greatest value for workers (Thomas Davenport, 1999). There's no doubt that academicians are "human capital", and thus need to be treated as such.

In dealing with academicians as workers, the consultative and participatory approaches are preferred to the traditional way of ensuring compliance. In his book "Treat the People Right", Edward Lawler propounded the "virtuous spiral" relationships that come about when an organization values and rewards its people, they will reciprocate with their commitment to performing well. According to Lawler,

*"A virtuous spiral begins when an organization takes intelligent, strategic driven, conscious actions to attract, retain, motivate, develop, and effectively organized committed, high performance individuals. This generates a high-performance organization. It boosts the rewards for employees, which increases their motivation and commitment. The more challenging and rewarding environment that results further reinforces the organization's ability to attract, retain, and develop effective employees, who further positively affect performance".*

Consequently to be effective, it is important that these group of people of a university relook at the skills and the competencies that they have. They ought to know the human resource requirements to achieve its mandate, where and how it will develop or gets its academic human capital, its competitive advantage in attracting the top brains, and to make forecast of how the academic human capital will change and grow.

In this paper I will identify 2 distinct groups of people who are responsible for managing the human capital of a University. These are:

- (1) The Human Resource officers and
- (2) The leadership in a University, both at the Central Level, the Presidents and Vice-Chancellors and at the local level, the Deans and the Heads of Departments.

## **THE USUAL ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEPARTMENT**

### ***1. Recruiting the Top Brains***

The role of Human Resource Management is to recruit and employ the right people at the right time and at the right cost. HRM people must have a good knowledge of their services and their human resource requirements. They must know where to source the best and the brightest in any field, and to use the most effective channels to recruit them. This involves networking with local and foreign universities.

Timeliness in recruitment and training is of critical importance. Wrong timing could have serious consequences. In this regard, HRM people should be able to do forecasting and conduct pro-active analysis of the human resource requirements, in consultation with the deans and the heads of departments.

### ***2. Remunerating and Retaining the Top Brains***

International top brains are very much sought after all over the world. With globalization, one can only attract the top brains with the right remuneration and terms of service.

The salary of academics in developing countries is far too low compared with that of their counterparts in the developed countries. Without doubt, we are on the losing end when it comes to attracting the international top brains. We have to think of developing our own super stars and put in place incentives to encourage them to stay on. Governments of the developing countries must review and

improve the schemes of service of academics, including accelerated promotion and other fringe benefits, in order to retain these brains to make our institutions centres of excellence.

### **3. *Developing the Talents***

The function of HRM also involves training the staff to make them continuously right, not just at the time of entry. A whole range of training programs can be arranged to upgrade the skill of the staff. This includes in-house training, short, medium and long courses abroad. Staff should be encouraged to spend their sabbatical leave to work with renowned experts and to conduct joint research to upgrade their skills.

### **4. *Providing a Conducive Work Environment and Fringe Benefits***

In consultation with the top management and the deans, HRM people could help to provide a conducive work environment in terms of security of tenure, work life balance, employee wellness programs (such as childcare arrangement), and ample support for research and consultancy. Other fringe benefits include pension or other social security schemes, free medical care, car loan, housing loan, sabbatical and research leave.

## **CHANGES IN THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEPARTMENT**

The traditional roles mentioned above is no longer adequate for any Universities that wish to improve its performance. The HR officers or departments need to become more strategically involved with the achievement of a university's goals or its vision. They have to become the champions of change and be totally committed to thinking and acting strategically. The need to realign and reorganise their functions so that they move from a reactive, process-oriented, and compliance focus to being a proactive, results-oriented, consulting-oriented strategic partner.

Human Resource managers and officers should work in close partnership with the deans and heads of department, and have frequent consultation and interaction. They could

organize forums for the deans, deputy deans and heads of department to come together to share their good practices and learn from one another. Such interactions could foster collegiality among deans and collaboration in teaching and research across disciplines. This could also result in sharing of resources, and increase the number of inter-departmental and inter-faculty programs for the benefits of the students.

It goes without saying that any Human Resource Department that wants to change need to harness technology to achieve change. Technology will free resources from the traditional portfolio to that of strategic work.

The changes that happens would also result in changes in the competencies and skills needed in Human Resource officers of a University. They must now be real Human Resource professionals who will be able to stand tall as partners with the Deans and other leaders of the University. They need to have a strategic foresight and the ability to read what the future trend in university development. In short the Human Resource people in the university have a critical role in making the future happen.

#### **THE ROLES OF DEANS, DEPUTY DEANS AND HEADS OF DEPARTMENT**

As local leaders, deans, deputy deans and heads of department are responsible to the Vice-Chancellors for the academic leadership and management of the faculty. They should be equipped with people management skills and be able to lead their Faculties.

Deans and heads of department have first hand knowledge of their own requirements, and hence should be actively involved in planning and managing human and other resources at their respective faculties and departments. They are in the best position to identify and recruit "super students" with good potentials for academic excellence.

The notion of the Executive Dean must be clearly defined. The university management should spell out clearly the roles of the deans and heads of department in human resource management and related issues of governance. The deans are responsible for making decisions concerning the strategic academic planning, in consultation with staff (through faculty meetings), the academic administration, the staffing and the financial management of the faculty. Heads of department implement these decisions. Deans are

required to present the faculty's views to the senate and university management, and relay proposals emanating from the top management (Senate, Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellors), to the faculty.

Deans and heads of departments must conduct regular analysis of their human resource requirements for the short, medium and long term. They should play a key role in the recruitment and training of their staff, in consultation with the Human Resource officials.

Deans and heads of departments are in a good position to appoint mentors to guide the young staff in their teaching, research and publication. They have to provide a conducive environment and reward for academic excellence and to motivate and sustain high performance academics. They must strive to minimize attrition of super stars that are constantly being sought after by the private sector and other universities.

Being local leaders, Deans, Deputy Deans and Heads of Departments deal directly with academic staff. They must be aware and reinforce the "virtuous spiral" relationships between the organization and the workers. As a good practice, the Deans should meet up regularly with staff to help resolve their problems, and solicit their views to improve the running of the faculty.

### **Leadership Role**

In managing and leading their people Deans, Deputy Deans are human capital leaders. So besides the technical skills of planning and organising, they need to develop new competencies so as to be effective in executing this strategic role of theirs. The competencies expected of these local leaders are the usual competencies of a leader. They need to be a visionary, they need to have the ability to influence others, to build a culture of team work, being creative and innovative, and they need to manage performance.

Besides the above the following would also be the concerns of human capital leaders of a university, especially in this region:

## **1. Developing Effective and Close Cooperation between Universities and Industries**

Given that one of the main functions of the universities is to equip students with the necessary skills for high level jobs in the industry, there is a need to have close cooperation between universities and industry through co-supervision of students in industrial trainings, consultancy and dialogues. We need to have feedbacks from the industry to make our programs more relevant and responsive to the changing needs of the market.

## **2. Internationalization of Universities**

With globalization the internationalization of universities has come to the fore. The number of foreign students and academic staff is used as one of the criteria for ranking purposes by Times Higher (World University) Rankings.

Many private colleges and universities now have twinning programs with the top universities around the world. Some foreign universities have also set up branch campuses in developing countries. Many universities in the developing countries have signed MoUs, have Exchange Programs and co-run programs with the top universities around the world.

The presence of academics from foreign universities, even though on short term attachment, has helped to enrich our teaching and research experiences. Academics from developing countries also spend their sabbatical leaves other universities, to upgrade their skills.

International collaboration in joint research can also go a long way in the internationalization of universities. The advent of ICT has facilitated greatly such collaborative efforts.

## **3. Transparency in Governance**

Good governance demands transparency and popular participation. Promotion, extension of services, and rewards should be performance-based. These must be

supported by key performance indicators. There is a need for clear criteria for promotion, and these should be widely publicized. The practice of peer evaluation will result in greater transparency and minimize reasons for discontent among those who do not get promoted.

At the University of Malaya, I have asked faculty members for nominations for deans and deputy deans. Those who are appointed are the nominees of the faculty members. We are also in the process to post the CVs of all lecturers on the website for greater transparency and networking with international scholars.

#### **4. Managing the Ageing Academic Human Resource**

The ageing of post-war baby boom generation results in a withdrawal of a large number of workers from the work force, including schools and institutions of higher learning. The departure of senior academic staff may cause serious disruption in some programs. The practice now is to extend retiring academics on contract. Many of them have opted out or joined the private sector that offers them a longer term of contract.

A study by Gramme Hugo presented at the previous ACU Conference shows that older academics tend to be more committed to their jobs and there is no evidence of "mental decay" or diminishing productivity with age. Efforts must be made to retain this older human capital with vast experience to serve as mentor to young lecturers and lead them to academic excellence. A more flexible employment and wage structure may be instituted to allow them to continue to play their roles.

The ageing of academic staff also brings out the dire need to have succession planning. HRM people, the Deans and Heads of Department will have to identify the needs for recruiting and training new staff or redeployment of staff to fill the vacuum left by the retirement of older academics.

## 5. Scholarships to Attract Young Talents

With the proliferation of higher education, more and more young people have access to higher education, and there are a growing number of high achievers among them. More scholarships should be made available to train and recruit them to increase the pool of excellent academics in the near future.

### Conclusion

Human Resource Management in a University is no longer the exclusive responsibility of the Human Resource officers. The lead people manager is actually the Vice-Chancellor or the President himself. Managing people in Universities after all is not about managing human resource, but it is about managing human capital. Academicians are investors of their human capital which is their knowledge, skills and their experience. Like all investors, they will invest where they will get a satisfactory ROI. It is therefore, the role of all people managers of a university to ensure this ROI so that a University can get the right people at the right time and at the right cost.

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