

ESTABLISHING HUMAN RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (INCLUDING  
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT) IN ACADEME IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

(Handout)

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## **1. NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION RESEARCH PROJECT**

### **1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The following overarching research question flows from the problem identification and informs the course of the intended research project:

*How does one establish an effective and efficient performance management (PM) system for academic/educational staff in higher and further education and training institutions in the Free State region?*

### **1.2 THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

The aim of this research project is to develop a model for an effective and efficient performance management of academic/educational staff in higher and further education and training in the Free State region.

To fulfill the above aim, the following objectives are to be met:

- To undertake a comprehensive literature and policy review on performance management in education and training.
- To investigate and critically analyse performance management systems at selected higher and further education and training institutions in the Free State region (supported by broader comparative perspectives) with regard to performance management.
- To develop an effective and efficient model for performance management in higher and further education and training in the Free State region.

**This research project informs this paper.**

## **2. IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (INCLUDING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN ACADEME IN HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALLY**

### **2.1 A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE**

2.1.1 While it is inevitable to place pressure for accountability and improved performance on higher education institutions, it is also imperative/critical for Human Resource Managers to take cognisance of the unique challenges facing the Human Resource Management and Development (HRMD) of academe internationally and in South Africa in particular.

2.1.2 Understanding the challenges facing academe is a prerequisite to effective and efficient HRMD (including Performance Management).

2.1.3 An international trend is that performance management is highly influenced by the need for institutions to reform their missions; to better utilise their intellectual resources (academe) and reward them accordingly; and to meet the demands and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century for higher education. In addition, various forces act and change the working conditions of academe drastically. These include, among others:

- Change and transformation in governmental and institutional structures and procedures.
- Reduced government funding for higher education as well as the need for institutions to identify options for dealing with the escalating costs of operating institutions and maintaining their sustainability.
- The changing nature of the demands and needs of the various constituents in higher education.
- Maintaining quality under conditions of under-resourcing, under-staffing and increased enrolments to - mention only a few unpleasant conditions for performance.

- The demographic shifts in student populations as well as dealing with the growing competition for the best students among institutions.
- The increasing economic role of knowledge and the rate at which knowledge is created and dispersed.
- Change in the way knowledge is created (shift from mode 1 to mode 2 knowledge production).
- Internationalisation, globalisation and the free market system as applied to higher education.
- Communication and information technology.

## **2.2 THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

- 2.2.1 Forces for change in higher education are not controlled by borders or by limitations of any nature. Therefore institutions in Africa are not immune to the external forces (challenges) pressing for the reconfiguration of higher education internationally. Unique challenges exist in Africa, however, and these include, among others, the following:
- The need to ensure the survival of national public HE within the competitive higher education environment.
  - Dealing with the legacy of underperformance and non-performance due to, among other things, heavy budget cuts, rationalisation of staff and resources, as well as a dilapidated infrastructure which fails to keep the institutions viable.
- 2.2.2 Despite the fact that attempts to redress have since gained a significant momentum with institutions gaining in student numbers, the demand for quality education continues to surpass the supply. Allegedly the greatest challenge for institutions in this regard has been to attract and retain good staff.
- 2.2.3 Brain drain has emerged as a major crisis for universities in Africa, because of the alarming rate at which academics are lost to better-paying institutions. Universities experience a constant erosion of academics, either to other better universities in Africa; or abroad, or to the corporate world which has appealing salaries. The loss of senior and more experienced staff has set back the institutions in terms of research outputs and has affected the quality of teaching.
- 2.2.4 Although there is often controversy around the actual statistics regarding the erosion of skilled professionals, estimations which need not be ignored, do exist to emphasise the severity of brain drain. According to the Human Science Research Centre (HSRC) (2004), between 1987 and 1997 South Africa lost more than 41 000 skilled emigrants and currently this figure is allegedly representative of staff lost per annum.
- 2.2.5 Institutions are forced to retain their good staff by using the “wag a carrot” approach (monetary), promises for promotion, as well as other incentives.
- 2.2.6 The reversal of brain drain is seen as a major priority by Africa through the improvement of political, social and economic conditions. Moreover, universities (through their Human Resource) face the challenge to improve the working conditions, resources and infrastructure, as well as the benefits of academe if they are to stall further emigration of their good staff to other places or countries with lucrative salaries and working conditions.

### **3. IMPLICATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (INCLUDING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT) IN ACADEME IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: EQUITY AND REDRESS**

- 3.1 Academics in South Africa share in the global problems. Nonetheless their situation in HR and PM is further aggravated by the past political situation and the imperative to transform the system.
- 3.2 To a large extent, the apartheid ideology has molded not only the composition, shape and size of the South African higher education system in general so that all education in the country has been divided along racial and ethnic lines. The human resources have also been shaped by this legacy.

The position of academics has not changed much from what the National Commission on Higher education (NCHE) of 1996 once described, namely that:

*The higher education sector in South Africa is highly stratified in terms of race and gender. The trend is that the greater the prestige, status and influence particular positions have, the greater the extent to which they are dominated by whites and men. Positions which on the other hand have lower status and prestige, and wield little influence, tend to be filled primarily by blacks and women. Most African staff are concentrated at the bottom of the employment ladder. Most are employed as service staff, whereas most whites are employed as academic staff or senior administrative posts. These disparities in overall employment structure of universities and technikons increase with rank (NCHE 1996:38).*

- 3.3 The manifold policies and legislative framework in the Departments of Education and Labour hope to guide the reconfiguration of the institutions in line with the values of a non-racial, non-sexist, non-discriminatory order, although policy implementation to achieve equitable human resources is not completed as yet.
- 3.4 In the 15 years between 1985 and 2000, the higher education sector entered a period characterised by the expansion of study opportunities for black students, an expansion in the number of technikons, and a proliferation of degree courses. Concomitantly, the permanent academic workforce expanded rapidly from a base of 1 764 at technikons and 9 009 at universities, and changed its character in many ways. These changes should have contributed to a steady improvement in the number and qualifications of academic staff, but the improvements were limited. (Statistics can be provided). This means that among academics major challenges remain with regard to the distribution of qualifications, age, race, gender and the number of contract staff. Together these variables provide crucial insight into the composition and distribution of academics, and the challenges facing institutions with regard to this labour force. Four important features can be identified with respect to these changes:
  - recent and marked differences in growth patterns between universities and technikons and between various universities;
  - the implications of increases at technikons for the overall qualifications profile of academic staff and the need for more senior staff at both universities and technikons;
  - the implication of age levels for the recruitment of future academic staff; and
  - the relatively slow change in the race profile of academic staff, especially at historically white universities.
- 3.5 Aligning staff profiles with student and national demographics has been a great concern for the HR managers, since it implies changes in recruitment, promotions, as well as development of staff, challenging them to develop strategic human resource policies and practices.

Nonetheless, imbalances in the quotas of staff still remain a big problem of equity in higher education (statistics can be provided).

3.6 In 2001 the *status quo* had not changed much and the gender and race profiles were still heavily skewed (statistics can be provided).

3.7 Some of the major challenges that still exist for HR in higher education institutions in South Africa concerning equity include:

- The need to remove the various barriers to access of the target cohort of staff by hastening the pace of transformation of the racial composition of staff.
- Developing new recruitment and promotion policies.
- Engaging in new recruitment and promotion strategies, i.e. head hunting; utilising relaxed recruitment and promotion strategies, e.g. Fast-tracking black and women academics.
- Performing exit interviews; as well as designing remuneration packages and reward systems that meet the needs of the required experts.
- Providing intensive training to the limited pool of the rare staff – Black and women academics in the institutions.

### **OTHER PRESSURES**

- Demand for quality, regardless of the fact that conditions (working and employment) and factors that assure the quality of teaching and research, as well as a scholarly ambience do not exist at universities.
- The expectation is that academe must act not only as recipients of policy, but more importantly as implementers, designing new structures; reviewing and redesigning curricula; as well as implementing effective processes which could relevantly address the needs of the new quotas of learners and further improve and enhance organisational performance in higher education in general.
- The array of cumbersome procedures, excessive record-keeping, as well as bureaucratic structures created for the implementation of the policy are not only overwhelming for staff, but they also take up most of the time that academics could otherwise utilise to pursue their normal scholarly activities.
- The increase in learner access has magnified and diversified the roles of academe immensely, notwithstanding the fact that academics are not merely expected to teach, do research and provide service, but that they must specialise if they are to compete successfully with the highly specialised world in which they exist.
- Most academics, particularly the novice and Blacks, are often thrown in at the deep end with the expectation that they should perform their roles effectively and maintain the quality envisaged by the various constituents. These academics have to grapple with being lecturers, researchers, service providers, counsellors, remedial lecturers, advisors and administrators without any relevant support or training to deal with these issues.
- If, and where such training is offered, academics barely have the time to engage in the few developmental activities, because of the expansive nature of their academic roles.

In the light of all these concerns, institutions/HR managers are challenged to think of new organisational arrangements which will motivate academics to respond rapidly to challenges surrounding their job performance. Institutions will have to strive to maintain a balance between emergent expectations, responding to change and ensuring accountability and service provision at the same time. Accordingly a combination of an enabling environment and equipped willing cadre of academics is a basis for achieving such a state.

For HRMD managers the knowledge and understanding of the foregoing challenges is imperative in dealing with the development and implementation of HR policies as well as in planning successful HRM and HRMD (including PM) for academe.

#### **4. PM OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN HE IN SA**

4.1 Challenges raised in the late eighties in higher education in SA about academe with respect to staff replacement, recruitment, expansion, adequate staff/student ratios, and the promotion of senior students still remain in 2004.

4.2 Some critical issues influencing PM in academe in SA higher education are the following:

- The role of HR in HE institutions is often not given equal status to governance, access, marketing, budgets, student affairs, etc.
- The relationship of HR divisions with academic staff tends to be about benefits, administration, payroll and complaints, but seldom about performance matters in academe, which is mostly accepted as the prerogative of only the academic line and peers.
- In the literature and practice there are always contestation around the issue of the relationship between HR divisions and academic staff development units in universities.
- HR and academic staff development units are always too sparsely staffed and underfunded to deal with the extensive needs in the PM of academe.

4.3 There is a grave need to focus the efforts in PM on academic staff and to keep the PM system as "simple" as possible. Examples can be provided.

4.4 There is no single HE institution (university) in South Africa that has the expertise and capacity to create an excellent theoretical framework and continuously update it on its own. Examples can be provided.

4.5 The above theoretical framework will necessitate comprehensive developmental opportunities that are again not possible in one single institution, due to lack of resources, expertise and experience. Examples can be provided.

NB A reference list can be provided on request.

#### **5. CONCLUDING REMARK**

The basic argument is that effective, efficient and high quality HRMD is the key to the provision of quality and relevant educational experiences. The term may still appear problematic - perhaps even slightly distasteful - in HE where concepts of professionalism, academic freedom, autonomy and collegial approaches to decision-making militate against the perception of academics as a resource to be managed, steered, and directed based on fitness for and of purpose, value-added, transformational expectations, etc.

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