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LINE MANAGERS AND HRM THEME 4

HRM does not reside solely or even primarily with specialist HR managers, despite the important role they play in devising policies and procedures in the organisation. Recently the emphasis has shifted so that Supervisors are expected not just to manage their staff, but to also show leadership capabilities that bring out the best in those that work, encourage them and discourage them from adopting attitudes and behaviours that undermine strong HR systems. Line managers are urged to become transformational leaders. Involving line managers in HRM appears to be common practice and can be viewed as an obvious and core element of the HRM approach to the employment relationship. The logic of using line managers is because they are closest to customers and employees and occupy a key role in the people management aspects of the general management job. However, there are many questions and difficulties arising from devolving the HR to line managers.

Line managers have criticised the contribution of HR specialists to organisational performance in four ways. First, HR people are regarded as out of touch with commercial realities, not aware of how business operates or its customers' needs, but instead applying principles that could be seen to conflict with business goals. Second, HR is felt to constrain the autonomy of line managers to make decisions they feel are in the best interest of the business - legal and trade union constraints. Third, HR is unresponsive and slow to act, always wanting to check options thoroughly rather than taking immediate action in support of line managers' recommendations. 4, HR criticised for promoting policies that may be fine in theory but hard to put into effect or inappropriate for their particular workplace.

What is the problem source? Senior managers do not involve the HR function

at an early stage, results in people issues being ignored or downplayed during decision making process. When problems arise, HR is called to solve them by short term solution. HR gets the blame for not being able to resolve the problem and continues to be excluded from major decision and the circle continues.

In order to address these concerns, line managers have been encouraged to take on greater responsibility for HR activities. Line managers believe their solutions are more in tune with business realities, and can contribute more directly to improved performance. Being given more responsibility for HRM also enhance line manager ownership of these roles and should increase their commitment to integrating HR with other objectives. Despite suggestions that HR should be disbanded altogether, a more realistic option is for HR specialists and line managers to work together as partners. Shared decision making between HR and LM led to increase in organizational performance, whilst too much reliance on one or the other had no impact. Involvement of HR specialists tends to remain highest in policy formulation where issues of consultancy and specialist expertise are most important and lowest when line managers are responsible for putting plans into effect. Major Responsibilities: Leading team briefings, problem solving groups and performance review. Shared responsibility - selection decisions, induction and ongoing training. Little responsibility - recruitment advertising, applications and initial tests.

There are problems with devolving HRM to line managers. Arguments for devolving HRM to line managers is that it is assumed that people management decisions should be made as close to the workplace as possible. Problem is that it assumes HRM is a relatively minor add on to any line manager's job, which can be undertaken during existing working time and without specialist training. Line Managers argue: Have conflicting goals and

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don't automatically identify with organisational goals, have competing priorities and suffer from work overload, Lack the knowledge and skills to undertake HR duties, have little respect for HR work and behave inconsistently when implementing HR policies. If involving the line manager in HRM is successful, then there may seem to be little need for organisation to employ HR managers.

Lack of identification with employer goals. Line managers view themselves as quite distinct from senior managers. Managers are usually promoted from junior positions, stuck in between work and managerial job, unwilling to align themselves with work or with managers. They have loyalty to their profession as well as their employer. Feelings of role conflict and ambiguity and insecurity are reinforced if front line managers find their existing skills are no longer needed or their numbers have been reduced.

Competing policies and work overload. If two policies are seen to conflict, HR typically takes the lower priority. Several studies confirm line managers feel other goals take priority over managing human resources. HRM issues were low on their list of priorities and HR issues did not appear in formal key performance indicators. Both line managers and HR people felt that pressure of work over short or long term was the biggest barrier to line management involvement in HRM. Managers feel overwhelmed with the additional work.

Lack of knowledge and skills and insufficient training. Line manager knowledge, of motivation theory or pay systems is typically based on personal experience or deeply held personal beliefs about why people work. The low education and technical base of line managers is a constraint on development. Changes typically occur rapidly, leaving insufficient

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ensure and address problems of inconsistency in decision making. Risk of falling standards or abuse of position (discrimination). Potential for the HR management role to be marginalised. Little time for the line to perform HR duties due to operational demand on them.

Developing line managers to provide effective HRM Firstly, selection, appraisal and training of line managers. Employees need to provide clearer job descriptions and person specification for these critical roles. Attempts to parachute a manager without requisite qualifications and experience into a leadership role have happened in health service and universities with unsatisfactory results. It is possible to combine technical and people management goals ~~into a leadership role~~ in order to ensure both are taken seriously. Feasible to define a set of performance criteria which focus more on people management skills without explicit proactive support from senior managers and recognition and regard for their work in the HR area, it is easy to see why line managers do not take this part of the job too seriously.

Using procedures to enhance consistency. Targets tend to take priority over HR considerations and directives from HR specialists tend to have less force than those coming from a production director. Thus, a HR policy that is well formulated, embodies the basic rules of good management practice and ensures uniformity and consistency may appear very differently when viewed from the position of line managers. Procedures of any kind are seen as the problem, rather than a potentially valuable way of channelling disagreement through an agreed route. HR specialists need to be able to persuade line managers that procedures are valuable tools rather than millstones. Procedures have a role in giving line managers a clear perspective on the direction in which the organisation is moving, its objectives and the general standards applied in relation to all aspects of the

employment relationship.

Support from the HR function. As HR used an increasingly dealt with by line managers, this has implications for the type of work undertaken by HR professionals, new skills are likely to become more important. Some can be said about line managers. 7 Supportive conditions that are necessary for effective line management involvement. 1. The HR function needs to understand that policies are implemented and brought to life by line managers and therefore there ought to be some line management involvement in their design. 2- Training and development courses need to be taken more seriously and made compulsory and the action points need to be embedded at the workplace to make them effective. 3- Appraisal process could include a wider range of stakeholders such as the 360° review, and self-assessment tools could help line managers to monitor their own progress. 4- The creation of a strong positive organizational culture which puts a primacy on integration of HR practices and alignment between strategic goals and the workplace. 5- A focus on key staff. 6- Support from and active commitment of senior managers in role modelling behaviours that are important to the organization and to line managers in particular. 7- Convincing line managers to take HR more seriously.

Part of the problem is that line managers have often been given responsibility without sufficient consideration of the skills they possess, the amount of work they are expected to do and regularly without much training in people management. They are not even interested in or committed to HR policies that their organization uses, viewing them as inappropriate, irrelevant and unrealistic. The solution is training, policies and support from HR function.

Example 1: (Townsend, Wilkinson) Employee experience of HRM is significantly influenced by their line manager. HR department had attempted to shift from a decentralized system of policies and practices across the hospital to a coherent organization wide approach to HRM. This had meant

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Changes for word staff in two areas: first a focus on growth of hospital and second a greater awareness of budgetary constraints, leading to the perception among employees that finances are more important than the patients or staff. Their commitment is not to the hospital but to the word and the word manager. Role of word manager is central to a communication link between management and staff. If word manager does not agree with all of the executive policies, then a selective distribution of managerial messages about such policies is likely. Word managers are placed into a role that requires people management skills, as well as other administrative and clinical skills. All too often they are not selected with the skills they need for such a role or provided with adequate training and support specifically to fulfill their new role. They tend to develop themselves through trial and error.

Example 2: Line managers (new on adopting HR role) - Hilton Hotels - Houston, Sandra, Maxwell. Establishment of trust between LM and HR is a significant challenge. Findings of survey of line managers: Evident that managers perceive staff to have greater ownership of spirit program. 97% of senior management ~~think~~ understand training and development issues goal to excellent. High level of trust in hotel HR managers is evident. Survey findings point to the managers believing they act as positive role models for HRD. 86% of managers felt training would have supported them in delivering spirit. 95% of respondents now feel confident in supporting training and development in their department. 92% are comfortable with their coaching role. Majority of managers reporting the heavy workload and short term job pressure have limited their ability to support spirit. 86% of managers often or always experience heavy workload and 78% often or always experience short term pressure. Jobs are demanding in general, line managers in Hilton hotel seem to embrace HRD positively and rise to the conceptual and practical challenges although the survey exposed where there is

potential for improvement. Learning points for HH concentration primarily on training and development of managers. Secondly they relate to the importance of senior managers are perceived to attach to HRD through hard through direct and reduction of workload.