

THE CHALLENGES OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

IG. O. NWANGWU, THECLA AMOGE EZE AND NGOZI OLUCHI JOMBO-UMEH

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the challenges of human resource management in Nigerian universities. The concept and meaning of human resource management are discussed. Also discussed in the paper are objectives, scope and features of human resource management. The paper equally discussed the challenges of human resource management in Nigerian universities. The paper opines that the challenges are many and varied in dimensions. These dimensions include a workforce of diverse population that needs creative approach to education and integrate into the university system. Closely related to this is the aging population of universities' staff as experienced academic staff are retiring without grooming adequately junior staff that will take over from them. Recommendations are made among which include that the office of Director of human resource management in Nigerian universities should be adequately funded to enable it perform its responsibilities effectively.

KEY WORDS: Human Resource, Challenges, Universities.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of modern technology, effective human resource management has become increasingly imperative to the success of Nigerian universities. As a result of the ever-increasing volatile society resulting from technological development, employees are expected to possess a wide variety of knowledge, skills and abilities capable of executing job activities in a way that enhances the attainment of institutional goals. For university system to realize its goals, it must not only possess the required resources but also utilize them effectively. The resources available to the universities are human, financial, physical and information. These resources must be harnessed

in order to ensure success in goal realization. Of all these resources it is the people (human resource) that are the most critical. This is because the extent to which an organization or institution succeeds depends to a large extent on the quality, quantity and management of human resource operating in that organization. It is difficult to sustain competitive advantage in modern world without the help of qualitative human resource. It is against this background that Harbinson (1973) in Nwangwu (2005) observed that:

Human resources, not capital, not income or material resources constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of

Ig. O. Nwangwu, Department of Educational Management, Enugu State University of Science & Technology, Enugu.

Thecla Amoge Eze, Department of Educational Management, Enugu State University of Science & Technology, Enugu.

Ngozi Oluchi Jombo-Umeh, Department of Educational Management, Enugu State University of Science & Technology, Enugu.

production, human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, built social, economical and political organization, and carry forward national development. Clearly, a country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else (p.2).

Nigerian universities are facing a lot of challenges in terms of having and managing adequate and appropriate human resource. This has resulted to various strident criticisms on the quality of graduates that universities turn-out yearly. The argument has been that the quality and quantity of university teaching staff are poor as to produce qualitative products. This argument is however, beyond the scope of this paper.

Concept of Human Resource Management

The concept of human resource management emerged in the 1990s. Udeze (2000) observed that there existed diversity in business practice in respect of determining business functions that is concerned with handling employment relationship. He stated that when specialized departments were first created in the 1920s, and 30s to be in-charge of the administration of the personnel programme, they were referred to as personnel departments. The emergence of labour union in 1930s and 1940s in the United States adopted the same nomenclature. Udeze went further to state that up till 1980s and 1990s, the term personnel management was the title for the management of people at work. Since the mid 90s, the term *human Resource Management* emerged and has been in vogue till date.

However, Fadel (2012) writing on the evolution of human resource management noted that the early part of this century emphasized improve efficiency through careful design of work. During the middle part of century, this emphasis shifted to the employees' productivity. In recent times, the focus has been on the increased concern for the quality of working life, total quality management and worker's participation in management. According to him, these three phases may be regarded as welfare, development and empowerment. What one can infer from this concept is that human resource

management is designed to handle people at work. Its responsibility is to see that people at work are adequately taken care of and that they realize the organizational goals.

Smrit Chand Management (2016) observed that the concept of human resource management has two versions – the hard and soft versions. The hard version or variant emphasizes the need to manage people in ways that will obtain added value from them and then realize competitive advantage. On the other hand, soft version is concerned with treating employees as valued assets, a source of competitive advantage through their commitment, adaptability and high quality. According to this group, human resource management in recent times is a combination of both versions. In a nutshell the concept of human resource management could be said to be geared towards harnessing human energy and capability for the purposes of attaining organizational goals.

What is Human Resource Management?

Various authors writing in various contexts have defined human resource management in various ways. For instance, French (1990), cited in Nwangwu (2005) defined human resource management as a process of appraising the organization of human resources needs with particular reference to the organizational goals and ensuring that efficient stable workforce is engaged. He went further to posit that human resource management involves an analysis of current and expected vacancies arising from retirements, transfers, promotions, discharges, sick leaves, leave of absence and analysis of current and expected expansions or reductions in departments. On the other hand, Onah (2000) defined human resource management as a process of having the right individuals, in the right numbers, in the right place and at the right time. Fadel (2012) also defined human resource management to be an inherent part of management with a focus on human resource of an organization. Its objective is the maintenance of better human relations in the organization through the development, application and evaluation of policies, procedures and programmes relating to human resource to optimize their contributions towards the attainment of the organizational goals. In order words, human resource management is about getting better results with the collaboration of people. It is an integral distinctive part of

management concerned with people at work and their relationship with the business. Fadel went further to note that it helps in attaining maximum individual development, desirable working relationship between employees and employers, employees and employees and effective modeling of human resource as contrasted with physical resources. It is the recruitment, selection, development, utilization, compensation and motivation of human resource by the organization.

One can summarize the above definitions by stating that human resource management is concerned with the management of people in an organization or institution from recruitment to retirement. It is a management function that assists organizations or institutions in recruitment, selection, training, developing and managing staff members. It is a process that is geared towards maximizing both employee as well as organizational effectiveness.

Objectives of Human Resource Management

The objectives of human resource management are many and vary according to the author. In this paper, we are going to examine those salient human resource objectives as identified by Smrit Chand Management (2016). This group categorized the objectives into four distinct groups – organizational, functional, personal and societal objectives.

- **Organizational Objectives:** Human resources management is a process of achieving efficiency and effectiveness. It works in tandem with other functional areas of organization or institution to attain efficiency in their operations. Acquiring the right individual for the right job at the right time in right quantity, developing through right kind of training, utilizing the selected force and maintaining the workforce are the basic organizational objectives of human resource management.
- **Functional Objectives:** Human resource management performs various functions for other units in the organization. However, it must ensure that the facilitation does not cost more than the benefit rendered.
- **Personal Objectives:** Currently, there is high demand for specialized and requisite talents. Human resource management has the onerous

responsibility to acquire, develop, utilize and maintain employees. This objective is attained when the human resource management helps employees to realize their individual goals. This will in return get their commitment and loyalty. Creating work-life balance for the employees is the personal objectives of human resource management.

- **Social Objectives:** Human resource management must see that the legal, ethical and social environmental issues are properly attended to. Equal opportunity and equal pay for equal work are some of the legal issues not to be violated. When these issues are violated, there is bound to be crisis. The social responsibility issues of human resource management include generating employment opportunities, creating schools and dispensaries attached to the institution or organization and helping women empowerment. Human resource management in any institution or organization is said to be effective only when it is able to create a synergy between the workforce and these objectives. When there is a deficiency in any of the mentioned objectives, the productivity level of the workforce is likely to be affected adversely.

Scope of Human Resource Management

Akrani (2011) identified the following scope of human resource management.

1. **Human Resource Planning (HRP):** Human resource planning estimates the manpower needs of the organization or institutions. It carries out a comparative study of the manpower demand and manpower supply. If manpower surplus exists, retirement, retrenchment policy is applied. If there is shortage of manpower, the management employs or promotes employees.
2. **Acquisition Function:** Acquisition function includes, human resources planning, recruitment, selection, placement and induction of employees. Human resource management adopts scientific selection procedures to select the right person for the right post. The right person is given proper placement and induction.

3. **Placement Function:** Placement function of the human resource management takes place after selection of employees. This means putting the right person in the right place of work. Proper placement provides job satisfaction to the employees and it enhances their productivity.
4. **Performance Appraisal:** Performance appraisal as part of human resource management task is said to be a systematic evaluation of the employee's work performance. It informs the employees about their strengths and weaknesses. It equally advises them on how to increase their strengths and remedy their weaknesses.
5. **Career Development:** Human resource management assists the employees in planning and developing their careers. It informs them about future promotions and how to get these promotions. It helps them to grow and develop in the organization or institution.
6. **Training and Development:** Human resource management provides training and development to the employees. Training is the process of increasing the knowledge and skills of the employees.
7. **Quality of Work Life (QWL):** Human resource management includes quality of work life. This is a technique for enhancing productivity and quality of work. This involves labour management cooperation, collective bargaining and participative management. QWL creates good working conditions, job security, good pay and other facilities such as flexible working hours, freedom to suggest changes or improvements etc. QWL gives a sense of belonging. This benefits both the organization as well as the individual employees.
8. **Employees Welfare:** Human resource management takes care of employees' welfare. Welfare measures include paid holidays, medical insurance, canteen facilities, recreational facilities, rest room, transport facilities etc. Proper and timely welfare facilities motivate the employees to increase their productivity in the organization or institution.
9. **Compensation Function:** All employees must be rewarded and

recognized for their performance. Human resource management provides adequate compensation packages for the employees. These packages motivate the employees and increase their morale. Rewards are given to individuals and these may be in the form of higher pay, bonus, other monetary incentives and non-monetary incentives such as letter of commendation and/or appreciation.

10. **Labour Relations:** Human resource management equally includes industrial relations. It includes union management relations, joint consultations, negotiating, collective bargaining, grievance handling, disciplinary actions, settlement of industrial disputes etc.

11. **Maintenance Function:** Maintenance as part of human resource management function includes the protection of health and safety of the employees. It introduces health and safety measures, other benefits such as medical aid, provident fund, pension, gratuity, maternity benefit, accident compensation etc to the employees.

The components of the scope of human resource management, though distinctive are not mutually exclusive. The human resource management must always strive to satisfy each of the components. If any of the components is neglected, it will create problems in the organization or institution.

Features of Human Resource Management

Human resource management as an emerging field of study in education has some features that distinguish it from other educational concepts. These features as identified by Accounting Management (2013) include:

1. **As a management of People:** Human resource management is concerned with people dimension of management. In other words, it manages different people such as workers; supervisors, managers, departmental heads, in addition to other related top managers.
2. **As a Continuous Process:** Human resources process is not an ad hoc arrangement in an organization or institution; rather it is an ongoing process of managing people and their competencies. Akrani (2011) identified these four processes thus:

- Acquisition of Human Resource: This function includes human resources planning, recruitment, selection, placement and induction of staff.
 - Development of Human Resource: This task includes training, development and career placement. The knowledge, skills, attitudes and social behaviours of the staff are developed through this process.
 - Motivation of Human Resource: This function includes giving recognition and rewards to the staff. It also includes performance appraisal and handling the problems of staff.
 - Maintenance of Human Resource: This responsibility includes providing the best working conditions for employees and looking after the health and safety of the staff.
3. **As a dynamic Function:** The principles and practices of human resource are not rigid, rather it is dynamic. In other words, it is a dynamic function whereby the procedures and practices are dictated by the environmental factors. Employees are expected to gain current knowledge and ability to work in the changing environment.
 4. **As a Universal Function:** Human resource is said to be a universal function because it is applicable to all types of organizations and institutions. The principles and practices are applied irrespective of size, nature, scope and purpose of organization or institution.
 5. **As a Strategic Approach:** Human resource management is considered as a strategic approach for organizational development. It helps to mobilize human resource in the organization or institution so as to realize the stated goals and objectives strategically. All activities of management are arranged in such a manner that they are interconnected with efficient and effective utilization of human resource according to change in the organizational strategy.
 6. **Integration of Goals:** In most cases, there exists a goal difference between organizational goals and that of an individual goal. An employee would like to satisfy his own goal first. On the other hand, managers or institutional heads would like to achieve organizational or institutional goals before any other

thing. Consequently, human resource management principles and practices assist in integrating both individual and organizational goals into a single framework. This results to the employees being motivated towards high level productivity for the realization of organizational or institutional goals.

7. **As Future Oriented:** Human resource management is said to be future oriented because it helps in assessing human resource requirements for future. It also helps in determining future goals and objectives of the organization. In addition, it employs the people to get the job done in future period of time.

The effectiveness of human resource Managers or Directors lies on good understanding of the above features and their working mechanisms. This is because human resource management is an action-driven function. It is a process that adds meaningful values to both the organization or institution and the employees. The understanding of the features will enable the Directors or Managers to appreciate the fact that human resource management is an art of managing people through creative and innovative approaches, and as a science because of the precision and rigorous application of the principles of human resource management.

The Challenges of Human Resource Management in Nigerian Universities

The challenges of human resource management in Nigerian universities are many and varied in dimensions. With the dwindling economy and other variables militating against the work of Directors of human resources, they need to position and assert themselves to attract and retain qualified staff.

Universities are said to be melting pots of Nigerian citizens. In other words, it is an environment that one finds people of different ethnic groups and character. With a workforce of cultural diversity, a pressure is laid on the Director of human resource to initiate, design and implement creative approaches to educate, integrate and retain these people with cultural diversity. It is possible that in the years ahead, management of people will be the greatest challenge to Nigerian universities. They will be confronted by a workforce of diverse population.

Aging population of universities' staff will pose a challenge to human resource

management. Experienced staff, especially academic staff are retiring without grooming adequately junior staff to take over from them. Many professors are not liberal to bring up other professors. This is to create room for either contract or adjunct position when they retire.

The proliferation of universities in Nigeria has led to the emergence of graduates with varying strengths of certificates in identical fields. Currently Nigeria has a total of 90 universities (Federal, State and Private universities). In spite of the NUC benchmark, there is still major disparities in the performance of graduates of Nigerian universities, and these are potential employees of Nigerian universities. The challenge here is in the assessment of candidates qualification for employment. A one time former Minister of Education in Nigeria Dr Sam Egwu admitted and lamented that "more than 80 percent of the products of Nigerian universities are unemployable" (Agbese, 2009:5). Another challenge in this area is the acquisition of the ability to understand and identify these disparities so as to make more objective employment decisions. This understanding of qualifications and skills needed will ensure that selected employees are capable of executing the assigned tables.

Retaining and engaging changing workforce is a veritable challenge to the Directors of human resource management. As social and economic life of university workforce changes as a result of societal changes, so also are their motivations and expectations. It becomes imperative that Directors of human resource management should understand what is most valued by the staff. Is it compensation, prestige or autonomy at work? It is the responsibility of the Director of human resource management to adapt their incentives, benefits policies and retention strategies for staff that are not actually driven by financial compensation. It is not enough to select qualified staff on the onset, what is of paramount importance after selection is sustaining their commitment, loyalty and productivity.

An important challenge to Directors of human resource management in the years ahead is designing motivational strategies during this period of acute scramble for candidates with the right skills. With tertiary institutions springing up now and then, the need for motivational strategies that can attract and retain staff arises.

The emergence of new communication technologies such as e-mail, mobile phones, websites and videoconferencing has not only enhanced closer contacts with university staff, especially academic staff in distant lands but also permitted them to form cross-boarder teams where colleagues can interact, discuss and share ideas in various fields despite not being in the same environment. The challenge here is that many university staff lack access and/or adequate technological literacy and communication technologies to cope with the changing trends. In this case, adequate financial resources have to be allocated for the provision of IT infrastructure.

Recruiting skilled employees is a challenge to human resource management. In a period of rising unemployment, it would appear that qualified employees would be easy to find. This is not usually the case. Many universities are facing acute needs for employees with the required skills and training or degree.

Training and development of employees are veritable challenges that Directors of human resource management must deal with very often. With the need to cut training costs, staff training and development are often relegated to the background. Directors of human resource management are expected to initiate moves that permit staff to receive the training they require without much expenses.

A very vexing challenge to the Directors of human resource management is government interference in the selection of employees. Politicians send long list of candidates to universities for employment. Writing on government and politicians' interference in the functions of Directors of human resource management, Orga and Ogbo (2012) observed thus:

... People are everyday, employed without due process. The human resource manager... is a mere rubber stamp at the mercy of politicians and their whims and caprices... The loyalists and their cohorts are usually given quota for employment whether or not the candidate is qualified (p.82).

The above challenges are quite enormous but not insurmountable. All that the universities need are Directors of human resource management that have a vision, firm

and committed to the cause, principles and practices of human resource management.

CONCLUSION

The work of the Director of human resource management in Nigerian universities has become complex in recent times due to changes in the workforce. Such changes include the diversity of workforce, dwindling economy, political interference, aging population to mention few. This situation demands that universities should make the Office of Director of human resource management the nerve centre of administration. This is because the stability of universities depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of the office of human resource management in terms of selection and retention of workforce. It is this office that designs programmes for recruitment, staff development maintenance etc. The ability to attract and maintain productive staff depends on the effectiveness of this office. When this office is neglected, its functions are not carried out effectively. This has a multiplier effects of low productivity, crisis and low morale. It is against this background that strict adherence to the objectives and scope of human resource management has become imperative in the face of modern technology. As an emerging field of study in education, the Directors of Human Resource Management are expected to be conversant with the features of human resource management. These features distinguish it from other educational concepts. The challenges as discussed above are not insurmountable, with time, commitment and qualified personnel, these challenges will be conquered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above discussion, the following recommendations are made to checkmate the challenges of human resource management in Nigerian universities.

1. The office of Directors of human resource management in Nigerian universities should be adequately funded to enable it discharge its responsibilities effectively.
2. Government and political interference in the selection of employees should be avoided to make human resource Directors relevant in their work schedule.

3. The human resource policy should be reviewed as environmental and economics changes dictate.

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