



Special Topics in SHRM & ER

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Key Learning Outcomes

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- *Define the terms ambidexterity and public service motivation*
- *Analyse the relationship between HRM practices, ambidexterity and innovation*
- *Analyse the impact of employee well-being on the HRM-performance link*
- *Identify the emerging trends in Green HRM*
- *Discuss the key approaches in managing people in times of a crisis*

Introduction

This final chapter focuses on the emerging trends and challenges faced by the field of strategic HRM and ER. This chapter therefore provides an overview of the topical areas of interest. The following topics are covered in brief: HRM in the public sector, innovation, ambidexterity and HRM, green HRM, HR offshoring, employee well-being and managing people in crisis. These special topics are vital areas of future research within the domain of strategic HRM and ER.

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HRM in the Public Sector

The public sector (PS) represents a typical professional services bureaucracy (Daley 2012). As the term professional service would imply, the public sector also requires a specialist set of knowledge, skills and abilities in order to fully discharge the responsibility of public servants towards the wider community they intend to serve. PS employees are regarded as employees driven by public service motivation (PSM) rather than the typical economic and profit motives (Mann 2006). Mann (2006) further argues that the role of HRM in developing PSM is to ensure that PS employees' commitment is high for making a difference in the delivery of what is essentially a public good. Mann notes that a problem with this view is that often HR managers are unable to quantify the nature of PSM and, as a result, the subsequent problems associated with designing and implementing HR practices for PS employees to deliver on the PSM ethos become evident. While in principle, one might offer some generic service delivery guidelines, the operationalisation of PSM construct is a little bit problematic. Presence of intrinsic motivation and non-tangible aspects of personal satisfaction in serving in PS roles remain the obvious ones, however, there is a potential for damaging these intrinsic drivers through the application of new public management HR approaches, which often rely upon using extrinsic rewards and a shorter-term focus. While typical strategic HRM and ER discourse centres around formal planning and alignment issues and delivering sustainable performance in the longer term, the application of such ideals is problematic in the traditional bureaucratic public sector models (Brown 2004; Daley 2012). Brown (2004) notes that the traditional bureaucratic PS model has always been rule-bound. More recently, it is witnessing a shift towards a new performance-based culture (Shim 2001) or what has been recently described as the 'New Public Management' (NPM) agenda. This latter agenda, Brown argues, is akin to what we find in the private sector—a focus on efficiency, effectiveness and quality of services. Within this neo-liberal and managerial agenda, the nature of HRM practices represent the need for a flexible workforce model and work processes that typify work undertaken in for-profit organisations. The whole ethos of PSM comes into question with such changes that are now widespread. NPM HRM has received significant critique in the form of deteriorating working conditions, mergers of multiple public sector entities to deliver on economic agendas of efficiency, effectiveness and high quality public service. Can one deliver a variety of social goods and services employing rational economic principles? This remains a key question among public sector employees.

Innovation, Ambidexterity and HRM

In pursuit of high growth, literatures on innovation and ambidexterity suggest firms that are able to innovate and be ambidextrous are more likely to offer sustained levels of growth. The literature on organisational ambidexterity suggests that firms that are able to *simultaneously* pursue exploratory and exploitative modes of learning or *ambidexterity*, are more likely to succeed and innovate (O'Reilly and Tushman

2008; Raisch and Birkinshaw 2008). O'Reilly and Tushman (2008), for example, define ambidexterity as firm's ability to manage the duality of simultaneous learning processes of experimentation and alignment with current goals, through refining, efficiency and well-developed routines. The underlying logic is that firms that are able to do both forms of learning simultaneously are able to successfully implement technological and administrative innovations. In this background, prior research examining the role of HRM practices in impacting innovation performance and ambidexterity is gradually becoming mainstream (Malik et al. 2017b, c; Prieto and Pilar Pérez Santana 2012; Shipton et al. 2006). The central argument of these studies is that HRM practices are antecedents in creating an ambidextrous context, which will ultimately lead to a range of innovation outcomes such as successful product and process innovations. Innovation outcomes can vary from work-design innovations, through process and product innovations to business model innovations (Malik et al. 2017a, c, 2018). Analysing the relationship between HRM and innovation, Seeck and Diehl (2016) found support for the impact of universalistic best-practice bundles or configurational approaches in the HRM–performance–innovation link. Several HRM practices have been identified in the literature that have an impact on innovation (Beugelsdijk 2008; Ceylan 2013) as well as in shaping ambidextrous learning (O'Reilly and Tushman 2008; Raisch and Birkinshaw 2008). For example, firms that are able to assimilate and apply new ideas at work are more likely to be innovative. The research points to HRM practices such as training, performance management, reward systems and a learning culture, which, if implemented collectively as a bundle is likely to generate innovation outcomes (Laursen and Foss 2003; Gupta and Singhal 1993). Others (Jiménez-Jiménez and Sanz-Valle 2008; Lau and Ngo 2004), also noted a bundle of HRM practices to positively impact innovation. The above links in well with the earlier discussion in chapters titled “HRM and ER: A Strategic Perspective” and “Strategic HRM&ER: Best-Practice Versus Best Fit” on best-practice schools.

HRM and Ambidexterity A recent review exploring the relationship between ambidexterity and HRM suggests there are numerous HRM and organisational practices that act as antecedents for the creation of an ambidextrous context conducive to innovation (Junni et al. 2015). Junni et al.'s (2015) review, identified the influences of employees, leaders and HRM practices, and how these variables interact with structure, culture and other contextual variables to create an ambidextrous context. More recently, high-involvement and high-performance work systems have been noted to create a social climate that supports an ambidextrous context through a number of ability-, motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HRM practices (Malik et al. 2017c; O'Reilly and Tushman 2011; Prieto and Pilar Pérez Santana 2012). Ahammad et al. (2015) found the influence of motivational practices in developing ambidexterity.

In their discussion of contextual ambidexterity, Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) explain if employees that can simultaneously partition their time and behaviours to balance “alignment and adaptability”, they are more likely to create new learning and routines. A contextual ambidextrous context advocates that employees engage

simultaneously with exploitative and explorative learning in their day-to-day routines, and as a result, this helps in reducing the costs of coordination. This approach to ambidexterity assumes individuals decide on how to allocate time and resources so firms can manage the duality of the two learning modes (Tushman and O'Reilly 1996). This approach clearly places HR and people management approaches as a key antecedent in supporting organisational ambidexterity, managing dualities and achieving innovation outcomes (Malik et al. 2017a, b, c).

Green HRM

Research linking environmental failures with aspects of corporate social responsibility and HRM has led to discussions of Green HRM practices. Such an emergence of interest is understandable as there are massive environmental disasters that have occurred in major utility industry sectors such as oil and natural gas, coal-fired power generation stations, and highly hazardous chemical industries. Notable among these were Enron, Union Carbide, AEC and Shell to name a few. While a broad framework of reference is still emerging, some scholars have begun to map all the core processes of the employment life cycle with the idea of Green HRM (Renwick et al. 2008). These authors highlight the application of an environmental approach to all HRM core processes such as right from the time of developing job descriptions and person specifications through to recruitment and selection. Additional changes are also evident in employer-of-choice campaigns wherein, overall job-value proposition for potential employees is presented to those who value ideas of responsible business and have corporate social responsibility attitude towards the society. Similarly, followers of this approach want to ensure that there are conscious efforts made in the management of performance and administration of rewards that embrace such values and attitudes. Specialized training programs to support this approach are also becoming prevalent to increase awareness of the problems as well as suggesting common solutions. For example, programs focusing on reducing waste and environmental compliance training are quite common. A number of German car manufacturers and technology firms are embedding specialized training programs under the umbrella of Green HRM approach (Renwick et al. 2008). The approach also appears on the bargaining table at the time of putting forth a charter of claims with the unions for finalizing the collective employment agreements. Specific projects, for example, focus on reducing pollution and disposal of waste for creating a healthy and safe work environment. Indeed as an extension of this idea, firms such as DuPont, Nordstrom and 3M have implemented incentive and reward schemes for minimising emissions and providing positive reinforcements for favorable environmental climate. Its increasing proliferation is also evident in Special Issues dedicated to the topic. For example, in *Human Resource Management* in 2012, *Journal of Organizational Behavior* in 2013 and more recently, the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (2016) have all ran special issues on Green HRM. Rendwick et al. (2016) map the current developments in

Green HRM and note that additional research on this topic is needed in relation to the desired type of HR systems and employee behaviours that are conducive to supporting a Green HRM ideology.

The theory of planned behaviour, AMO, attribution theory, stakeholder theory and corporate social responsibility are among the commonly used theoretical frames for situating and conducting Green HRM research. Further research is needed in developing a holistic theory of Green HRM, its causes, consequences and the core values and behaviours of employees and managers to support its adoption and proliferation.

HR Offshoring

As part of the wider phenomenon of offshore outsourcing, HR offshoring is not immune to outsourcing of HR processes to overseas locations such as India and the Philippines (Cooke and Budhwar 2009; Pereira and Anderson 2012). The modularisation of transaction processing services to offshore locations was expedited by the high levels of service excellence and maturity experienced in the call-centre and back office outsourcing industry. Realising the ability of services providers to successfully deliver and operate on complex processes such as HR has triggered its widespread diffusion. While the earlier stages saw the offshoring of locally outsourced activities such as pay, training and recruitment process outsourcing. The rationale, although initially, was driven by labour cost arbitrage and efficiency seeking motives. Subsequently, the rationale changed to accessing high quality competencies and capabilities in HR at these offshore service providers who had accumulated, through their experience of working with a range of clients, spanning diverse industry sectors. The decision rules suggested by Atkinson regarding the 'core and periphery' activities of a business have also contributed to the thinking that certain non-core HR activities can and should be outsourced. However, with an increasing strength of capabilities of the service providers, it is not surprising to see a shift from low-end to high-end strategic HR processes outsourcing in the form of consulting advisories, as well as designing the entire architecture of HR systems for medium to large organisations. Cooke and Budhwar (2009) note that often in relation to major decisions in HR offshore outsourcing, HR practitioners are not consulted. The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), UK survey (2006) revealed that 70% of HR practitioners felt they should be involved in the decision to make the HR offshoring actually work for the business. A related aspect of the phenomenon is managing the relationship between a client firm and third-party service provider. Again, to the point above, in the absence of HR's involvement in the first instance, HR practitioners are left to manage the relationship with service providers and ensure their quality of services delivered. This often results in poor employee well-being outcomes and failed relationship management with third party service providers.

Employee Well-being

In increasingly competitive and uncertain times, the concepts of employee resilience and subjective wellbeing have come to the fore. Developing employees' psychological states so they can effectively discharge their work through their resilience and subjective well-being has been a widely researched topic in the field of industrial and organisational psychology. More recently, we have seen detailed literature reviews within management and HRM (see e.g. Van De Voorde et al. 2012). Such reviews throw light on a number of aspects such as why this concept is important to researchers and firms and its direct and indirect impacts on, for example, employee satisfaction at work. Studies of HRM exploring this area fall into two broad categories. The first group of studies note that the mutuality of purpose is important. Both parties must benefit through the implementation high performance HRM bundles, or in other words, theorists in this group argue for a 'win-win' outcome: HRM practices should make employees *happy* and at the same strive to achieve sustained high performance (e.g., Appelbaum et al. 2000). The second group of studies in HRM do not find adequate support for realizing positive health and well-being outcomes through the logic of high performance HRM. The underpinning logic of this approach is that a disproportionate focus on strategic goals and alignment with a firm's objectives for achieving high performance comes at a cost and often leads to work intensification, higher levels of stress and fatigue at work (e.g., Godard 2001; Peccei 2004). This eventually leads to poor employee health and well-being outcomes. The important point to consider is how employees perceive the managerial *intent* and how well managers balance the excessive focus on performance and alignment with opportunities with work and life in a way that it does not result in major spill-overs from one domain to the other. Often the problem lies in having unrealistic expectation from people, which then translates into poor health and well-being outcomes.

Managing People in Crisis—Credibility of HR in Today's Times

I conclude this final chapter with a discussion on one of the most pressing topics: managing people during a crisis and the deteriorating credibility of HR in today's uncertain times. Are we back to the drawing board and asking where to from here? Our societies have witnessed 16 major economic crises between 1720 and 2013 (Warner 2013), six of which occurred since the 1997–1998s Asian Crisis and include: the dotcom bubble burst, Wall street crisis, Islandic Banking crisis, global financial crisis, global recession and the Eurozone crisis. More recently, we have witnessed other forms of cash crises such as noted in India's demonetization efforts in 2016. Crises can be natural or man-made. What is interesting is that the latter type of crises are increasing in its incidence and intensity and we are most likely to witness more of the same as we are still part of a neoliberal agenda, which, some would

argue caused the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC) in the first place. Typically, a small group of people design most human-engineered crises. However, their actions have far-reaching consequences, as was noted in the case of the GFC, which spread like a contagion to almost all parts of the globe, affecting, even those who had nothing to do with the US financial system or who had no understanding of what it is like investing in stock markets, let alone financial derivatives. These groups of people were severely affected and were often also people living on the fringe with minimum wage protections. Where was HR in managing such human engineered disasters? Can HR play a role? How can it prevent organisational psychopaths from engaging in such behavior, again? In the events that followed the GFC, why did HR play the role of a stooge of management and an implementer of their neoliberalist agendas? Could HR have saved some jobs? Should HR challenge the dominant coalition of stakeholders in making decisions that affected the source of livelihood of thousands of people? Unfortunately, there is mounting evidence that HR has clearly lost its credibility in living up to its role as an *employee champion*, a key role espoused by Ulrich in some of the earlier work on HR tasks. The issue of professional ethics and personal values were constantly challenged in an environment where the only way to stand up for a cause would have meant losing your own source of livelihood. In such conditions, have we lost hope in HR and the widespread neoliberal order? Are institutional forces so strong that people have little choice and leeway to exercise alternate strategic choices through their human agency? The answer to this question, in short is yes. Nevertheless, all hope is not lost and we must not undermine the critical role *human agency* can play by politically navigating through, and negotiating with, the key stakeholders to change the dominant logic and explore alternate solutions to overcoming the problem. Aspects of this were evident in recent research on the GFC (Malik 2017). And yes, there are other studies in HRM (see for example, Boon et al. 2009) that have highlighted the role active developmental (innovative) human agency can play in dealing with institutional forces by creating an innovative fit and expanding the degrees of leeway available to people in a given environment. Even in a post-GFC era Malik (2013) noted that a number of firms adopted different approaches in solving the same problems in a post-GFC environment. While all providers had the pressure to undertake job cuts to stay afloat, the study found diversity in HRM practices and ideologies, suggesting that firms implemented different strategic choices in dealing with environmental and institutional pressures, in this case, managing the excesses imposed by the GFC on firms in the Indian IT industry. Building on this work, Malik (2017) undertook further research in a post-GFC period in the Indian IT industry, as well as other industries, from selected international contexts. The research found that while the wider institutional environment imposes constraints on the extent of strategic choices that leaders and managers can exercise, these constraints can be manipulated through political and power processes, which enhances the degree of leeway and choice managers have in implementing and exploring different solutions. Malik (2017) argues that through

active developmental and innovative human agency, a number of leaders in the Indian IT industry and indeed other industry and national contexts, explored additional opportunities by re-negotiating with stakeholders alternate revenue paths to minimize, and in some cases, avoid total job losses. In part, the ability to deliver on their promises was also contingent upon the concomitant investments these firms made to certain HRM practices and organisational capabilities, which allowed them to deliver on the re-negotiated opportunities to their stakeholders.

Critical Reflections

Not all is lost. There is hope. All this requires courage and adopting a higher level of moral standpoint for upholding the core values and maintaining HR's credibility. The task however is not easy in what is largely a capitalist system. HR managers are perceived, in the main, as agents of the principal rather than as professionals who are also tasked with playing the role of *employee champions*. Cultural, institutional and value differences may well explain alternate paths leaders may embark upon to balance their businesses' economic interests with employee interests. In the case of offshore outsourcing, while it was business interest that led managers to navigate through, and negotiate with, key stakeholders to commit to the offshore outsourcing decision, evidence from the literature suggests that several offshore service providers also went under, following the GFC. Raising the threshold and baseline of *equity* and *voice* is a good place to start if one were to balance it with efficiency. Through international and national platforms and strengthening moral intensity of managers and leaders, we might lead them to explore the path of innovative and developmental human agency rather than succumbing to conformist pressures.

Illustrations and Skills Sandpit

The examples from the GFC, Christchurch earthquake disasters, bushfires and several other natural and man-made disasters have time and again proven that humans are resilient and capable of adaptation and change and have in many instances be able to minimise the impact of, and in some cases even turn the course of the tide around. Such major events often require collaboration and cooperation between the affected parties. Adopting a competitive model might not be the best way forward.

Concept Integration with Cases and Learning Activities

The case study by Tasoulis and Progoulaki entitled *Crisis, internationalization and HRM in Project-based organisations: The tale of SOFMAN* covers a number of the above aspects on managing in a post-crisis context. Additionally the case study

titled *Gender Inclusive Leadership for Innovation and Change –an HR Head’s reflections* also provides a good account of how to manage innovation and change through HR.

Conclusion

This final chapter highlighted the central role played by a number of HRM practices in supporting innovation, creating an ambidextrous context and managing people in crisis through the exercise of developmental and innovative use of human agency. Learning and development can support in the development of agile and flexible leaders who are willing to challenge the status quo and navigate or re-negotiate opportunities with the dominant coalition of stakeholders. As a result, this will lead to longer-term commitment and loyalty of employees and possibly help HR regain its credibility. While this approach is evident in a number of contexts, the path taken is not easy and requires courage, it does, however, offer some hope for people and organisations in the wake of adversity. In a highly turbulent and disruptive world that we live in today, there is hope and we need to rethink and institute processes, which, in the first place prevent such crisis from occurring. Second, we must think of a cooperative and collaborative, rather than competitive approach to HRM. Firms and people in firms must be viewed as collectives of capacities and capabilities. Potential collaborators from both within and between a network of firms must come together to fully deal with the excesses imposed by natural and manmade crises. Being mindful of resources that go against the spirit of cooperation and collaboration, efforts must be made to make people aware of the unimaginable harm their neglect and deliberate actions might cause. This might sound like performing the first task of change and will require a special kind of cognition and action for dealing with such major events. People will need to engage in emancipatory frames of learning to come up with novel solutions to what is becoming a common and pervasive problem.

Glossary

Ambidexterity is a firm’s ability to manage the duality of simultaneously engaging in learning processes of experimentation and exploration of new ideas with alignment to current goals, refining, efficiency and working on well-established routines.

Contextual ambidexterity occurs when individuals in a firm are able to partition their time and learning for simultaneously exploring and exploiting new and existing learning for achieving sustained levels of performance.

Key Questions and Learning Activities

Question. 1 What are the key HRM practices that support innovation at work? Discuss.

Question. 2 Which aspect of human agency is most conducive to managing people in times of a crisis? Discuss with examples.

Question. 3 What is the relationship between high-performance work practices and employee well-being? Provide a critical discussion.

Learning Activity: The Secret Ingredient

The Secret Ingredient

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Key words: *Organization structures; family-run businesses; Leadership; Ambidexterity*

Company Overview

Globe Build is a 20-year old, family-owned construction company. It started out with building small residential buildings, and with time, it has grown into a developer of large commercial estates, especially in Special Economic Zones or Tech-Parks as they are colloquially called, in Bangalore – the Silicon Valley of India. Kariappa Reddy is the founder and CEO of the company. A capable man under whose leadership the company has grown to USD 250 million in market value of property and a name in construction in India to reckon with.

The Leadership

Reddy is the family patriarch. He is now 58 years old and proudly declares himself a “self-made-man”. He came from tough times, the oldest of 4 sons, in family where the parents passed away when the children were still of a school-going age. Inheriting just the old family home on the outskirts of the city, Reddy had to start working odd jobs to sustain his siblings and educate them. That’s how he found himself in the construction business. Working his

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way up from brick laying and concrete pouring, Reddy found an opportunity in real-estate when salaried city dwellers started investing in “holiday homes” for weekends away from the city. He refurbished their family home and sold it for a massive profit. Reinvesting the proceeds into, smaller but prime, land purchases within city limits. And the rest, as they say is history. A stern, demanding yet generous man, Reddy is considered a father-figure of the Globe Build family, treating every one of his staff like his children, patronizing them when they make a mistake and pampering them when they do well. He runs Globe Build like a tightly run ship, taking quick, firm decisions on matters. This gives the company a competitive edge in the form of lightning speed decision making and very low bureaucracy.

Reddy has a son and a daughter, both of whom are now involved in the business. His son Arjun, who is a Civil Engineer has been supporting in key construction projects for the last 7 years, while his daughter Avni, who is a Chartered Accountant, is now helping out with the finance function for the past 3 years. Prior to the children entering the family business, Reddy was supported by some of his childhood friends and early career associates, who continue to remain his trusted aides and members of his company’s board.

The Staff

Globe Build has about 150 full-time office staff, managing business operations including architecture and construction, and support functions such as finance, procurement, marketing and HR. Ninety are business staff spread across the 5 key construction sites in Bangalore and 3 sites outside of Bangalore in the country. The remaining 60 are support staff working out of the corporate office.

All staff have a direct line of communication with Reddy and he gives direct orders when he needs things done. Of course, his closest aides and family members also manage the staff and ensure they work on getting things done immediately and as required by Reddy to support the rapidly expanding business.

About 30% of the staff have been around 5 years or more and are used to the inner workings of the company. They know how to work with Reddy and deal with his tempers. They know how to prioritize when different people give opposing instructions. But some staff are new in the system, a few about 2 years and majority, with less than a year. With the rate at which things are moving in the company and the limited number of seasoned people in the company, they are struggling to cope. One of the new procurement hires, Seema, asked one of her seniors, why they were placing an order from a vendor who was decidedly more expensive than several more popular options in the market. The answer she got was, “If Reddy Sir says that’s what he wants, that’s what we must do.” When Seema shared her experience over lunch with

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a few other colleagues from different functions, everyone had a similar view of not questioning management and doing as they are told.

The Transformation

After his almost 4-decade-long career and running Globe Build, Reddy feels like he now wants to step back and put himself in a more relaxed position where he can enjoy the fruits of his labor and when required, guide the company to grow. He knows where he wants to take the company in 5 years before stepping back and he feels like his people are stuck in every day operations. They are too caught up in the moment to appreciate his vision for the company and work towards the future. In the past year alone, he has fired at least 15 staff himself, where he has observed that they haven't been able to deliver at the pace and standards at which he needs work done.

To strengthen his leadership, Reddy has also recently roped in a professional sales manager, along with his son-in-law who is an attorney and his daughter-in-law who is an architect to support the business. He believes everyone must support the business at a critical time like this.

The Challenge

Two years into his 5-year plan, Reddy is faced with some tough challenges:

- 3 out of 8 projects have overshot time and budget plans upsetting projected company revenues
- Reddy's aides and his family members have become two groups clearly opposing each other and fighting for decision making authority and possible succession to the business
- Increasing errors across key processes has put Globe Build at a compliance risk that now needs to be reactively addressed since it is stalling active projects.

Discussion Questions

- What are some risks for Globe Build's business right now?
- What should be Reddy's key current priorities to create a transition / retirement plan for himself?
- How can Globe Build start to deliver on current requirements while also being prepared for the future?
- Who else beyond Reddy must have a role to play in Globe Build's transformation? And what should be some of their key focus areas?

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