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CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND THE WAY IT IS IMPLEMENTED

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JEL Classification

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Abstract

Strategic human resource management issue is treated by many authors, following this paper we will try to clarify, to emphasize the role of this concept and how it should be implemented in domestic companies. Defining the concept of strategic human resource management, requires perfect understanding of human resource management, the concept referring to the philosophies, policies, procedures and practices related with people management in an organization. The main purpose of human resource management is to add value not only to the process of obtaining, but also to the products and services themselves, together with increasing the level of work quality and creating a better standard of living for the employees.

The human resources can be considered economical resources and thus a strategy generating costs opportunities is required. Even though it is very relevant for the human resources positions, the HR departments do not welcome the concept of „cost opportunity” probably because the individuals in managing positions consider themselves working with people and not with money or maybe they are specialists regarding the job positions related to the personnel and not regarding the decisions with direct impact on the business. The actual reality proves that the human resource „faults” can largely generate cost opportunities within a company.

CONCEPT OVERVIEW

In order to define the concept of strategic human resource management, we must fully understand human resource management, a concept which refers to the philosophies, politics, procedures and practices related with the management of people in an organization. This concept is vast and includes several factors, such as strategies, decisions, actions, functions and methods, with the main purpose to contribute effectively to the management of people in an organization. Over the years, many authors have developed various definitions, complementary to the concept of human resource management. For example, Michael Armstrong defines strategic human resource management as “a strategic approach to gain, develop, motivate and get the commitment of the most valuable asset in a company – the people working for it”¹. Also, John Storey implies that human resource management is a “distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an integrated array of Cultural, structural and personal techniques”².

Analysis of these definitions will conclude that strategic human resource management is much more than just a set of practices, and it cannot be localized just at organization level, but throughout the entire strategic and decisional process of the organization.

The concept of human resource management has gained the attention of several theorists and practitioners over the last century, especially during the last decades, being subjected to extensive development, as follows:

1917-1918: the first personnel department is created, to cope with the job market, riots, losses and employee inefficiency;

1920: the concept of human resource is used to gain the cooperation of employees, by commitment from the company to offer safe jobs and benefits;

1930-1950: human relations discover that there are psychological and social factors which influence the satisfaction, cooperation and performance of employees;

1960: it is found that work projection is much more efficient in increasing the motivation of employees than communication and cooperation. Small groups start working more efficiently, thus creating a competitive advantage for the company;

1970: the development of QWL – “quality of work life” – emphasizing the values of human resources;

1990 – present: Total Quality Management (TQM) is born. Great focus is given to strategies related to human resource management by tracking the degree of involvement and commitment of employees and innovative working practices.

The strategic management of human resources focuses on the decisions which have a major and long lasting effect on employees and the connection between the management of the organization and human resources. The main purpose of human resource management is capitalization of the style, structure, quality, devotion and motivation of employees in order to achieve the set objectives.

In order to be applied successfully in everyday practice of companies, human resource management requires strategic integration, coherent and consistent development of a set of policies regarding the employment and gaining the devotion of the employees. Moreover, decisions with a high degree of efficiency must be adopted, requiring competency at all managerial levels.³ Thus, we can identify two distinctive traits of human resource management:

1. The capacity to think strategically and to have a clear perspective on the strategic direction that needs to be followed.
2. Strategic integration and organizational ability to integrate the issues of human resource management in strategic plans and to ensure the coherence of all

¹ Analoui Farhad, *Strategic Human Resource Management*, 2007, Thomson learning, pag. 3

² Analoui Farhad, *Strategic Human Resource Management*, 2007, Thomson learning, pag. 4

³ Cristina Maria Stoica, *Managementul strategic al resurselor umane. Teorie i practica*, 2004, Junimea, Ia i, pag. 22

aspects relating to human resource management.

Peter Drucker considers that the function of human resources has become operational by its cooperation with hierarchy, regarding the conception of jobs, selection, planning. His mission changes with the new conditions: instead of looking for the lowest price in human resources, he will have to gain the optimum effectiveness, because the work of human resources is now differentiated and specialized.⁴ The function of human resources can be considered strategic if it follows provisions like⁵:

- It contributes to the elaboration and application of strategy;
- General management takes into consideration the cost of this function in respect to the gain and the quantity and quality risks the organization is exposing to.
- Human resources manage the resources in tight connection with the global strategy of the organization.
- There is a shift from the status of “expense” to the concept of “strategic variable”.

Planning and strategic thinking in human resource management

Many of the concepts and techniques for strategic management have been developed and successfully applied within many companies. As managers are trying to manage better and to face the changes in economical climate, a company develops over four phases of strategic actions and management. These phases consist of basic financial planning, prognosis-based planning, external environment oriented planning and strategic management. Moreover, strategic management consists of four basic elements which ensure a structured format for examination of company strategies⁶: scanning

the business environment, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, evaluation and control.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITY DOMAINS OF THE STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Human resources recruitment and selection strategies

The recruitment of personnel involves searching, localization, identification and attraction of the candidates most suitable for the requirements of the society. This process can be complicated and involves large resource consumption, especially if the process is not performed under adequate conditions and must be repeated. If the recruitment procedures prove to be inefficient, the fluctuation rate is high and this leads to time and energy losses and raised administrative costs. The recruitment strategies should concentrate on the commitment and flexibility of the possible employees, identifying the most fitted recruitment methods in order to attract the best candidates.

The commitment and flexibility are the most important features of the competitive advantage. Therefore, depending on the location of the recruitment process, two different process types can be identified:

- in-house recruiting – involves reassignment of employees for other positions. The benefits of this method are based on the fact that the employees are aware of the organization’s strengths and weaknesses and the managers already know the candidates. This method can reduce staff fluctuation because the main effect is the raise of employees’ motivation and satisfaction. The issues that may occur while using this method are related to the transparency and equity of the advancement process.

- external recruiting – involves identification, localization and attraction of the candidates outside the organization. This method offers the advantage of a wide range of candidates that can bring new perspectives to the organization. The weaknesses of the method are related to the level of difficulty in attracting, contracting and evaluating the possible employees. This is why different recruitment

⁴ P. Drucker, *Good bye to Old Personnel*, in „Wall Street Journal”, 26 mai, 1986, p.16

⁵ Cristina Maria Stoica, *Managementul strategic al resurselor umane. Teorie i practica*, 2004, Junimea, Ia i, p. 25

⁶ Analoui Farhad, *Strategic Human Resource Management*, 2007, Thomson learning, pag. 35

procedures have been developed in practice: unscheduled submitting of resumes, employee references, promotion, networking, professional associations, educational and professional agencies, recruitment via internet or due to verbally transmitted information.

The strategy of recruiting and selecting a certain person for a specific position is applied when an employee leaves the current job (relocation, promotion, retirement) or when additional duties must be fulfilled due to the company's activity development or reorganization for obtaining a competitive advantage. The Labour marketing research of the most suitable candidate in order to fulfil the additional responsibilities starts with an analysis of the job description, the required level of qualification, remuneration and the hiring period.

The human resource field literature identifies eleven stages necessary for the implementation of the personnel recruitment.

The recruitment requirement is issued by the company manager or the head of the department (depending on the company), and is most frequently necessary because of some additional duties or when an employee leaves the job due to relocation, retirement, termination of employment, promotion, etc. This stage of the recruitment strategy considers the following:

- qualification, professional experience and required seniority for the open position
- the due date for hiring a candidate
- required skills: driving license, PC knowledge, foreign languages, etc.
- remuneration: salary, gratification and social advantages.

The recruitment opportunity analysis identifies possible solutions to raise labour productivity, and generally the wages funds, the possibilities related to salary payment, the increasing effects, and the long-term impact of the recruitment decision are analyzed.

The job description indicates the requirements and criteria of the recruitment process. This stage provides analysis of the jobs, level of studies and experience.

Internal prospecting represents the strategy to attract and identify candidates to fill job vacancies. This strategy is usually applied for the

management positions as the recruitment and selection can be more difficult when searching external sources. The employees are offered equal opportunities to be advanced by confirming their skills and knowledge acquired within organization. One of the advantages of internal sourcing is the fact the employees are acquainted with the internal and external environment.

External prospecting is the strategy of recruiting and selecting candidates outside the company involving different methods: advertising, using appropriate media, job shops, online recruitment, etc.

Screening and selection of candidates. The strategy applies by screening the resumes submitted by the candidates, their covering letters and recommendations which consist the basis of the interview.

The interviews and questionnaires represent another stage of personnel recruitment and selection implementation.

The actual selection includes a number of steps and considers the performance assessments of the aptitude and psychological testing.

Testing professional knowledge represents the final stage of the recruitment and selection process. This stage involves the testing of the knowledge acquired due to their experience within other companies.

The Appointment letter represents the final stage. The organization manager and the person responsible for human resources section assess the strengths and weaknesses of the last candidates. The decision is made due to an impartial analysis of the aptitude, knowledge and skills testing results.

Onboarding is the term which describes the new employee integration, is the final stage of the recruitment and selection strategy and is very important in fulfilling the company's future goals. There are two stages that provide full integration of the new employee:

1. the new employee becomes acquainted with the company's organizational and activity regulation, internal regulation policy, and occupational safety norms, visits the company and is introduced to the specific domain of activity and administrative procedures;

2. the new employee is integrated in the department, is informed on the duties and responsibilities to be fulfilled and on the status of collaboration or subordination relations (where need may be).

Strategies for human resource development

The human resource development of a company is closely related to the gratification process. The development implies enhancing the performance level which creates the basis of the internal market and becomes the force that drives the learning process within the organization. The main target of the human resource strategic development is to increase the company's capacity of benefits resulted due to its resources – the human capital which is a major source for competitive advantages.

The specific goals of the strategy involve the development of the intellectual capacity and the support of the organizational learning by providing an adequate environment for individual or team learning and due to a system of knowledge management. This strategy is applied in order to provide the individuals most suitable for the company's short-term, mid-term and long-term requirements. The personnel professional development is very important both for the employees and for the company efficiency level.

Garavan has identified three theoretical perspectives on the human resource development⁷:

- the perspective of human resource development based on competences – a theoretical economical perspective upon the human capital as a basis for reaching the organization's goals;
- the psychological contract perspective – it concentrates on the relation between the employer and the employee according to the contract terms;
- the perspective of the collective learning or of the organizations that teaches – it considers the organization as an entity generating, improving and managing the

knowledge otherwise than the traditional perspective based on individual learning.

At macroeconomic level, the human resource development is related to investments and results within the educational, health and population sectors of the society assembly. At microeconomic level the focus is on the organizational activities that manage the improvement of the employees' qualifications and competences, continuously motivating individuals to develop their potential and to enhance the company's capacity and competitive level.

The human resource development can be considered the process that provides to the employees the necessary support for acquiring and elaborating the competences required for different current or future positions within company. The main purpose is to develop general and individual competences of employees by determining them to discover their own internal potential with an impact on the organization's development. This is the setting of the basis for an organizational culture regarding the superior – subordinate relations, team working and collaboration between subdivisions. Identifying the opportunities and setting a certain climate, the employees are helped to demonstrate hidden competences and to contribute to fulfilling the company's targets.

The final purpose of an organization is to provide its development and the professional development of its employees. This is the effect of its capacity to provide personnel of the highest quality level and to develop the level of learning within the company. In order to elaborate a definition of the strategic development of human resources, Garavan underlines the base elements: "the strategic management of training, development and intervention in education in order to fulfil the organizational goals, simultaneously with an integral use of the individual knowledge and competences. The strategic development of human resources involves the experience acquired due to training, education and development. These activities enhance qualifications, knowledge, general attitude and working capacity expected from the employees in the coming future or sometime in future and lead to the learning process. The human resource

⁷ Prof. dr. Ioan CIOBANU, Asist. dr. Ruxandra CIULU, *Managementul Strategic al resurselor umane, Suport de curs, 2009-2010, pg. 45*

development literature concludes that the development element includes more types of learning activities: Learning, education, Development, Training”.

Performance evaluation and control strategies

The performance evaluation and control is the process through which both past and present performances are assessed, compared and controlled by the superiors in terms of the standards required by the company top management. Moreover the standards required aim at the fulfilment of the goals of both the company and each individual. Since any evaluation system is not deemed to be perfect, the subjectivity of the employees may affect the interpretation of the results. Besides, the employees consider that the system may directly affect their professional life. The appraisal

process may cause stress for the employees: the outcome results mostly in salary increase or decrease, compensation and promotion or dismissal, in the worst case scenario.

Therefore a performance appraisal system shall pursue two objectives:

- correct evaluation of the employee’s work performance;
- creation of two or more position within the organization.

In order to create competitive advantage in the market, the evaluation shall fulfil two roles also: administrative and development-related role. The roles of the performance appraisal system must be pursued in order to acquire a balance between the employee and employer benefits.

Benefits for employee	Benefits for employer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The appraisal is a necessity for improving the individual performances • Each employee merits are recognized • The performance appraisal and classification process aim at motivating the employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual differences enhance organization performance • May be used as control tools in case of work conflicts • A well-done evaluation makes the reward and bonus scheme more effective • Contributes to the implementation of the strategic objectives and may predict expected results • Creates equity between the members of the work teams

As I have already mentioned above the performance appraisal systems are not perfect, therefore they are continuously being optimized by detecting and correcting the failure causes:

- the performance criteria are not clear and their communication is poor;
- the performance criteria clarification tools are not efficient;
- faulty superior-subordinate relationship;
- the individual in charge with evaluation does not collect sufficient information with regard to the individual being evaluated;
- lack of real-time feedback;
- the individual in charge with implementation and evaluation of systems is not competent.

To ensure proper functioning of the evaluation system the above-mentioned faults must be remedied by establishing a methodology consisting of five stages:

- clear determination of the objectives to be fulfilled and their correlation to some standards;
- measurement of performance by collecting the necessary information and data analysis on which real performance is established;
- selection and removal of incorrect criteria that cause deviations from the real issue;
- comparison of actual performance to the standards defined at the beginning of the process;
- communication of the evaluation results to the employee;

- identification of actions to be carried out to improve performances.

Motivation strategies

On-site personnel motivation may be defined as a set of processes stimulating, directing and maintaining the human behaviour in order to reach the departments and company objectives.

Even though it differs from one company to another the motivation is mainly influenced by salary, promotion perspectives, good relationships with collaborators, comfort at the place of work, etc. In order to exactly identify the motivation needs within each company we must be aware of the two types of motivation fundamental theories:

- Content motivation theories: hierarchy of needs (Maslow), ERG theory (Alderfer), motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg);
- Process motivation theory: expectancy theory, equity theory, needs-goals theory.

The motivation theories on content focus on *what* motivates the people and involve actions to satisfy the employees' needs and at the same time identify the needs influencing the behaviour. The most important theories in this category are: the hierarchy of needs elaborated by Maslow and the two-factor theory made by Herzberg, which list and identify the personnel needs as satisfaction factors.

The theory of needs ranks the needs in five stages: basic or physiological need, safety and security need, love and belonging need, need for esteem and need to actualize the self. Maslow supposes that higher-ranked needs occur only after lower-ranked needs have been fulfilled. This theory underlines the various needs motivating the employees and the fact that once being satisfied they no longer represent a motivation factor.

The motivation-hygiene theory or the two-factor theory of Herzberg states that the professional satisfaction is influenced by two categories of factors: intrinsic such as achievement, knowledge, responsibility, self-realization, etc, and extrinsic such as salary and working conditions. Not only that the theory identifies the employees' fundamental needs and shapes the need to self-realization, recognition

and promotion, but it also defines the job and provides tasks in order to achieve greater productivity.

When implementing the personnel motivation strategy the process motivation theories (expectancy, equity and needs-goals) must also be taken into consideration.

The expectancy theory has been developed by Porter and Lawler in 1968 as a model embracing Vroom's ideas and states that there are two factors that determine how much effort the employees invest to fulfil tasks:

- the value of compensation for the individual that enable him to satisfy the safety, esteem, autonomy and self-realization needs;
- awareness of the connection between compensations to be received and effort invested.

To optimize work and achieve required performance, the authors have also identified two additional variables influencing the achievement of tasks:

- capacity – employee skills and knowledge to perform work under efficient conditions;
- perception of role – connection between the availability of the individual to do what he/ she is requested to and what the organization considers that he/she should do.

The theory of needs-goals states that the performance and motivation of an employee is closely connected to the determination of specific objectives. The objectives must be established together with the employees, and the difficult ones require normative guidance and advice from behalf of the superiors. The objectives must be accepted and assumed by the entire personnel, and the feedback is a tool of continuously maintaining the motivation especially for achievement of higher objectives.

The theory of equity analyzes the perception of the employees on how they consider they should be treated in comparison with their co-workers. The theory accentuates that the organization should provide fair and correct treatment depending on performances. Two forms of equity are identified in the speciality literature: equity of distribution – correctness and fairness the employees consider they are

rewarded for their work in comparison with their co-workers, and equity of procedure – perception of the personnel on the correctness and fairness of the performance, promotion and discipline evaluation process. Five factors contributing to the formation of the procedural perception have been identified:

- acceptance of the employee's point of view;
- suppression of personal inequality towards an employee;
- fair application of the performance criteria for all employees;
- communication of the consequences of decisions to the employees;
- argumentation of the decisions taken.

The motivation strategies aim at stimulating the personnel to work efficiently in order to successfully fulfil the company objectives. Therefore the company top management and the human resources officer shall elaborate such strategies as: authority, participation, team work, retaining and reward.

Authority is the process of conferring the employees the right to set their own objectives, make decisions by themselves in this respect and solve the problems in their activity. Authority releases the employee from under the pressure of expensive controls, and raises awareness for own ideas and decisions. This contributes to creating a competitive environment for fulfilling the objectives and at the same time provides realization of the individuals involved.

Participation confers the employee the right to participate into the company decision-making process and gives him/her the opportunity to be recognized and add value to the company.

Team work balances the company human resources and determines enhancement of innovation, performance and work productivity and improvement of organizational environment. Team work raises awareness for the entire team to fulfil tasks and achieve expected results. In order to implement the team-work strategy Tuckman identifies four stages to be pursued and verified⁸:

- forming – phases are set, objectives to be fulfilled are elaborated while analyzing the resources available, tasks are assigned and rules are established on-site;
- storming – the team begins its proper activity;
- norming – rules and norms are established to regulate activities;
- performing – outcome and its verification.

Retaining strategy aims at keeping the best and rare human resources. It is generally applied to line managers and pursues optimization of retaining models on compensation, performance, engagement and team-building.

Reward strategy refers to the monetary and non-monetary compensation within an organization. The reward policy is the main determiner of the relationship employee – employer.

The salary system used within a company is considered to be a modification, correction and perfection mechanism of both attitude (work satisfaction) and behaviour of the employees as follows:

⁸ Prof. dr. Ioan CIOBANU, Asist. dr. Ruxandra CIULU, *Managementul Strategic al resurselor umane, Suport de curs, 2009-2010, pg. 69*

Attitudes	Behaviours
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the level of job satisfaction is being modified depending on the value the employee receives or that he/she considers he/she is entitled to receive; • the level of satisfaction varies depending on the reward of other co-workers and is generally misinterpreted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the reward influences positively or negatively the personnel fluctuations; • it influences absenteeism; • the performance-based rewards modify the work activity, especially when it is adequately measured, and a correlation between them exists; • the reward level has direct influences on motivation.

CONCLUSIONS

We can assess that the personnel of a company becomes a valuable resource, thus the procedures for selecting, developing, training, motivating, keeping and devoting of personnel needs special attention, especially in the global economic context, where competitiveness is necessary to survive. Human resource management is no longer regarded as an administrative function, but as a strategic task, with long term political overview, as a separate part in the entire value system of a company. The strategic management of human resources focuses on the unification of the link between economic and social through economic and social achievement, by developing people to develop the organization, competence and motivation of employees, customer satisfaction, organization results, development of competitiveness.

The human resources can be considered economical resources and thus a strategy generating costs opportunities is required. Even though it is very relevant for the human resources positions, the HR departments do not welcome the concept of „cost opportunity” probably because the individuals in managing positions consider themselves working with people and not with money or maybe they are specialists regarding the job positions related to the personnel and not regarding the decisions with direct impact on the business. The actual reality proves that the human resource „faults” can largely generate cost opportunities within a company.

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