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MANAGING EMPLOYEE RESOURCES THE EXTENT TO WHICH LABOUR FLEXIBILITY CAN GENERATE EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

Case
Study

Keywords

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Abstract

Institutions want to foster a content workforce to gain a competitive advantage but also attract and retain workers. Labour flexibility can help prepare multi-skilled, flexible labour adapting to fluctuating work demands. Additionally, employee commitment engenders an institutional outcome of HRM positively affecting performance and decreasing staff turnover by strengthening retention strategies. Hence, the workers choose to remain in an organisation because they have experienced a positive environment, decreasing labour turnover and increasing the right motivation to improve entity performance. Hence, companies have begun to offer various flexible work circumstances, generating high employee commitment. Flexible employment can foster commitment depending on the work performed and the commitment produced. For example, flexitime and annual hour contracts can foster affective commitment, causing staff to choose to remain at their job, helping the firm maintain competitiveness and thus succeed.

FLEXIBILITY AS A COMPETITIVE STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

As the requirement for talented workers surges worldwide, skilled worker labour shortages have surfaced (Heisler & Bandow, 2018). Economists have proclaimed that 65% of the jobs will require a college degree by 2020, the world has struggled to fill knowledge-based jobs in the emerging technologically advanced economy (Cummins, Brown, Bahr, & Mehri, 2019). Hence, employers have sought various methods to meet this talent disparity and labour shortages, expected to widen from 2020 to 2030 (Strack, Baier, Marchingo, & Sharda, 2014). Consequently, employers have begun to tap new labour sources, like older people and individuals juggling childcare. More people, particularly women, struggle to balance work-life responsibilities (Choo, Mat Desa, & Abu Hassan Asaari, 2016; Fapohunda, 2014; Lott, 2020). An increasing number of employers have requested more flexible work practices to accommodate the evolving employee demands, providing an alternative to full-time, permanent employment. Enterprises operate more efficiently when they employ motivated, productive employees. Many older workers and caretakers want reduced employment hours, motivating employers to offer workers flexibly scheduled jobs (Chandola, Booker, Kumari, & Benzeval, 2019; Vanajan, Bülmann, & Henkens, 2020).

In light of this labour shortage, buyers (employers) compete for the limited supply (employees), sparking a rise in organisational initiatives to attract and retain high-quality employees (Sellar & Prashansa Mihiri Jayawardana, 2020). The dynamic work demands and employee shortages have prompted organizations to become more flexible. Flexibility embodies one of the human resource management (HRM) goals facilitating business success in the competitive business environment (Nabi, Islam, Dip, & Hossain, 2017; Onken-Menke, Nüesch, & Kröll, 2018). Most importantly, fast change has necessitated a focus on employee commitment (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002). Commitment entails one of four HRM goals. According to Guest (1987), "the rationale behind this can be found in the assumption that committed Employees will be more satisfied, more productive and more adaptable" (p. 513). This essay will examine the types and levels of flexibility, particularly labour flexibility, as human resource management (HRM) objective and theories and definitions of commitment concerning flexibility. Additionally, a brief of labour turnover and staff retention, and the extent to which flexible employment can generate high employee commitment will be discussed.

Experts have begun to explore new avenues to optimize employees' ability to increase productivity (Parker, Holesgrove, & Pathak, 2015). For example, DiClaudio (2019) illuminated the fact that institutional productivity enhanced competitive edge in the dynamic global economy. According to Ghorban and Gholipour (2018), flexibility embodies how an institution alters to accommodate the demands it encounters. In fact, many firms have begun to recognize flexibility as a competitive advantage (Doroudi & Babaei, 2016). Flexibility encompasses four crucial areas: technology, systems, organisations, and labour. Flexibility ranges from broad to narrow. For example, the flexibility of technology represents physical technology, the information provided, and the interaction. Also, organisational flexibility refers to how an institution reacts to requirements changes (Koçyiğit & Akkaya, 2020). System flexibility constitutes the company's external factors, such as a local or global economy. Finally, the flexibility of labour refers to the relationship between work ability and willingness to adapt to various tasks and the entity's ability to utilize diverse employees in response to fluctuating demands (Doroudi & Babaei, 2016). This essay concentrates on labour flexibility. However, isolating this flexibility from other kinds of flexibility has proven challenging. According to Guest (1989), employers must understand the vital role of strategic integration to incorporate HRM and strategic plans. He further asserted flexibility interconnects with organisational structure, which must adjust and respond to innovation, primarily through job enrichment and multi-skilled workers responding to work demands (Guest, 1989). However, traditional personnel issues, unionism and job speculation can hinder this HRM goal (Guest, 1989).

Flexibility engenders one HRM objective, particularly in the dynamic business environment with emerging industrial competition. Diverse requirements must adapt to fluctuating demands and rising pressures to ensure businesses perform various tasks (Atkinson, 1984). Moreover, Guest (1987) emphasized the importance of flexible organisation in achieving such demands to avoid rigidity and bureaucracy (Guest, 1987). Furthermore, the institution needs to acquire a change agent in response to these fluctuating demands (Guest, 1998). Atkinson (1984) suggested labour flexibility comprises three facets: functional, numerical, and financial. Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model refers to a competitive company in the current business market (Taylor, 2008). Taylor (2008) highlighted this influential flexible firm represents a descriptive, prescription, and prediction tool in the changing corporate

environment. Moreover, this structure further divided the firm into organisational structure levels with varying worker policies and three employee groups: core employees, peripheral workers, and subcontracted workers (Atkinson, 1984). Centre to the flexible firm theory resides two flexibility elements: functional and numerical. According to Chandola et al. (2019), functional flexibility constitutes organisations accommodating the evolving workforce patterns, like adjusting the hours worked.

For further explanation, core workers chiefly encountering functional flexibility are hired as full-time employees, such as managers and designers. Thus, those employees perform more complex tasks, depending on varying company demands. They fundamentally realize firm success and remain more secure in their careers (Atkinson, 1984). On the other hand, peripheral workers possess less skill, mostly encompassing part-time or contract workers (Atkinson, 1984). They offer the enterprise numerical flexibility needed and hold less security of employment (Taylor, 2008). However, these employees are also associated with functional flexibility to some extent. Temporal flexibility is the third kind of flexibility concerning "Flexibility in terms when people work" (Taylor, 2008), like flexitime and zero-hours contracts. Experts have debated labour flexibility as an HRM goal. For example, flexible workers must remain committed. Understanding this controversy requires a good understanding of commitment's definition and relating theories. Flexible entities can efficiently respond to business requirements and work demands (Chandola et al., 2019). Guest (1987) professed entities could only achieve institutional and labour flexibility through high organisational commitment, trust, and intrinsic motivation.

THEORIES OF COMMITMENT

Employees generate revenue, and adverse working conditions can minimize commitment, leading to employee attrition and reduced output quality, affecting financial outcomes (Walsh & Arnold, 2020). Anjum, Ming, Siddiqi, and Rasool (2018) elucidated 80% of employee productivity issues stem from daily work environments. In some companies, high employee turnover presents a severe problem. The cost of onboarding new employees can compromise company profits (Leroy, Pelanski, & Simons, 2015). With time, employees begin to entrench themselves in the organisational culture understanding the job, tasks and the institution (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). As employees begin to connect with the firm, they develop a sense of loyalty or commitment. Companies must foster a commitment to reduce

turnover (Choo et al., 2016). Corporate commitment refers to an employee's commitment to the institution and its decision to remain a member. In other words, the commitment binds employees to the entity, fostering loyalty and high performance (Austin-Egole, Iheriohanma, & Nwokorie, 2020). Existing employees become more dedicated to the company providing psychological, economic, and functional benefits. Hence, when employers offer a healthy work atmosphere, work-life balance, adequate compensation and benefits, training and development opportunities, the institution can retain through minimising existing employee turnover intention. Thus, the employer strives to foster a commitment to maintain a healthy organisational culture and improve employee performance (Cote, 2017), for satisfied employees produce (Zhang & Liao, 2015).

Three organisational commitment elements can be distinguished: affective, normative, and continuance (Meyer & Allen, 1991). These three dimensions relate negatively to turnover and the intention to leave (Meyer & Allen, 1991). For example, in affective commitment, the employee chooses to remain with the institution, which is associated with a more favourable consequence and better performance (Meyer & Allen, 1991). On the other hand, in continuance and normative commitment, employees think they should remain with the company or lack other choices (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Also, Legge (1995) defined employee commitment as a strong motivation to remain a member, a firm agreement on the corporate values and goals, and a readiness to offer significant exertion on behalf of the organisation. Moreover, Guest (1987) acknowledged commitment as attitudinal and behavioural. Attitudinal commitment, similar to affective commitment, encompasses behavioural loyalty more like the continuance or normative commitment. Employers want to foster dedication; therefore, they have started to use a customer-oriented approach to satisfy employees and reduce turnover (Kashyap & Verma, 2018).

Labour Turnover and Staff Retention

Employee turnover engenders "the change in the workforce during a definite time" (Kaur, Mohindru, & Pankaj, 2013, p. 1219), depicting the degree to which existing employees leave and new employees enter a company. Employee turnover can be voluntary or involuntary, where employees either choose to leave the institution or management removes them (Ongori, 2007). Institutions must attract individuals to hire as employees. Employee attraction epitomizes the process through which companies get potential employees to view the organisation as a positive place to work (Jimenez, 2019). When people

perceive a company positively, they may intend to join it or apply for employment. After undergoing an interview, they accept a job offer and enter the institution (Onah & Anikwe, 2016). Once a company hires employees, they face the challenge of retaining them (Alshathry, Clarke, & Goodman, 2017). As a result, serious adverse effects result (Billikopf, 2004). Labour turnover can be better understood based on the type of employee resigning from work: voluntary or involuntary, controlled or uncontrolled, avoidable or unavoidable, and functional or dysfunctional (Taylor, 2008). Recently, scholars have better understood the trend between economic conditions and shortage of skills or high labour turnover. Taylor (2008) claimed, "Rather than the former leading to the latter, many believe that in reality, the opposite is the case" (p. 341).

Some controversies have surfaced regarding labour turnover. High institutional attrition rate can benefit a company, achieving lower redundancy costs and enabling employees to control wages (Taylor, 2008). However, high turnover can depict an alarming issue in industries hiring high multi-skilled employees despite these claimed positive advantages, particularly if those valuable workers move to rival enterprises (Heisler & Bandow, 2018). For example, the business may experience a loss of productivity, business opportunities and employee demoralisation (Taylor, 2008). Thus, decreased worker output can signify other challenges, like job or setting dissatisfaction or setting. The measures selected to prevent turnover will also benefit the overall business environment. High staff turnover is costly in terms of time and effort required to recruit, select, and train new staff (DiClaudio, 2019). Retention strategies can decrease and control staff attrition rates. However, the best counteracting turnover methods will differ significantly depending on the reasons for turnover and organisational type (Taylor, 2008), such as job enrichment, improved training, managing staff expectations through realistic job previews, increased rewards, and managing work-family obligations (Taylor, 2008).

Flexible Employment and its Relation to Worker Commitment

Choo et al. (2016) elucidated Malaysian businesses increased employee affective commitment when the enterprise promoted a family-supportive work culture, bolstering. In other words, employees who receive support to manage their work and family lives are more committed to their organisations and were more likely to stay in their company (Haar & Spell, 2004).

Flexible Working Hour: Part-Time

For example, in Britain, almost 25% of employees work part-time, meaning they work less than the

primary full-time employment contract (ACAS, 2015). Although this flexible work shows continuance commitment, it shows a lesser degree of affective commitment.

Zero Hours Contract

Zero hours work exemplifies employment, where employers do not guarantee hours (O'Sullivan et al., 2020). Employees start work regardless of the number of hours or times not stated in the contract (ACAS, 2015). Therefore, because wages rely on the number of hours worked, this flexible work can ensure continuance commitment but not the affective. Therefore, retaining zero-hour employees has become an area of concern. Nawaz and Chowdhury (2018) purported organisations must recognize employee needs before designing motivational policies

Annual Hours

Taylor (2008) defined annual hours as being variable all over the year. He further stated, "The amount of time worked can vary from month to month or season to season." Therefore, these flexible work practices can help decide the most appropriate employee hours, ensure effective work, and foster full employee commitment. It also can reduce staff turnover (Taylor, 2008).

Flexitime

These flexible work hours "allows employees to choose, within set limits, when to begin and end work" (ACAS, 2015). This flexible employment could help retain staff, improve performance and help recruitment. Nevertheless, this freedom can mean a lack of supervision in many organisations (ACAS, 2015). Petak and Miller (2019) unveiled a robust positive correlation between flexitime and employee motivation and a strong positive relationship between flexitime and employee productivity (p. 409).

Most importantly, these flexible work practices and how they relate to employee commitment make it vital to recognize flexible working can generate a high level of affective commitment and help retain employees. Good examples involve flexitime and annual hour contract. On the contrary, other forms of flexible employment can generate only continuance commitment but not the affective commitment, illustrating the employee remains in part-time and zero-contract employment due to lack of alternatives.

CONCLUSIONS

Jackson (2007) claimed employees comprise a firm's most valuable assets, and companies have begun to accommodate workers, breaking away from the traditional employee paradigms (Chandola

et al., 2019). Institutions want to foster a content workforce to gain a competitive advantage, but also attract and retain workers (Alshathry et al., 2017; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002). Even though flexibility as a concept comprises four primary areas: technology, system, organisation, and labour, this essay focused mainly on labour flexibility to achieve business competitiveness and success (Doroudi & Babaei, 2016; Nabi et al., 2017; Onken-Menke et al., 2018). As one HRM goal, labour flexibility can help prepare multi-skilled, flexible labour adapting to fluctuating work demands. Furthermore, the flexible firm theory of Atkinson (1984) was discussed, concentrating on the involved employee groups: core and peripheral, and explaining the difference between labour flexibility: functional, numerical and temporal. Additionally, employee commitment portrayed an institutional outcome of HRM positively affecting performance and decreasing staff turnover by strengthening retention strategies (Chandola et al., 2019; Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2002). Also, commitment divides into affective, continuance and normative, where affective commitment embodies the corporation to offer flexible employment. Hence, the workers choose to remain in an organisation because they have experienced a positive environment, decreasing labour turnover and increasing the right motivation to improve entity performance (Austin-Egole et al., 2020). Finally, various flexible work circumstances generating high employee commitment were discussed. This essay indicated how flexible employment could foster commitment depending on the work performed and the commitment produced. For example, flexitime and annual hour contracts can foster affective commitment, causing staff to choose to remain at their job, helping the firm maintain competitiveness and thus succeed.

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