

## IS TRANSFERABILITY OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (HRM) BEST PRACTICES A SUCCESS KEY?

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### ABSTRACT

*Can best practices be transferred from one domain to another? Such a question may appear when targeting the very heart of a private company as well as an educational system at a national level. In the European Union governments, ministries, central and local authorities' decisions have a greater impact on the strategic use of human resources management (HRM) practices than anywhere in the world.*

*Starting from a general background where humans are seen as important resources, I will analyze how close is specific HRM to what is called language teachers' professional development/training.*

**KEYWORDS:** *achievement, impact, observation, participation, reflection.*

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### 1. BEST PRACTICE OR NEXT PRACTICE?

Navigating high levels of dynamic environments is one of the major challenges for organizations today, be them public or private.

When referring to organizations and organizational behavior (OB) it is compulsory to point to a function responsible for establishing integrated personnel policies, meant to support organizational strategies.

Very many researchers see a very close connection between OB and HRM, as HRM develops and implements policies at:

- an individual level;
- the group level;
- the corporate level.

The contextual levels of analysis impose policies supposed to enhance the quality of working, the employees' commitment, their engagement or flexibility. From such a perspective, HRM can be seen as 'organizational behavior in practice' (Buchanan & Huczyski, 2017). HRM is linked to the organization strategy on the labor market and to its performance, to its effectiveness and the individual efficiency. However, HRM policies are considered to be independent variables, while the organizational effectiveness and the working life are seen as dependent variables.

Between HRM functions like:

- employees' recruitment, their selection, employees' induction;
- employees' training and their professional development;
- employees' performance appraisal and reward;
- managing conduct and discipline;
- employees' participation and commitment;

and skills as:

- transparency;
- responsiveness;
- consensus orientation;
- equity;
- accountability;
- problem solving,
- team building;

the key organizational capability is represented by the ability to adapt 'as context, opportunities and challenge change' (Buchanan & Huczyski, 2017). When referring to practice, nowadays researchers make the difference between 'best practice' that might have worked in the past and 'next practice' which might respond to new challenges.

### **1.1. Are there new directions in the scientific human research management (SHRM)?**

Involving employees and making the right decisions, displaying solutions and a formal system of organizational discipline, the specialists in HRM shaped the scientific management into the new scientific human research management (SHRM).

The methods that legitimized SHRM went towards the improvement of performance through appraisal and assessment, the innovation speed, the work flexibility increase, procedural/regulatory changes, employees' participation in new forms/conventions governing organizational behavior.

There are main objectives and principles of the SHRM approach. They trigger:

- output per worker increase;
- tasks standard;
- clear division of tasks and responsibilities between management and working;
- employees' training;

Starting from the job design, repetitive work cycles, a separation of task conception from task execution, the SHRM underlines the importance of motivation based on economic rewards. Aligning the employees' goals with those of management, has led the employees to their own initiatives in decoding how they should best organize their work. Regarded as a 'human capital' – the employees have become more important than physical assets such machinery or buildings.

The concept of reverse accountability, where an employee has the right to rate his/her boss, has flown down the vertical hierarchy of the organization, displaying:

- how open and participatory the management practice is;
- how decisions are made;
- how the organization's chain of command is understood;
- how employers report back to their subordinates.

### **1.2. Does HRM imply leadership?**

It has been stated that a group/organization makes a leader of a person who can cope with the group's particular problems. Through his/her role, a leader should enable communication, making employees' security, health, safety welfare, public-private partnerships his/her main objectives.

Being considered a 'management prerogative', the type of leadership can be compared to HRM, when it is meant to:

- maintain order and stability;
- monitor and control performance;
- solve problems/conflicts and administer affairs.

The collective exercise of leadership behavior is known as 'distributed leadership'. For many researchers this exercise is often informal and spontaneous but in fact what really counts is the flexible

behavior that allows to change the working style, to clarify the goals, to commit the teams' members and define individual responsibilities. Opposing individual leadership, 'distributed leadership' has had a strong impact on HRM, making possible:

- many people act in concert;
- share roles (from formal to intuitive, from turn-taking to team work).

## **2. How can HRM make "change" happen?**

Maintaining and/or developing the competencies that enter the employability matrix (personal qualities, leadership qualities, practical skills), HRM can focus on:

- efficiency;
- mission;
- vision;
- values and philosophy;
- innovation vs creativity.

Organizations need to balance individual autonomy with collective actions. If individualization has its downsides, the group functions effectively when the group members treat the group's values as their own.

### **2.1. Is HRM as a 'change agent', a 'universal wisdom'?**

The saying 'management is management' (Schneider & Barsoux, 2003) brought changes from HRM perspective in:

- strategic planning selection, socialization, training;
- job structure;
- ICT at a broad scale;
- a normative system of control.

Facing, on one hand, global interaction and on the other one, local adaptation, HRM has:

- served the overall needs of the individuals;
- accomplished service provision tasks;
- assumed different important roles and activities.

### **2.2. HRM in teachers of languages' education compared to organizational HRM.**

At a European level, HRM for teachers of languages has:

- developed the knowledge-based practices;
- protected and improved the quality of integrated academic study and the practical experience of teaching;
- ensured the flexible and modular delivery of initial and in-service education
- issued an explicit framework for teaching practice and how to work with a mentor and understand the value of mentoring (Kelly & Grenfell, 2005).

All these aspects have transformed the Romanian educational system of teaching/learning modern languages through:

- career planning;
- performance appraisal;
- peer evaluation;
- auditing innovation precesses.

During the past decades, the dual ideas of the vertical organization of tasks (hierarchy) and the rule-bound execution of tasks (bureaucracy) continued to exist, establishing not only functional but also

social relationships. The HRM modernization in the Romanian languages teachers' education has included:

- reducing administrative and financial burdens for the teachers' professional development;
- minimizing start-up requirements and speedy settlements;
- systemic monitoring;

Exploring the nature of change and the individual implications in a transparent HRM for Romanian languages teachers has imposed:

- evaluation and reorganization of the level structures and the motivational mechanisms;
- solving problems of external adaptation and internal integration;
- behavior shift towards society as a whole, parents and children within an institutional based framework.

The learner-centered concept has led to:

- students' interaction within the modern taught language and their improved communication;
- an increase in the quality of teaching services and the professional development through interagency collaboration;
- students' satisfaction with the European and national assessment of their linguistic competences.

Participative management should be the democratic style of HRM and has proved itself as more effective in the following situations:

- for those who have 'frontline' knowledge and experience;
- for those involved in a decision-making process, where they become committed.

### **3. In Romania, HRM for Romanian teachers of languages has envisaged new competencies, falling into categories like:**

- leading and developing peer observation;
- empowering and encouraging change;
- building shared vision.

Should emotional labour – defined as 'the act of emotions during interactions with others at work' (Buchanan & Huczyski, 2017) – monitor the employees' observable behaviors? Such a significant element, meant to make a difference between the surface teaching acting and the deep teaching acting, might make teachers respond with authentic feelings of empathy and concern, according to the teaching situation. Certain researchers refer to the so called models in teaching. If we were to choose among the craft model, the theory-practice model or the reflective model (the shift from product oriented theories to process-oriented theories of learning teaching and teacher learning), the reflective model [Akbari, 2007] seems to have been the most accepted one by both students and teachers.

Romanian HRM for teachers of languages targeted:

- partnership for mutual class observation and peer review;
- personal SWOT analysis;
- rank of priorities and action taking;
- training needs analysis for long-term development education.

The provision factors in Romanian language teachers' training/education have been international and national agencies, national official bodies and institutions, academic/professional journals, professional associations like the Romanian Association of Mentors (AsMeRo) or the Romanian Association of Teachers of English (RATE), affiliated to IATEFL.

There have been three directions that have been followed by the Romanian HRM for Romanian teachers of modern languages:

- developing a sense of autonomy and responsibility towards the teachers' needs for their

- professional evolution;
- developing and improving possible training projects (an example was the complex national training course conducted by the British Council Romania together the Ministry of National Education between 1991-2000);
- generating stronger students' achievement through high efficacy beliefs.

Recent studies underlined 'a significant correlation among the three variables of Teacher Reflection, Sense of Efficacy, and Intellectual Excitement (IE) as a component of teaching style. (Akbari & Allvar, 2010).

### **3.1. Very many voices recognized that 'culture is the most important influence on management' (Schneider & Barsoux, 2003).**

They added that culture has been neglected as a presence and a force. Entering the world of teaching, beliefs and values represent a bridge across cultures. Still, differences in approaches to decision-making can be viewed as cultural preferences for hierarchy or formalization, time and change. What is very obvious for the businesses world, where 'pulling together' might oppose the pursuing of individual well-being, is the fact that the teaching world is evolving from different cultural assumptions.

The influence of national culture on the development and the transfer of HRM practices, especially training, performance appraisal and career development can serve as a basis for dialogue and the balance between global integration and local adaptation of HRM. When using the terms 'global' and 'local' I am referring to what is 'international' as opposed to what is specifically 'national' in HRM for Romanian teachers of languages. The national context and not only the cultural background may launch the strategic use of HRM practices. The calculative approach, also referred as the 'hard' and the collaborative approach or the 'soft', imposed a choice that might lead to the improvement of teachers' motivation. Passing from the individual's needs to the type of relationships between key actors (central and local authorities) and management, a balance should emerge (Schultz, 2000). Converging policies, bringing variety and at the same time taking into account local practices, teaching training teams create their own working culture and HRM.

Romanian teachers of English succeeded to set up temporary and permanent training groups- project teams, steering committees and boards - designed to formulate or implement strategies. The two main professional associations – already mentioned in the article – AsMeRo and RATE are the image of the team work at a national level. A very interesting training course I attended years ago, was organized by the British Council with European mixed training teams. Its theme Developing as a Teacher Educator brought together trainers from Romania, Hungary, former Yugoslavia and trainees from Romania, Poland, Croatia, Latvia, Senegal. Different expertise and perspectives, behavior, values and beliefs made possible a multicultural approach, encouraging cohesiveness and communication, providing development opportunities for the team members to improve their understanding of international aspects of a teaching career.

Even if the 'team' approach might remind the communist ideology that promoted collectivism, a balance between the individual and the collective effort is necessary. Managing the teaching tasks as well as the teaching process itself, would ensure efficient and effective solutions in an international context and an appreciation of the impact of culture on receptiveness to training teams. The European Union objective regarding its citizens' linguistic competences in at least two modern languages besides their mother tongue has been attained not only through training courses but after having changed the national curricula for modern languages, the textbooks, the teaching practice framework, and after having improved national and international partnerships in projects.

Bringing together various perspectives, responding to challenges and changes, encouraging teams to make decisions, could shape a new HRM in Romanian teachers of languages education.

Still, adapting solutions that are of external source does not mean that solutions to problems of internal integration are to be neglected. Finding a balance between the individual and the collective effort is cropping 'appropriate strategies to manage the task as well as the process' (Schneider & Barsoux, 2003).

## 2. CONCLUSIONS

Management is very important and the HRM in Romanian teachers of English education is perhaps to be compared to the 'undertow of the ocean'. That is why recognizing the power of cultural influences brings two 'myths' that are very close to 'truths':

cultural differences seem to be disappearing while they still exist;

- management practices tend to become universal.

From such a perspective several ideas are to be displayed:

- the European arena should interact with the national one when referring to HRM and professional development;
- HRM reforms should target different levels bringing communication between institutions and teachers, efficiency of the education/training programs and regulatory impact assessment;
- the necessity of elaborating a new motivation and a teaching assessment code at a national level has been stated by both the employers and the employees of the educational system.

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