

Chapter 11

HR Audits and Planning

Guidance Note For Students

The activities that follow are designed to be used with *An Introduction to HRM: An Integrated Approach*. Read chapter eleven, which provides both the answers in easy to follow sections and guidance on other areas of the book that can help you with your studies.

Learning Outcomes

After reading and completing the activities in this chapter you should be able to:

- 1. Recognise the importance of HR planning.**
- 2. Understand the value of auditing HR activities in relation to planning new HR interventions.**
- 3. Evaluate the appropriate use of a variety of HR research methods.**
- 4. Appreciate the significance and application of critical evaluative organisational studies.**
- 5. Understand and apply the REACT system to HR planning.**
- 6. Understand and apply the SMARTA system to HR planning.**
- 7. Design an HR audit (individual or group activity) to conduct both primary and secondary research into an organisation's HR planning and implementation.**
- 8. Apply business research to identify HR issues in organisations.**

Note to Students:**Can You Tell Me All The Answers Please?**

In common with the vast majority of students, you want to do really well in your study programme. There are grades to attain and employers to impress...

You may like to believe that there are perfect answers that can give you perfect grades. Indeed, if this were an elementary mathematics handbook you would be correct. However, with people simple sums do not always produce neat solutions.

So, can I reassure you that I do not have all the answers to everything, and neither does anyone else! What I would encourage you to do is engage in discussions with your fellow students, read different writers ideas and listen to your lecturers. Your lecturers have invested many hours, years in doing what you are setting out to do so they are excellent guides to help you succeed. Learn to think for yourself and integrate ideas across disciplines and subject areas. Think outside the boxes.

Guidance Note For Students

There are key messages in the following HRM In Action about the importance of involving people in projects and valuing and including their input. By respecting a person we show a willingness to acknowledge his/ her ability to contribute towards agreed purposes and plans. Recognising that you can not always get everything you would like and that to gain agreement requires a flexible approach. Even if you cannot always agree, try to retain mutual respect.

HRM In Action: Ownership

Please read the following management evaluation. It was sent to me by Will Porter (A senior IT project manager) following several meetings and discussions on HR and management performance.

Mike,

I thought I should send you a quote...

So here goes:

When an organisation sets out to improve, people will recognise the need to improve both process and behaviour. The problem is how do you achieve this? Quite often, the need to make a change comes at a time of crisis.

People are too busy trying to do the job, and have little time to talk about change, yet alone implement it. So how do you break the cycle? I believe it is a big mistake to launch a program with stated goals of process improvement or behaviour change. These can be perceived as patronising, or disconnected from reality, with an overhanging fear of the 'process police' getting ready to pounce. I have found that you can introduce both process improvement and a change in behaviour by focusing on ownership. First of all be clear on what you aim to achieve and why (this must be a business imperative to have teeth!). However, very early on identify key stakeholders and ensure they agree there is a need and impetus for change. The big question of 'how' is then discussed. The key to success will be good facilitation, drawing out the good ideas, and bringing them to the fore. These ideas for change will have come from those affected. They will therefore be 'their' ideas. They will own them. The ideas can be tested to see how well they contribute to achieving what you aim to achieve, and will help validate whether or not this is correct. Ownership then continues as the team (which you should now be) work out how these ideas can be implemented. Actions can be identified, and assigned (owned). This should not take much time. The ideas should already be ripe within those contributing. It is your job just to bring them out. If things are taking too long, do you have the right people, or are you doing it the right way? Beware of getting it wrong, as the second time around is much harder!

With ownership established from the beginning you gain the following:

- 1) Buy-in from those involved. The ideas are their ideas.

2) Peer pressure from other owners. If they are delivering their actions, others must as well. This assumes the methods of facilitation include suitable team building.

3) Accountability for achieving the agreed aims. The ideas are not your ideas; they are the ideas of those participating. If the idea does not achieve the agreed aims, it will be clear who is responsible. This is further incentive for those involved to make the ideas work 4) The ideas and methods of implementation will improve on their own over time. Given the clear accountability described above, those responsible for delivering the agreed aims must be given enough leeway (ownership) to evolve the ideas and methods of implementation.

All of the above must be underpinned by appropriate methods of communication and management. Standard project management practice already provides a good enough definition of how this achieved.

That's it Mike. It's very long. Feel free to edit, but if you do so, please let me know what you propose.

Good luck with the book.

Will

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think the writer regards 'ownership as so important?
2. Who/ what are the 'process police'? Why do you think some organisations may appear to emphasise process over worker/ employee ownership of projects/ change?
3. Why do you think regarding changes and new plans 'the second time around is much harder'?
4. What does this case study suggest about the value of team working and involving people in decisions?

5. Evaluate the role of HR input in developing the teams and managers' knowledge and skills in facilitating meetings. (see chapter 12).

Guidance Note For Students

Research requires careful preparation and planning. It is certainly *not* an assignment to be rushed in the week before submission!

If you are required to conduct a research based project as part of your course make sure you allocate sufficient time to prepare and conduct the work. For example, if you do decide to use a questionnaire then the questions should be set out in a way that is unambiguous and clear. This takes time and it is very useful to take advice from your supervisor/ course tutor. (Read the research guide in chapter 11)

Exercise: HR is OK Here, Isn't it?

A business student was asked to make a study of the HR planning. S/he knew that primary research would be required so s/he contacted the head office of the organisation where s/he was working part-time and made arrangements to interview the HR manager. However, because the hand in date for the course work was several weeks away and s/he was doing the project alone there was no peer pressure to make a start on the work. Unfortunately, the lack of progress also meant the student felt too embarrassed to attend the workshops on HR auditing which the course tutor had provided...

However, the student was confident about the assignment because s/he had attended some lectures on general research methods for another business management unit, vaguely recalling something about qualitative and quantitative approaches, but not the key details...For example, one of his questions asked:

‘ As you know, strategic HR is absolutely essential to modern successful organisations. Please tell me how many months/ years you spend on staff consultation for major change programmes.

1. 1 year and over
2. 1 year
3. 9 months - 1 year
4. 6 months - 9 months
5. 3 months - 6 months
6. 3 months

The respondents found the question confusing.

As the hand in date for the project drew closer s/he decided it was time to do some interviews with the HR manager and her assistant. The HR team noticed that the student was somewhat less than well prepared for the meeting, but were keen to help out with the project. Given that the questions were so specific it was easy to give the kind of answers the student was looking for without the need to qualify their responses. For example, they answered the above question with D) 6 months – 9 months. After the student had left the assistant asked the HR manager why she had given that answer? The reality was that no formal consultations had taken place. The HR manager replied: We did talk to a few people informally and it took around three months to set the policies in place. I wasn't sure whether to select E) 3 months - 6 months, or D) 6 months - 9 months so I opted for D because it took us around six months to complete the compulsory redundancies.

Discussion Questions

1. What were the main mistakes the student made in planning the research?
2. Why do you think the research failed to obtain more accurate material about what was really happening in the organisation?
3. In what way, if any, might the project have been more likely to succeed had the student been working in a team?

Practicing HRM: Organisational Audit

Title: Choose *two* subjects from the chapter headings, which can be found at the front of this book. Select an organisation you are interested in and write a management report critically evaluating what influence, if any, your chosen subjects has had on that organisation's HR performance. (Details on management report writing are contained in chapter 12)

Chapter Summary

HR planning is an important step in improving organisational performance. The use of tools such as *REACT* and *SMARTA* provide practical frameworks for analysing progress with a step-by-step system. The HR audit design outlined in this chapter can assist a management team and or students of HR to produce a more objective report, based on tools that have been refined in the academically rigorous environment of social science research. As such the results are likely to offer a more reliable source of information than less formal organisational research. The student of HR is therefore better able to analyse human resources issues. The HR managers who receive an audit report will be in a better position to make informed decisions regarding their recommendations for improving staff performance.

Guidance Note For Students

The references are a useful guide to seek out other sources for background reading and ideas for your course work. Universities and colleges expect you to read more than just the set text. Although HRM An Integrated Approach provides a complete course for you, it is important to recognise that there are

many other opinions, ideas on HR and management in general. In your assignments and activities you will be expected to refer to a range of literature. Go to your Learning Resources Centre and read/ view academic literature and expand your knowledge of HR and Management.

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