

Conflicting Role Demands of HR Managers in the Transitory Economy of Pakistan

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Abstract

Policies and practices of human resource management are relevant to contemporary Pakistan. This paper explores the role of HR managers in the transitory economy of Pakistan during the process of introducing US-American HRM practices into organizations tied to local norms. Based on an intensive case study of a local enterprise actively striving to participate in the global economy, we analyze how HR managers handle the tension between the demands of modern HRM systems and local moralities. This study draws three main conclusions: first, HR manager face extreme pressure to accommodate particular employees in HRM practices of selection, job appraisal, and promotion; second, HR managers use various tactics to diffuse the external pressure; and third, locally trained HR manager are more successful in handling human resource issues than foreign trained manager. This paper contributes to the debate of national culture impact on management practices. Our results help academics and practitioners to understand the critical role of human resource manager for making organizations successful.

“Our role is not to control references and follow strict policy but we are here to regulate references through appropriate interpretation of policy for managing pressures especially on external and internal (promotion) selection.” (Senior HR Manager)

“We are here to make ways for systematic adjustment of the references. Despite great efforts, we could not completely eliminate the impact of references. Now we have created basic selection criteria so that no candidate with reference could qualify without at least meeting the minimum level. It is because we have to take work from all the employees. It is true that we cannot deny all the references but at the same time we cannot entertain all the references. Therefore, we have followed the middle way by adopting the basic criteria of specific qualifications, written test and panel interview for all the regular jobs. I accept that these strategies have not completely controlled the influence of references in the selection process but it to some extent has helped us to maintain standards. In case, if the referred candidate does not meet the basic requirements, we can present a solid reason to the reference person for not selecting the candidate. Somehow, this helps us to save ourselves and the organization from reciprocal grievances.” (HR Professional)

Introduction

Like many other transitory economies, Pakistan is adopting Western management practices mainly originating from the USA (Brewster, 1995) in order to better perform on globalized markets (Budhwar & Debrah, 2009; Mariappandar, 2005; Tayeb, 1995). Particularly in the area of HRM, the implementation of such management practices face local social moralities which may lead to substantial tensions due to incompatibilities at various levels. Inevitably, this leads to some kind of adaptations of these HRM practices. For example, in a study of HRM practices in Pakistan, Khilji (2003) highlights substantial micro and macro level adjustments in HR practices in local as well as foreign organizations working in Pakistan.

This situation points towards two broader issues: the relevance of national culture for business operations and the handling of conflicting role demands stemming from the cultural and economic sphere. Regarding the former, the argument that the national culture is less relevant to the contemporary organizations due to global cultural forces (Appadurai, 1996; Khilji, 2004; Lenartowicz & Kendall, 2001) has been countered by evidence of the prevailing impact of national culture on human resource management practices (Aycan, 2001; Budhwar & Debrah, 2009; Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002; Davila & Elvira, 2005; Jackson, Amaeshi, & Yavuz, 2008; Khilji, 2003; Mariappandar, 2005; Newman & Nollen, 1996; Noorderhaven & Tidjani, 2001; Saini & Budhwar, 2004; Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998; Siengthai & Bechter, 2005; Wasti, 1998). Regarding potentially conflicting role demands, Shaules (2007) highlights the issue of cultural diversity in the contemporary world. Likewise authors such as Trompenaars (1997) and Adler (2002) point towards the double edged pressures on management to follow international standards of operations without denying relevant social moralities.

In Pakistan, no substantial changes in the social norms have been witnessed despite almost two decades of economic deregulation (Khilji, 2003; Subohi, 2009, March 8). This setting has created a very complex situation for HR managers and professionals. They have to implement and execute modern Western HRM practices while dealing with an organizational culture tied to and Pakistanis socialized on the principles of collective self-identity with in-group and out group behavioral assumptions, personal penetration and reciprocal obligation (Lyon, 2002).

These micro and macro factors put paradoxical pressure on the HR managers and professionals. At the core, two crucial problems emerge: first, how do human resource managers handle the conflicting demands posed by the management system, senior managers, colleagues, friends and relatives? And second, what kind of HR managers successfully handles human resource management issues under these circumstances and continue in their career with this firm?

These are the two leading questions for this paper. In answering them, we will first provide a brief review of globalisation and basic approaches towards HRM, i.e. a more universalist ('practices') and a more contextualist ('cultural sensitive') view of HRM. Then we present a literature review on the relevance of modern HRM practices in Pakistan, the role of HR managers and social role as well as role conflict theory. We will then outline our research methodology and research results in the next sections. Implication of the study and future research direction will be offered in the last section.

Conceptual Background

Globalisation

The globalisation approach closely matches with the previous debates on the impact of industrialisation on organisational convergence (Pugh & Hickson, 1997). However, while the early 'convergence' stance was more linked to structural aspects such as technological and economic change, some of the present approaches emphasize that globalization leads to a convergence of business culture and policies. It is argued that in the contemporary globalized world MNCs are becoming 'placeless' as national identity is changed in global corporations by the commitment to a single unified global mission (Ohmae, 1990). In the same vein, research in strategic management (Whittington & Mayer, 2000) highlights that the organizational structures of global firms will certainly follow the Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism with a multidivisional organizational structure. Consistently, it is argued that an increase in globally operating companies will enhance the likeliness of companies using similar tools (Bakan, 2004; Hirsch-Kreinsen, 1998; Hunt, 2000). As a result, MNCs promote integrated international standards and resist pressures to be locally responsive (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick, & Kerr, 1995; Doz, Hamel, & Prahalad, 1986; Kim & Gray, 2005; Yip, 1995). Such global strategies encourage greater homogenization to create greater efficiency (Kostova & Roth, 2002)

On the other hand, there is a strong stream in the literature pointing out the importance of national and cultural specifics. From a theoretical perspective, arguments are raised for both convergence and divergence. Arguing at the macro-level, different forms of capitalism (Amable, 2003; Hall & Soskice, 2001) as well as the importance of national business systems (Whitley, 1999) emphasize the differences in the modern world, its institutional change (Djelic & Quack, 2003) and the limits of globalization (Guillén, 2001). From the cultural perspective, national and regional cultures reflect substantial differences in norms and values (Hofstede, 1980; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) that will also make convergence at all levels highly unlikely.

Best Practices and Cultural Sensitive View to HRM

The globalisation debate has also influenced the debate about HRM. In the 1980s and 1990s, the financial crisis of Japan has given way to the promotion of Anglo-Saxon, mainly US-American, approaches to HRM to support international competitiveness (Geppert & Williams, 2006). The current supremacy of US-American HRM perspectives forms part of a historical debate that focuses on market-based juxtaposition and the direct transfer of US-American HRM practices by US-American MNCs together with their imitation by other firms interested to get market success (Lane, 2003; Lucio & et al, 2001; Mayrhofer & Brewster, 2003; Tayeb, 1998) makes a similar point when identifying the reasons for utilizing US-American HRM practices in developing economies. The entrepreneurs in the developing countries use US-American HRM practice with the intentions to gain competitive advantage in the international market (Tayeb, 1998). However, they cannot achieve these targets until they have aligned it with cultural moralities within a national context (Kanungo & Jaeger, 1993; Luthans, 1998; Mariappandar, 2005; Sinha & Kao, 1988).

To explore national cultural influence on HRM, researchers have studied the design and implementation of HRM policies and practices across a broad range of cultural contexts (for an overview see Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2012) An underlying theme of much of the work on comparative HRM is that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to transfer HRM policies and practices between two countries with different national cultures and/or

institutional settings (like Beechler & Yang, 1994). For instance, implementing an individualistic HRM system (such as merit-based promotion) in a collectivist culture may face problems (Ramamoorthy & Carroll, 1998). With the similar perspective, national cultural distance has been taken as an indicator to envisage the transferability of HRM systems across countries (Kogut & Singh, 1988; Liu, 2004; Shenkar, 2001). Regardless of the existence of intense debates about the cross-cultural transfer of HRM policies and practices, researchers generally agree on two points: first, it is important to differentiate between HRM policies and HRM practices; and second, while some HRM policies may be similar across MNC subsidiaries, at least the actual practices are – and have to be – responsive to local conditions and hence vary across cultures (Khilji, 2003; Tayeb, 1998).

This phenomenon of variability of HRM practices in different cultural contexts has initiated interest among scholars and researcher to identify a set of universally applicable HRM best practices that can be successfully utilised in all cultural contexts. In HRM terms, the globalization versus localization debate is reflected in the debate about a universalist vs. contextualist approach towards HRM (see Mayrhofer, Sparrow, & Brewster, 2012). While the former is in search of internationally best practices (Von Glinow, Drost, & Teagarden, 2002), others disprove this idea and contend that practices have to be consciously modified according to the local context to get positive results (Marchington & Grugulis, 2000; Newman & Nollen, 1996; Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998) and suggest that congruence between human resource management practices and national culture is critical for organizational survival (Fisher, 1989; Goshal & Bartlett, 1997; Lu & Bjorkman, 1996; Martin & Beaumont, 1999; Monk, 1996; Pucik, 1988; Rosenzweig & Nohria, 1994; Rosenzweig & Singh, 1991; Wasti, 1998).

Relevance of Modern HRM Practices to Pakistan

HRM policies and practices mainly coming from the US are being adopted in developing countries, though they are altered to accommodate cultural sensitivities due to local socioeconomic, political and religious factors (Schneider & Barsoux, 1997; Tayeb, 2001). Developing countries view this as a tool for satisfying operational management of human resources. Researchers argue that social, political, structural and organizational factors influence HRM practices in developing countries (Al-Hamadi, Budhwar, & Shipton, 2007; Budhwar & Debrah, 2009; Budhwar & Debrah, 2001; Khilji, 2003; Khilji & Wang, 2007; Mellahi, 2007; Mylloni, Harzing, & Mirza, 2004; Namazie & Tayeb, 2006; Saher, 2010; Sparrow & Wu, 1998).

This phenomenon is particularly true for organizations operating in Pakistan (Bjorkman, 2004; Jamil, 2005; Khilji, 2003; Khilji & Wang, 2006; Storey, 1995). Regarding HRM in Pakistan, Khilji (1999) and Saddique (1997) have presented evidence about the restructuring of the original personnel department as human resource division in the majority of the businesses in Pakistan. Yet, only few organizations follow an integrated approach to HRM with the majority using a 'piece meal approach' to HRM (Khilji, 1999). Khilji (2003) argues that concepts of HRM are relevant to Pakistan in a similar manner as in a developed country. Furthermore, she surprisingly found that HRM practices are similar between multinational (though policies are different in this case) and local organizations in Pakistan and points out that "HR managershanded a policy ...and had been asked to implement it to the local subsidiary after adapting it to local environment" (p. 121). However, national phenomena such as an in group life, strong dependence need, respect for authority, dominance of an elite class, culture of broken promises, and network of power relations

highly influence execution of HRM policies and practices in Pakistan (Islam, 2005; Kazi, 2003; Khilji, 2003; Saher, 2010, 2011).

Social life in Pakistan is group-focused (Lyon, 1993) and social system is 'family centered' (Khilji, 2004: 142). As a member of joint and extended families, a Pakistani is socialized among various categories of relatives and interaction takes place according to asymmetrical relations. Kids are trained to respond to kinship categories, rely on them and look at their individual self-identity as a part of these kinship categories (Lyon, 2002). In this social system, individuals feel strong dependence need and obligations to take care of the other group member (Khilji, 2002). Consistently, this gives way to strong in-group-out-group identities; and group members are given favours where out group members are treated barely (Khilji, 2002).

The respect for authority is one of the main features of Pakistani social system. The eldest male being the head of the family most of the time decides on the behalf of the whole family (Lyon, 2002). Though, favorable decisions can be attained with the help of personal penetration (someone close to him help to get favourable decision) (for details see Saher, 2011). Nonetheless, when interaction with people beyond the kin becomes indispensable then family roles are transposed on these people for their social integration into the family (Khilji, 2003; Lyon, 2002). Consequently, non-family interaction is also maintained on the embedded principles (intervention, indebtedness, loyalty and reciprocation) of kin relation. These familial (and ethnic) based social networks formulate network of power relationships in Pakistani society and influence private as well as public spheres. These network of power relations are steer by some powerful-elite figure (Lyon, 2002; Saher, 2010). These basic features of Pakistani social system are embedded in the colonial legacy of the civil-military and landed elite and are perceptible in workplace settings and . In line with this general feature of Pakistani society, various employee groups based on familial-ethnic networks (functioning on an in group/out group assumption) can be witnessed in the organization. In this regard, Khilji (2003) sheds light on the existence of this kind of networking among the workers and between workers and management and its substantial impact on the human resource management practices of selection, promotion, better placement and compensation in Pakistan. A similar kind of situation is highlighted by Kanungo and Mendonca (1994) in Indian organization, where a self-reinforcing circle prevails through which political and familial contacts influence selection, promotion and transfer practices. Sparrow and Budhwar (1997) point towards the value of networking in obtaining work, securing promotion and advancing pay in Indian organizations. The deregulation of Indian economy and global linkages has brought about visible changes in the organizational structure and attitudes of management towards HRM policies and practices (Budhwar, 2001; Saini & Budhwar, 2004). Chatterjee (2007), has highlighted the impact of local socio-cultural phenomenon on managers when they are facing the complexities of global realities. Saher (2010, 2011) illustrates this for the management in Pakistan. HR managers have a challenging role: to support a consistent global HRM system while, at the same time respond sensitively to local cultural norms. However, research in comparative human resource management on the role of HR managers is very limited, an issue we address in the next section.

Changing Role of HR Manager and Role Conflict

Contemporary shift from HRM to SHRM has changed the role of HR manager from an administrator to a strategic partner (Nicklaus, 2007). This changing phenomenon has attracted the interest of many researchers (Caroll, 1991; Storey, 1992; Tyson, 1987; Ulrich,

1997). They have explored the changing role of HR manager and grouped his activities to clarify the confusion between traditional and new responsibilities (Nicklaus, 2007). Ulrich (1997) has presented a two dimension HR manager's role model. This model grouped the HR manager's role into four categories: 1) Administrative expert, 2) employee champion, 3) strategic partner, and 4) change agent (Ulrich, 1997). Among these four groups the first two identify traditional whereas the last two depict the new role demands on an HR manager as a strategic partner. In this new role, HR manager is expected to actively contribute to developments of strategic HR issues and HR objectives in consistent with business objectives (Booselie & Paauwe, 2005; Caldwell, 2003; Ulrich, 1997). But interestingly, research on the roles of the HR manager contends that HR manager are still playing the traditional role in most of the organization (Conner & Ulrich, 1996; Raub, Alvarez, & Khanna, 2006; Wright, McMahan, Snell, & Gerhart, 2001). Khilji and Wang (2006) identify the reason why HR managers are not performing new role and sticking to the traditional role. Khilji and Wang (2006) reveal that this because HRM practices in most of the organizations are only planned by the HR management and never implemented. Researcher like Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler (1997) explored the factors that can enhance the chance for the organization to adopt and implement HRM practices effectively. In this regard, the competencies of HR manager are identified as a major influencing factor to effectively implement HRM practices in the firms.

However, all these studies come from developed economies with a more or less developed SHRM perspective. The HR manager's role is of critical value especially in the transitory economies where s/he often has to implement modern HRM policies and practices while being sensitive to local cultural norms. Our research in particular explores, so far ignored, HR managers who face and handle such conflicting role demands, using the transitory economy of Pakistan as an example.

To further develop our framework for the effective handling of our topic at hand, we would like to employ role conflict theory. Role conflict theory has its roots in sociological theory of Social Role. Role is an expected behavior of a person on a position. A person can have different roles to perform in one situation due to her/his various positions in this situation. Consistently, a person can experience role conflict due to inconsistent expectations about suitable behavior indifferent roles (Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958; Van de Vliert, 1981). This situation give way to a subjective experience of distress which can be lessened by opting one of the three options: 1) choosing one of the roles, 2) avoiding the conflict, or (c) compromising between the various roles (Gross et al., 1958; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek, 1964). The choice mechanism is explained by behaving according to the dominant role and ignoring the other, such as doing what one superior requests and not meeting the request of another superior. The avoidance mechanism refers to leaving the field, quitting. Compromise includes finding a way to meet both demands simultaneously.

Model of the study

Prior studies have acknowledged the potential for role conflict of HR managers (Caldwell, 2003). Yet, the existence of conflicting role demands of HR manager, its consequences and strategies to manage this phenomenon in transitory economies has hardly been empirically explored.

Our study attempts to fill this research gap in line with the following research model (see Figure 1).

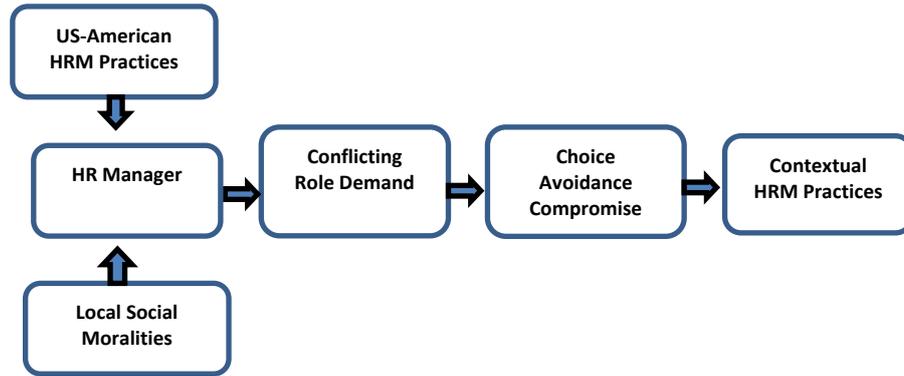


Figure 1: Role conflict model of HR managers in transitory economies

Methodology

We draw on material from a case study of a medical corporation located in the capital city of Pakistan. Qualitative data on human resource management practices was collected through an extensive field work of almost two and half years between 2004 and 2007. This organization was selected due to three main reasons. First, it was founded in the early 1990s when the comprehensive program of de-regulation of Pakistani economy was launched in Pakistan (Asian Development Bank, 1999). Second, the existence of an HR department and the implementation of HR practices since 1994 have made this organization an ideal field for this research. Third, its location in the capital city of Pakistan as a center of the power play makes it very suitable to further explore the topic at hand.

In the field, different research methods like in-depth interviews, key informants, case studies, and formal document analysis were used to collect data. Three types of key informants, i.e. managers, HR professionals, and workers were selected to get a ‘holistic’ perspective about the HRM practices in the organization. The selection of these key informants was mainly based on their interest in the research, willingness to provide information and availability. Sixty face to face interviews were also conducted with an equal number of male and female employees belonging to various levels and segments of the target organization. An interview guide was developed to acquire more focused and relevant data; probing technique was additionally incorporated for stimulating the respondent to produce more information. The length of interviewing varied from 35-55 minutes depending on the willingness of the respondent. The interviews were administered mainly in Urdu but later the essence of the interviews was translated into English.

The case study method was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the prevailing situation in the firm. The cases were selected randomly on the basis of their relevance to the understudied issues besides the availability of information. Document analysis, especially the analysis of the HR manual, was additionally conducted to acquire data about the HR rules and regulations, thus analyzing the official view on major organizational issues.

Results

The founding members of the firm wanted to develop an organization in Pakistan meeting international standards in terms of management. With this intention, this firm was

founded by a team of professionals having almost one decade of US-American exposure and working experience. At the same time, employees maintained direct or indirect relationship with the founding members or with each other. In the second year of its existence, HRM practices based on popular US-American HRM concepts were introduced to solve various human resource issues in the company.

This had effects at various hierarchical levels. Both operational managers and workers felt uneasy about execution of these practices because HRM practices were impersonal and directly in contrast of the obligatory management system (supervisor obliged the worker through personalized mode of conduct whereas workers obliged their supervisors by accepting their authority). Senior management faced lots of pressure from within and outside the organization because of this decision to implement these HRM practices. As workers and managers consider HRM practices lengthy and bureaucratic procedures whereas power figures outside the organization can't easily penetrate and influence the HR decisions.

Pressures on HR professionals while implementing HRM practices

In this general organizational setup and management style, HR managers faced double edged pressures due to the conflicting demands of seniors and co-workers. On the one hand, senior management pressured them to follow the new policies. On the other hand, workers wished to continue in the familiar ways. Their colleagues in various department and workers, too, influenced HR professionals to extend favors to job applicants and current employees of their liking when doing HR work. Generally, HR managers resisted when there were some serious gaps between the official policy and the action requested by those trying to exert influence. However, in case of less serious discrepancies, favors were granted to the recommended applicants and employees. In fact, the use of reference (i.e. the recommendation of a resourceful person) to settle an issue is a common phenomenon in Pakistani society (Lyon, 2002). Almost all the managers as well as employees in the organization, not speaking of the broader society, are accustomed to it. The following case illustrates this.

Case 1: Personal Intervention to Exert Pressure on HR Manager

Mr. Abid Elahi, Associate Manager of Human Resources, was in a meeting when the phone rang. The voice on the other end introduced himself as Mr. Ahsan. He immediately mentioned that Shah Sahib (Senior Manager of Finance in the hospital) had given a reference for him. The purpose of his phone call was to inquire about the result of his job interview two weeks before. Abid asked to call him back in thirty minutes when the appropriate information would be available. Abid then called his assistant, Mr. Ibrar, who entered the room and preferred to stand beside him rather than sit on the chair, patiently waiting for his senior to acknowledge his presence. Abid looked up and in a friendly tone asked about the selection case of Mr. Ahsan who was recommended by Shah Sahib. Ibrar told his superior that Mr. Ahsan's test was fine but his interview did not go well. He added that in front of the selection team Mr. Ahsan had mentioned his future plans for study and had also inquired about the hospital's leave policy. Ibrar further elaborated that Mr. Ahsan had presented an aura of non-seriousness in front of the selection team. Abid pointed out to Ibrar that Shah Sahib had particularly supported Mr. Ahsan's application. On this Ibrar exclaimed, 'Why didn't you tell me earlier? Anyhow, now you have to talk to Sadia as she wrote Mr. Ahsan's report.'

Meanwhile the phone bell rang again and it was Mr. Ahsan. With a stern voice, Abid asked him about disclosing his intentions to study further and go on 'leave' in front of the

interview committee. Then he said: 'I had clearly forbidden you to mention such things in front of the interview committee, but you did not obey. Now you have to wait since the selection committee did not recommend you.' Abid finally said: 'I am sorry, but I cannot do anything' and placed the phone down. Abid then picked up the phone again, dialed a number, and asked the respondent about what exactly had happened in Mr. Ahsan's interview. He was told that on the day of the interview Mr. Ahsan had walked in with his friend carrying a mobile phone in his hand and after mentioning the reference of Shah Sahib insisted that the interview organizers interview him right away, without considering the long line of interviewees already awaiting their turns.

The moment Abid put the phone on the cradle, it rang again. It was Mr. Ahsan, who wanted Abid to talk to his father. Abid informed the father that even though his son was intelligent and had passed the entry test for the job, he still had to wait for an opening. Abid once again acknowledged the reference of Shah Sahib and explained, 'we are not bestowing a favor upon your son. He is truly capable of securing a job in our firm, but right now we are short of posts so he has to wait for new openings.'

Finally, Abid hung up the phone and turned his attention to Ibrar, who throughout the conversation stayed in Abid's office, now sitting in a chair. Abid said to Ibrar in a concerned voice: 'Yar...., do something for him!' The phone rang again. Abid picked it up: 'Gi Shah Sahib, I am fine. Your referred person is most welcome, Sir, but he failed in front of the interview team by saying that he wanted to continue his studies and asked about the leave policy as well; and on the top of that, he had a conflict with the Filipino who was organizing the interviewees. I hope that you can now better understand our position. What we can do, Sir? Yes Sir, I am telling him the same: to wait for one to two months. We will take him since he has passed the interview test. No problem, Sir. Do not worry, we are here, Sir.'

After hanging up the phone, he looked at his assistant and said; 'Ibrar, find a way out, you know that Shah Sahib will never forgive us if we do not hire the person he recommended; and whenever Shah Sahib gets a chance, he will reciprocate this'. Still, Ibrar was upset and said, 'I know this, but the guy (Mr. Ahsan) has been showing off his relationship with Shah Sahib and unfortunately he will not be able to adjust to the system, so he will remain a problem for us. We are not only obliged to Shah Sahib. We also have to run the system and this guy does not fit into it'.

Abid looked at him thoughtfully and said: 'You are right, but we cannot afford to offend Shah Sahib. Mr. Ahsan's father is an ex-colleague and friend of Shah Sahib; and rejecting his son will be an issue of Shah Sahib's respect. So we have to find a way out; otherwise we will suffer. Please look into the matter and make an end of it. If the documents are relevant and complete, we cannot deny this wish to Shah Sahib'. Ibrar said: 'OK, Sir, I will see how it can be managed' and left the room. It was witnessed during the field work that the use of a reference, i.e. Personal recommendations, and personal intervention, i.e. the identification of a relevant person in the decision making process and finding a reference person to use him/her for getting a favorable decision by exerting pressure on the relevant decision maker, was a common feature of the prevailing organizational culture. Although the management was trying hard to decrease its influence, these (personal intervention and reference as organization cultural patterns had significant impact on management decisions and HR processes. While discussing his true role in the department, a senior HR professional mentioned that "our role is not to control references and follow strict policy but we are here to regulate references through appropriate interpretation of policy for managing pressures especially on selection".

Beyond confirming the substantial role of references in HR practices, this finding highlights two further points. First, HR professionals' role in the firm is to legally accommodate these references; and second, the highest level of reference pressure was experienced during the selection process. Actually the way a person is inducted has a major influence on the other processes of HR management such as job evaluation, transfer, and promotion. In line with this perspective, the HR assistant manager emphasized that "we are here to make ways for systematic adjustment of the references." He further explained that the basic criteria of specific qualifications, written test and panel interview were used for almost all the regular jobs which helped them to maintain minimum standard besides saving the HR professionals and the organization from reciprocal grievances. These grievances came from applicants/employees/their social circles who could not be accommodated in the HRM practices.

Denial to references and grievances against HR Manager/professionals

The field work showed that HR professionals could not always protect themselves from the negative implication of denying a recommendation, especially in a situation when the candidate's reference person occupied an influential position in the organization. In this situation, the HR manager was directly approached by the reference person to hire the person for a vacancy. Usually, the recommended candidate was selected. Only in case of some serious deficits in professional skills essentially required for the job the applicant was not hired. However, in such a situation HR professionals had to face serious implications because they did not only challenge the established system of authority but also denied the indigenous morality of "*Mang*" (extending the requested services/things; for detail see Saher, 2011). We explain this phenomenon with the help of the following case.

Case 2: Denial to reference and its implication for HR Manager- Professional

Ikram Jan from the Northern Areas, having an MBA in HRM and being a relative of the Chief Operating Officer (COO), was referred for the post of training facilitator by the COO. Mr Abid, the HR manager, asked Ms. Sadia, senior supervisor, training and development (active trainer) to interview him. During the interview it became clear that he was incompetent for this job: the basic requirement of this post was to conduct employee training workshops but Mr Ikram did not have any experience of delivering trainings. Since Ms. Sadia was running training and development department alone, she was in dire need of an assistant. Yet Ikram was not the right person for this job and subsequently not recommended.

When the COO found that Ms. Sadia did not recommend Ikram for the job, he asked Mr. Abid to re-interview him. Abid conducted the interview again and was not satisfied either. However, he came to Ms. Sadia and said: "You are right, Ikram is not the right match but he has a passion for learning so I think he should be given a chance." She kept quiet for a while and then replied in a casual tone: "Sir, if we start the training of training facilitators here then I think training of the workers will not be possible. Therefore, Sir, please give me adequate staff so that I can efficiently run the training and development department. Sir, I surely do not mind if you want him to be here but then we should have to keep our expectations low from the training department."

Abid pointed towards the pressure of his superiors for hiring Ikram and she approved Ikram's selection case, though she kept pointing to Abid that Ikram was a very poor addition to the training and development department. The disapproval of Ikram by the unit led Abid to withhold the case file. Inevitably, refusing to hire the COO's (Chief operating officer) referred person created a problem ('panga'), a kind of challenge to his authority that could antagonize him. So a conscious strategy was applied to handle this situation: the HR department closed down communication on this case and applied a delaying strategy to minimize the severity of this issue.

As a consequence, the COO did not further exert pressure on Abid but he it was annoyed and kept grievances against Ms. Sadia. Payback time came during the COO's yearly evaluation when he changed her departmental performance evaluation from 'Excellent' to 'Fair'. But when Abid, the HR manager, highlighted her professional value as being the only one who was running the department of training, the COO re-evaluated her as 'Good'. As a consequence, she received less than the appropriate pay increase but she did receive it—it could not be completely denied.

This case reflects that the female training and development officer was punished for sticking to the HR policy rules and not extending favors to the referred person of the COO. Similarly, colleagues, juniors, friends, and even family members criticized HR professionals when they could not extend any favors to them or their recommended person due to the official HR policies.

Conflicting Role Demands, HR Managers' Approach and Career Prospects

The field data demonstrated the sandwich position of the HR professionals in this Pakistani organization. They contextually interpreted HR policies for coping up with conflicting demands of diverse and changing situations and decision making requirements. Running an organization by solely to abiding to policies from abroad hardly provides suitable solutions for local problems (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997: 3). In line with this view, the field data shows that those HR managers who both accommodated for the local situation while also trying to adhere to HR policies and practices from abroad achieved both personal and professional targets. This was not the case for those who just followed the impersonal US-American HRM practices. The following cases illustrate this point.

Case 3: Foreign Qualified HR manager and Career Issues

Rehman Chaudhry, (36 years), got his MSc degree in HRM from Sydney, Australia. He worked very hard to develop an HR manual and established an HR department in the firm. His diligent performance and down-to-earth attitude was greatly appreciated at all levels. However, his personality always was criticized due to his straight forward attitude regarding the execution of modern HR practices. Mr. Chaudhry actually believed in the complete execution of modern HR practices in order to effectively manage human resources and achieve organizational goals. Therefore, he strongly resisted to requests and efforts to intervene and 'bend' HRM practices. This attitude sometimes created serious problems for senior management. The chief executive officer, however, liked him because of his professional competence and wanted him to continue his career with the firm despite the number of complaints due to rigorously implementing modern HRM practices and not allowing interventions was steadily increasing. While employee trainings and workshops were conducted at all levels to handle the tension and normalize the situation, the employee dropout rate increased up to an alarming level.

When a new Chief Operating Officer (COO) took charge of the firm in 2005, he saw this issue as a challenge and, after thorough analysis, recommended hiring anew HR manager. This proposal was highly supported by other managers, who were facing employee problems in their department and had developed grievances against Mr. Rehman due to his straight forward attitude. Everybody in the organization acknowledged his skill in the field of HRM. Yet, at the same time everyone showed discontent with the HR practices and alarming turnover rate. Finally, Rehman presented his resignation to COO which was accepted with only slight hesitation.

Case 4: Moderate Approach and Career Success

Ahmad Ali, (28 years), was rehired as associate HR manager Mr. Rehman resigned. He had four years of previous work experience with the firm. His first hiring with this firm was as an administrative secretary in 2002. At that time, he had a bachelor's degree(14 years of education overall). He worked very hard on this post for two years and with his respectful attitude and performance earned seniors' acknowledgement. During this period, he also secured a masters' degree (private) in communication. Considering his qualification and good performance, he was promoted and transferred to the HRM department as junior supervisor. He worked in this position for two years and later joined a Chinese company after leaving the firm on friendly terms.

In his first meeting with staff after rejoining the firm, he declared flexibility and consideration as the key principles of HR department. He believed that the role of the HR department and HR professionals is to channel things and add efficiency to the processes rather than jamming the system. To be sure, he surely believed in change but he was more in favor of evolutionary change, especially if this change is introduced into a corporation where achieving the targets are more important than bringing the change. This he learnt from his practical experience with commercial organization working in the Pakistani market; he did not have a formal qualification acquired abroad but his approach proved to be more reasonable and result oriented. He knew the practical wisdom of social networking and reciprocal obligation to attain dedicated performance and organizational loyalty as he himself was an active member of this system. He experienced that the moral obligations prevailing between the worker and senior/supervisor/manager within the limit of rules and regulations (moderate obligations) were very effective for performance management. With this approach, he guided his staff and gave them his confidence to satisfy everybody within the limits of rules and regulation. In order to handle the issue of turnover, the HR team under his guidance developed a revised salary package which was approved and launched by the management. The change at HR department normalized the employees' situation in the firm and he was compensated accordingly.

Discussion

Evidence from the firm shows that despite the implementation of modern HRM policies and practices since 1994, there is a substantial impact of personal recommendations and personal intervention on prevailing practices of workforce management. The field data also reveals that management as well employees both did not feel comfortable on implementing modern US-American based HRM practices to solve various human resource problems in the firm. The seniors as well as co-workers expect from the HR manager and

other HR professionals to follow fair and equality oriented human resource management practices in general, but also to extend favors to them and their referred people.

The data also reveal very strong feelings of distress and stress experienced by the HR manager and his team due to conflicting role demands from seniors, co-workers, junior and sometime even from the family members. For example, senior management asks them to strictly implement HRM practices and do not grant favors to anybody. In parallel, the same people might ask them to extend favors to employees from their network in other instances. Likewise, colleagues expect support and favors from HR professionals but criticize them when someone else gets any of these. The HR professionals are aware of the prevailing situation and accepted that influence of the social networks and personal intervention cannot be completely eliminated; however, to some extent it can be controlled. Most of the HR professionals believe that they have to take the role of moderators who will have to adjust the personal influences within the policy frame work.

As the HR manager and his team are well aware of this phenomenon of ‘saying-doing gap’, they use tactics of choice, delay and compromise to diffuse situational pressures and perform their job. The data identify the value of flexible and accommodative attitude of HR managers’ towards HRM practices as well as HR issues to continue their career with the firm. The foreign trained HR manager with the stronger intentions to implement modern HRM practices in the firm was not able to continue his career with the firm whereas a less qualified and locally trained HR manager survived successfully. This was because of his understanding of local system and indigenous expectations and the flexible attitude towards implementing HRM practices when dealing with a Pakistani workforce.

This study has several limitations which do not allow generalizing the findings to other Pakistani organization. First, it is a single case study with a focus on qualitative data. Second, the surveyed firm belongs to service sector. It is likely that in the production sector the situation might be different, e.g. the workers do not interact with the clients directly so there is less performance pressure on both managers as well as workers. Third, the location of the organization in the capital city of Pakistan with a highly diverse work force is somewhat different than organizations operating in the other cities of Pakistan.

Nevertheless, this study can provide useful insights both for researchers and practitioners, specifically in the absence of any study focusing on the role of HR professionals in Pakistan. In future, research can be conducted in other sectors like production sector, telecom sector etc. to gain additional insight into the role of HR managers in Pakistan, the pressures they face and the tactics they use to deal with this in light of their career aspirations.

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