

The Role of Human Resource Development in Libraries and Knowledge Referral Centres: An Emerging Perspective

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Abstract

Human Resource is a constituted force and a prime driver that initiates and facilitates optimal utilisation of all other resources and helps the organisation achieve either the optimal or the best possible result in terms of its products and user services. A different set of understanding is required when considering human resource and its development as applicable to libraries and knowledge referral units of research centres. In such an environment the complexity and depth of knowledge of the support group must be multi-dimensional in order to provide the necessary support. There is a growing importance of managing human resource at these centres which provide the nation with a bulwark of recommendations based on extensive research for present and future policy frameworks. In this article I have emphasised the requirement of human resource development as applicable to libraries and knowledge referral centres which will ultimately bolster the quality of research output

Keywords: Human Resource Development, Knowledge Centers, Libraries

Introduction

Human Resource is a constituted force which greatly improves the quality of the products and services of any establishment through management practices, which gives direction for further growth and development of the institution. It is the prime driver that initiates and facilitates optimal utilisation of all other resources and helps the organisation achieve either the optimal or the best possible result in terms of its products and user services. It has been observed that human resource departments and functions in organisations have changed in recent years in response to the recognition that people are a unique resource.

Before we proceed further it would also be imperative to understand what this vital resource means as applied in the world of information science, that is, in the context of knowledge referral centres and libraries. The management aspects of human resource in libraries have been deliberately kept outside the purview of this article as that would focus separately on managerial and administration aspects.

Of course, there needs to be a different set of understanding when understanding human resource and its development as it cannot be included in the same category as industry or a business enterprise. In libraries of research centres, there are different categories of employees and output generators, and they work in diverse areas. Highly developed knowledge centres involving study groups comprised of intellectuals are created. In such an environment the complexity and depth of

knowledge of the support group must be multi-dimensional in order to provide the necessary support. This is so because there would be various types and categories of studies that may be undertaken and it becomes essential for the library work group to essentially understand the general as well as specific requirements of various study groups and researchers.

The aim of this article is to examine the special requirements of human resource in knowledge referral centres/libraries as from other distinct business ventures and organisations. There has also been an enthusiastic surge in the establishment of “think tanks” which are involved in various forms of strategic, security and defence related studies. This also implicates a growing importance of managing human resource at these centres which provide the nation with a bulwark of recommendations based on extensive research for present and future policy frameworks.

Human Resource Defined

An increasing number of practitioners and educators in library science have tried to articulate the broader definition for human resource, its management and development which can be applied to knowledge resource centres and libraries. However, there does not seem to be a very precise form of definition as applied to information science with particular reference to libraries and knowledge centres: those that include greater attention to the diversity of staffs, work-life issues, career development, and issues, managerial in nature.

Human resource management is defined as a strategic and coherent approach to management of an organisation’s most valued asset - the people working there who individually and collectively contribute to the achievement of its objectives. Therefore, human resource development defined for the purpose of information science, referral centres and libraries can be stated as: *comprehensive management and development of personnel involved in knowledge-based informational and system levels at learning and research centres with the core objective of developing expertise of the work group involved in managing the purpose of improving the intellectual and knowledge performance process.* The components of this definition encompass; management, learning process, elevation of organisational performance and national development through overall improvement of work group professionals in libraries and knowledge referral centres.

Human Resource Development (HRD) in Context

The context in which HR is referred is almost always within a host organisation. The organisation can be a corporation, business, industry, government agency or even a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or non-profit-making organisation (NPO) - large or small. The organisation is a system having a mission, with goals and output. High level competency of this workforce would lead to fundamental elevation of intellectually responsible thinking and efficient attainment of the goal of the organisation. HRD can also be thought of as a sub-system that functions within the larger host system for the purpose of supporting and harmonising the larger host system. For example, in the context of a think tank, proper cataloguing by responsible HR would be seen as shaping and supporting the knowledge

environment. In addition, any recommendations and suggested readings available in the referral centre or made available through external agencies and organisations will add value in contextual reality. The above process would be facilitated through continuous investment and development of HR professionals functioning as individuals and work groups.

Constituents of Human Resource (HR)

HR constitutes experts, specialist and peers that have a high degree of value. HR experts refers to any individual serving as a valuable information resource in order to meet the information needs of the knowledge seeker or clientele when referred in management terms. Today's librarians are faced with organisational pressures. A vital element of this pressure is change. It may well become imperative to describe the environment in which human resource in learning information units will function. Many interrelated factors affect human resource, its management and necessarily the achievement of certain goals and objectives. The focus would also denote what this human resource can give the organisation as goals. This is so because the learning unit may not be able to set goals which are not supported by peripheral domains. The domain will in a way decide appropriate functional activities or means under the focus, even if it is in a supportive manner. The entire system will then comprise of the focus, the domain, internal pressure, external pressure, people, and data and knowledge sources. The double impact of evolving technology and network environment has created an increasingly complex work setting. If the knowledge seekers have to keep abreast with the latest in today's world, they have to rely enormously on technology. It is this group of experts who can provide the world wide based knowledge in a traditional organisation with effective retrieval systems available through network and technology. This group provides the special knowledge and possesses the required skill and training in the referred field.

Specialists are often referred to as the best reference human sources and comprise those personnel who are not only experts but have exclusive domain knowledge in a particular branch of study or work. They provide not only subject specific inputs but also for specific disciplines. In specific, fresh researchers can be guided in their search for reference works. The input would be to identify the level at which fresh writers would like to pitch and accordingly provide the correct reference at the entry level. It is also appropriate to consider the role of functional specialists in this context. The burgeoning of the information technology dominated functional specialists brings to mind the generational shift and impending threats to traditional opportunities. The new paradigm has brought in new skills into librarianship which in many ways are necessary and healthy. Through concerted efforts over the years, libraries in various institutions have developed needs for new kinds of expertise along with the information revolution. In my view, there should not be any cause for alarm as it provides for the long-term interest of librarianship and makes a huge difference in the way workload and the system of information transfer can take place.

Peers are those who may not be considered all that important in current awareness service in human resource but provide invaluable support with their work talent

derived after years of experience and hard work, render immense creativity and is a source of rapid, reliable clear vision to plausible solutions which entirely improves the quality of output that an organisation can render. Regardless of how data is collected there would be certain behavioural inputs that would be necessary. Just as eye contact is a positive indicator of availability and enthusiasm to provide reference service there may be other instances where the reference tool usage is either explained or the patron is left to fend. Any researcher is appreciative where the librarian checks back after a period of time as to whether the reference material was of assistance or otherwise. The peers have to observe a vital role in this important interaction between the librarian and patron and provide helpful inputs where essential.

HRD as a Discipline in a Professional Field of Library Science

The HRD in any profession is widely recognised, large and therefore can be applied in any field and in a variety of organisations. This can be confusing to those outside the profession as they take up different names and roles like Librarian, assistant librarian, library assistant, so on and so forth. Practitioners who work in HRD have various titles such as manager, director, head of department etc. HRD roles can span the organisation such as Chief Operations Officer, Training Director and the like. More often than not HRD work is part of their larger job as it is almost impossible to calculate the total organisational commitment. However, in a library the role of the librarian or assistant librarian gets almost strictly confined to the functioning of the systems process without much reference to development as part of organisational requirement. To further expand the thought, it will be seen that training and further development generally gets recessed and does not form a part of organisational requirement. Basic training and professional enhancement often forms a part of imperative requirement of any organisation but often a reclusive option in libraries. If we view HRD in libraries as overlapping with the theory and practice underlying closely linked domains in management practices then the considerations should include:-

- Technical training and development.
- Executive and leadership development.
- Organisational learning and human performance development.
- Career development.
- Organisational and process effectiveness.
- Performance improvement and organisational planning.

The practice of human resources and human resource management as an umbrella term in knowledge based centres can be dominated with positive intentions for improving the expertise and performance of individuals, work groups, work processes and overall, the repositories of knowledge archives. The philosophy is to respect and value the invisible work force and important contributors in the entire process leading to a higher quality of knowledge services and products in the form books and writings. Effective participation and quality performance of such human resources at various libraries would then in a seemingly intangible but otherwise invaluable way render growth of higher and cumulative knowledge productivity.

HR as an Agent of Information Transfer

Human resource at knowledge centre archives enhances the transfer of information. They serve as best agents in the flow information in an informal channel of communication besides the catalysts provided through various seminars and conferences. Human resource at these centres facilitate in converting various resources into products and services. Products being the published writings in the form of books and articles, and services in the shape of various presentations at seminars, ensuing participation, flow and transfer of ideas, followed by the final product in the form of policy recommendations for a better tomorrow. To proceed with the idea of human resource in its various categories it will first be essential to get an overview of a flow diagram from the perspective of knowledge dissemination where HR is an active agent in the entire process.

The Learning Process Perspective

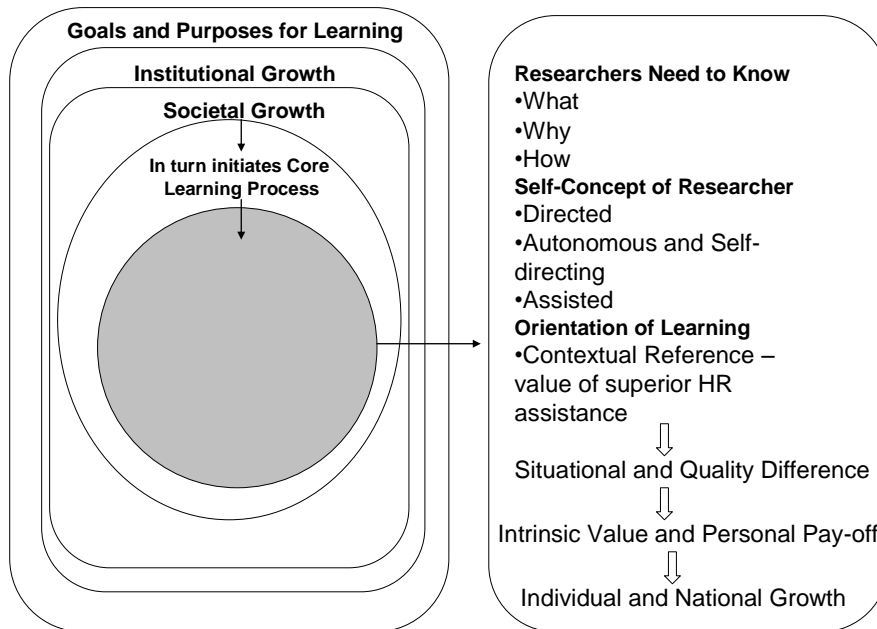


Figure 1

The above figure depicts a conceptual view of the learning process in which the growth of individual, society and the nation is seen to be interwoven with an HR - assisted base in knowledge centres. The entire concept may seem to be a selfish depiction of the learning process but we also know that national interests can in many ways also be expressed in similar terms. The goals and purposes for learning help to attain institutional growth which would lead towards intellectual growth of the society, as the society consists of human beings with intellect. This would initiate a learning process because as the intellectual capacity of the society increases, the base level qualification of the people living in the society undergoes a quantum jump. This in turn sets the wheel of learning or the quest for higher knowledge.

What the researchers need to know are answered by the three basic questions of what, why and how. The researcher is either to be directed by a guide or can involve in self-study depending on the level of expertise and experience attained. In both the cases, however, the researcher has to be assisted. This assistance is offered by the HR personnel at libraries. The more knowledgeable this work group, the greater the quality of assistance extended. This would lead to difference in quality and output of one researcher vis-à-vis another who does not get access to such quality assistance. There are personal pay-offs due to the quality of output of a researcher as the quality of work fetches value. This leads to individual growth of the researcher and ultimately the nation benefits.

Now how does HR perform as an agent of information transfer? First, HR is the primary source in any referral centre which organises the collection development process after necessary approval has been accorded for purchase of study publications and initiation of various subscriptions. This will be followed up with payment of invoices for services rendered to the library, creation and maintenance of library budget reports, ordering of supplies for the library. This process is undertaken either digitally or in a largely traditional mode.

Secondly, it would be apt to view such personnel as information generators of the available primary source knowledge made accessible through books, journal articles and informative magazines. They enable to showcase what the library has after identifying the objective of the researcher and proceed on to evaluate the objective to finally suggest the availability in terms of additional authors and editions besides those mentioned by the researcher.

Thirdly, the library work group performs the part of information processors which align to a responsibility and assist in collecting and shaping information with the application of software documentation.

Fourthly, this work group records the information after due processing for the purpose of retrieving it and disseminating as per requirements of various professionals thereby creating a powerful tool in the medium information storage and its useful application in the world of knowledge dissemination.

Finally, information transfers are closely related to technology and software in the present era and are viewed as important factors in the collection, processing and dissemination of knowledge and its web. Information technologists form an integral part of this system and should not be forgotten or neglected as these personnel are the architects of job system design and contribute immensely towards not only maintenance of the knowledge archive support system but also the functioning of the entire process.

HRD in Library and Information Units: Implications and Outcomes

As a general premise, HRD exists to serve the organisation. Therefore, an answer to any question of implication of human expertise will reflect the perspective from which one chooses to view its role. A preeminent point of view will see HRD as a passive function within the organisation focused on the activities and outcomes of learning. However, the activity of learning contributes to performance and can

clearly improve it thus providing for a substantial value addition. Optimal performance has precedence over minimal performance and in this context the ability to qualify expertise – efficient and effective or average and minimum output can be seen as having significant implications. An organisation tends to give greater attention to line functions but in almost all organisations support provided by staff to line tends to become critical.

One could argue that defining HRD and its expertise adds no value because it is reflective of the lowest level of responsive behaviour that is expected and therefore will not promote competence and efficiency with any further investment than what has been acquired at the entry level. Consequently, this argument would conclude that it must be the competence provided to the organisation that must be provided to the organisation through development of core competencies and not expertise. Competence here is referred in a direct context to the efficiency of a person while expertise is consequent to the qualification attained and practical application of such in work environment. Such an argument has scanty merit because expertise and competence though distinct are clearly linked and unquestionably similar. To place it precisely, competence or what can be stated as core competencies can be visualised as subsets of expertise. In other words, competence reflects very task-specific actions and is therefore found within an individual's domain of expertise, and not encircling it. Competence is seen and described as an outcome while expertise is clearly a process. The competence of proactive librarians is seen in leading efforts to develop and implement learning outcomes with visible initiatives and tangibly measurable objectives. The primary goal of competence is narrowed to efficient action unlike expertise, which is dynamic and expanding. Investment is always made for growth and therefore it would be imperative to invest in expertise rather than look only for the outcome. It is the means that one has to concentrate, the process, and the outcome will follow.

When new learning is applied in a work setting to achieve desired performances one is critical of the relative amount of time and effort invested focusing on training within a performance improvement framework. “We do not think about the problems we do not have” at the present moment. A professional work centre has to choose sides where to place a bet. Understanding the work system and its performance requirements depends largely on the output of its work groups at all levels, and, therefore, should also importantly focus at basic issues as well. In most instances, organisation and scholars care about require more than only an existing level of performance. The larger organisational performance perspective will require performance improvement modeling followed by professional implementation and accounting.

Quality Outcomes

The area of greatest misunderstanding between researchers and practitioners about quantitative applications probably rests in issues of quality. It is common to want to use procedures that may seem to like excessive work to practitioners. Researchers and their methods then may be labeled unrealistic in nature and put simply, waste of time. Research has a different purpose than practice. Whereas ‘seat of the pants’ methods might be quite acceptable for certain organisations,

research necessarily has a higher quality standard. This ushers in the requirement of changing the level of the practitioner at the library work force level. The higher the standard and training of this work group, the simpler it becomes for both sides to draw up common conclusions to performance and output.

Degree of Certainty: The other parameter that affects the complexity of the learning and dissemination process through a knowledge referral centre is the degree of certainty required from the research, hence from the researcher, and therefore from those who support researchers in their work. A substantial and sometimes huge amount of money is being invested in serious research. The stakes are high, and where the stakes climb the ladder, the degree of certainty expected out of the investment made in research work becomes high, strict and complex at times. Researchers are wary about the breadth of generalisation and have to be careful about the scope of the study and how it is to be studied. The library work force is now under pressure and has to be quick in realising the objective of the study and therefore have to act with the correct reference materials and data inputs to meet the challenges now posed in terms of work substance and timeline. Therefore, there is a need to align library HRD with the larger intellectual areas of pursuit of organisations. There would be a requirement of institutionalised, specialised library science training which would be possible only with individual initiative at all levels.

Conclusion

The understanding of research in any discipline requires the understanding of the conduct with the requirements of accepted theoretical and empirical underpinnings. All researchers and their research are influenced by various disciplinary bases which are explicitly connected to knowledge and the support system which provides for necessary findings and applications by way of present functioning and future policy framework. The work groups supporting such a system are also under degrees of pressure which either cultivates their development or degrades the entire learning process. The professional practice of HRD applied in the field of knowledge and research not only improves the performance and satisfaction of the work group but also leads to the improvement of a professional practice like research work.

HRD in libraries and information units do not require any specific assigned process or primary rule-following but institutional training improvement processes would definitely provide for definite benchmarks that any library or knowledge referral centres would prefer to invest in. Without the formal knowledge the basis for practice by practitioners, that is, the work group will be little beyond supporting a structure to solve common and mundane problems of an institution of research based knowledge but to unify the basic knowledge with advanced learning and expertise would be to provide continuity in research and practice with skills and attitudes that foster the entire process of learning in a country.

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