Chapter 55

Creating the Environment for High Performing Distributed Teams:
Human Resource Strategies and Practices

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ABSTRACT

The organizational workforce has always been a complex landscape. The varying personalities, demographics, and needs have challenged organizations to be legal, fair, and just, while simultaneously competing for market share and profit margins. Although these conditions are not mutually exclusive, due to the global reach for market share and use of supporting technologies, workforces have grown increasingly diverse over the past three decades. Organizations have looked to their Human Resource (HR) division to support business strategy, growth, and development. While a few have stepped up to accommodate, many HR divisions have struggled to support business needs in perhaps the greatest time of flux in modern day business. This is creating a serious issue for most organizations who recognize the competitive way forward is through effective Human Resource Development (HRD). Business success has always been about the people and it will continue to be so. Therefore, organizations struggling to develop their workforce to perform in complex, highly distributed situations will continue to lag (often far behind) the effective workforces of their competitors. This chapter offers best and next practices from HRD leaders accommodating the needs of their businesses.

"We are at the earliest stages of a significant workplace transformation that will profoundly affect how businesses approach people management and how individuals approach the workplace."

–Towers Watson

INTRODUCTION

Indeed HR is evolving in its attempt to address the needs of businesses and employees. Most HR initiatives, however, have become stymied in more administration and less strategic development. This phenomenon was observed critically by Keith Hammonds (2005) who articulated the reasons 'why we hate HR'. The work of HR practitioners has not gotten easier since then and there is still a faction that hates HR. However, there is also a contingent that (dare we say) loves HR – or at least that does not propose the elimination of that division from their organization due to strategic incompetence. The HR practitioners and others throughout these companies recognize that HR, and more specifically HRD, is the "lever for strategic success" (Marquardt & Engel, 1993, p. xi) especially when engaged in highly distributed work across a global marketplace.

Globalization does make a difference when managing and developing resources. According to Marquardt and Engel (1993), a number of factors differentiate global HRD from domestic HRD. Some of these factors include personnel, culture, administration, learning styles, and language. Each of these differentiating factors is important. Understanding the variances of global HRD as compared to domestic HRD should help ensure appropriate responses to training and development, career development, organizational development, and performance management needs of both the organization and the individual.

While the purpose of this chapter is not to engage in determining the efficiencies of HR administration, the exploration of HR strategies and practices must, of necessity, extend beyond functions that have traditionally been considered the purview of HRD. The related disciplines of HR Management (HRM), HR Development (HRD) and Organizational Development (OD) may have distinct origins and academic identities, however their functions in organizations are deeply interrelated and interdependent (Mankin, 2001). In practice, all of these functions commonly report to a single executive (Ruona & Gibson, 2004; Singh, 2003) within an organization. These and other studies argue that while HRD and HRM may be functionally distinct, it is pragmatically impossible for them to function independently of one another.

The focus of this chapter is HRD. However, the research cases also consider the contributions of related HR functions including recruitment, organizational reputation management (i.e. employer branding) and elements of employee retention that typically fall within the responsibilities of HRM or OD functions (Farndale, Scullion & Sparrow, 2010; Brewster, Sparrow & Harris, 2005; Ruona & Gibson, 2004). Consideration of HRD in the context of these structural interdependencies reflects the type of whole systems approach that must be incorporated into a strategic view of the HR function in an increasingly global and complex environment (Ruona & Gibson, 2004).

The discipline and function of HRD emphasizes major areas of organizational work including training and development and career development (deSimone, Werner, & Harris, 2002). Gilley, Eggland, and Gilley (2002) also noted the HRD concern for performance management. To operationalize the notion of HRD, we rely on Swanson and Holton's (2009) perspective in that HRD is "a process of developing and unleashing expertise for the purpose of improving individual, team, work processes, and other organizational performance" (p. 4). To shorten this to near mantra level, Holton and Yamkovenko (2008) suggested "HRD is to develop and unleash human expertise" (p. 276). This is a distinct and strategic task of optimizing

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