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TOWARDS AN ORGANIZATIONALLY SENSIBLE HR RISK ASSESSMENT IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A CASE OF A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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Abstract

Employees can be a resource of sustained success and a competitive advantage in any orgnisation, reliant on skilled workforce. However, dearth of trained labour force to drive the manpower requirement of local industries has become a long lasting burden in some small counties. These countries do not have adequate professional advancement opportunities for librarians and support staff to become professionals or paraprofessionals due to lack of openings for specialist education in the field of librarianship. Thus, human resource risks in libraries of such countries are comparatively higher. It is therefore needed to identify and assess the severity and impact of HR risks to mitigate the future burdens with a set of carefully planned HR management practices, which can positively increase the risk resilience. Due to less professional educational opportunities, economic downturn and outflow of educated personnel in Fiji, employers have been unable to recruit and retain suitably qualified professionals and paraprofessionals specially for academic libraries. All universities have hired many librarians from foreign countries and some universities have employed untrained manpower for paraprofessional work. Consequently, this research also tried to identify HR threats and vulnerabilities related to the Department of Library services in the Fiji National University (FNU) with the objective of directing the opted library for a possible risk mitigation plan. The study used qualitative methods by exercising semi-structured interviews for a sample of 25 professionals and paraprofessionals in the library. The research identified HR risks, their prevailing circumstances, library operation and its relationship with these HR risks, and finally to address what could be improved. Nevertheless, the management of HR risk will be continuing and its connotation will be unique and richer because of the Library is a part of a larger autonomous venture. It is therefore found that HR risks are bound to overall management of the university to cause a profound and extensive impact.

Keywords: Human Resource Risk, Libraries in Fiji, HR risk matrices, HRM practices in libraries, Organisational risk, Risk assessment

Introduction

Risk management is nowadays very essential as a core business function specially since the environment of the businesses and uncertainties within such an environment remains continuing to grow[1]. Risk is virtually manageable so as to cut down the expenses incurred by unforeseen consequences, which may happen in organizations. It is a widely accepted notion that "people are the greatest asset" in organisations. Even though this statement is at times abused, it still remains true. The success of any organisartion is essentially dependent on the quality performance of its manpower, making HR a risk-prone function in any organisation[2] with no exception for libraries.

There is a growing number of young people in countries. Thus, the entry of more unskilled workers into the labour market in urban areas is a consented communal concern. As a result of this unskilled labour, it leads to reduction in wages, diminishing wage rigidity and poor production in businesses[3] and finally the business instability. Fiji is a country which comes in the same set of circumstances and it has now understood that the nation's economy depends on the knowledge and skills of its people. Development of skilled labour force is now a great priority in Fiji, growing in part by increasing the skills of younger generation who have completed formal education but lack of hands-on skills and know-how useful for its emerging market. Training opportunities for librarians is one of the burning issues in the country as all three universities do not have professionally accredited higher education LIS programmes. University of the South Pacific has part-time TVAT certificate and diploma level programmes starting from NVQ level 3, which makes provision for some paraprofessional requirements but not the LIS professional manpower requirements needed for the country. Fiji National University (FNU) has higher education level certificate, diploma and three year bachelors level programme for which very few students are enrolled due to higher course fees, non-accreditation, fewer faculty with no professional affiliations, local politics between the two universities specially related to LIS programmes, weaker professional practices of the country's Library Association dominated by one university.

Migration of skilled labour force is also a crucial factor for the shortage of talented manpower in Fiji. Lack of opportunities in the formal businesses and opportunities in the informal market with less wages has forced many young people to seek another solution ending up with emigration. This has exhausted the country's skilled and experienced workforce largely. Thus, all three universities in the country hires librarians from outside countries including India. Only a few people who have monitory potentials to study abroad and get qualified for LIS practices are recruited and it has created a void in the skilled manpower requirement permitting expatriates to land for higher salaries.

However, loosing staff with experience and knowledge in LIS can pose a significant risk to library operations, specially when their experience is difficult to replace and provide the organization with the added value it needs to succeed in its businesses. This loss will also lead to the operation being interrupted, unless some corrective action is made to ensure that there is less interference to the shortage. Thus, this research can serve as a means of opening the eyes of HR managers and library management in the university sector.

Objective

Therefore, the researcher wanted to identify HR threats and vulnerabilities related to the Department of Library services at FNU enabling this risk assessment be utilized to remodel potential risk mitigation plans in libraries.

Literature review

Even if HR departments have noticed possible risk factors related to human resources, no extensive research has been carried out on this particular topic. In the prevailing literature, it almost does not mention risk-related human resources particularly in libraries. The literature usually discusses risk factors in business organisations and how HRM practice can mitigate them.

According to Sadgrove, different type of risks can be observed but one of them is a risk to people or a human capital, which is a risk posed by the employees of an organization[4,5]. Many risks become apparent due to human weaknesses but more often risks are not because of employees but the cause of the business crisis[6]. All those who are in organizational operations can cause business problems in one way or another. Some of the risks they pose or manage can be reduced with better employment techniques particularly appropriate recruitment procedure, more training or better motivation[7]. Unfortunately, other human risks arise due to the deception of the workers, but there are cases such as cheating where people deliberately fraud the enduring system. Structural HR risks include high turnover, substandard worker compensation, absenteeism, unionisation, workplace violence, workplace harassment, strikes and discrimination, safety

and security[8]. Therefore, many libraries rely heavily on volunteers including student workers for support due to shortage of staff[9].

Most publications on HRM and their work focus on the positive influence HRM and HR systems and practices[10]. Despite these positive effects, risks due to poor, non-existent or inappropriate HRM behavior can also be present[11]. HR practices have a positive impact on human resources but their shortcomings can pose a threat to human resources. Proper HRM practice can also reduce risk[12]. It depends on each management practices whether HR risks are, ranging from a health issues to absence of critical expertise due to the loss of key personnel in the organisation. Risk analysis is one of the central keystones associated with caries management. It should be included in the current work plan to assist library management in the decision-making process regarding work systems, library operations and quality producers in the system. An effective HR risk assessment system should have maximum support and reliability, and be easy to use in practice at a low cost[13].

Methods

Information can only represent the past history of the library but management of risk is typically depending on the future decision-making in the library. Identification of HR risk needs skilled knowledge and expertise. Assessment can be performed by these experts with such expertise with integral knowledge of library operations and management practices besides with accumulated intense familiarity and proficiency through long-term hands-on library practices. Thus, minimum of three years experienced staff in the same university but with more than 5 years' experience in the field of librarianship were selected to weigh up the possible incidence rates of the HR risk, the likelihood levels of risk occurrences and the effect so as to collect clear information. Interviewees were selected via convenience sample meaning that interviewer had to choose 25 individuals that would fit the inclusion criteria discoursed above.

Table 01: Sample

Category	Staff categories	Number of interviewees
Management	University Librarian	01
	Quality Liaison Officer	01
	Librarians	03
Employees	Library Assistants	08
	Library Clerical officers	04
	Office Administrators	02
	Library Attendants	07
	Total	**25**

The research method used is qualitative, explorative in nature and was based on semi-structured interviews. An interview questionnaire was used in advance to the interview and included a section to identify risks and the risk level based on a risk matrix. There were two sets of interview questionnaires prepared for the employees and the management of the university library. Similarity in questions was maintained as the objective of the research was to ascertain the perspective of the employees and management towards the possible risks and causes. Questionnaire for the employees consisted of 3 major sections. The first section had questions related to the employee demographics, the second section was some open-ended questions to discover possible HR risks. During this course of action, risk was delineated as the likelihoods that an event can occur and detrimentally influence the attainment of the library's vision and mission in relation to its Human resources. This is a widespread typology pondering to persuade the interviewees to contemplate the fullest feasible and workable kind of HR risks that the FNU library had encountered. Once the completed questionnaires were received, all identified risks were directed to the employees to find out the relevancy and likelihood rating. Then, the questionnaire for the management was exercised to uncover the severity of the unearthed HR risks. Also, Librarians were required to communicate new HR risk which cannot be attained from the matrix based on the responses given by the employees.

In the first stage of this investigation, the researcher summarized intensity of risks with the expectation of the descriptive categorization of risk clusters enabling library management for a common vocabulary for identification, evaluation and responding to shared challenges. Severity of the identified risks were established as propositioned by Michalko et al.[14], which is indicated in the Table 02.

Table 02: Grading matrix used in assessing risk impact

Grading criteria	Description	Severity	Weightage
Catastrophic	• Organization would not likely survive in present form • Sustained, serious loss in user share • Loss of library value where the cost of future library investment outweighs the recovery	Very high	5
Major	• Major impact on library—serious damage to library's ability to service users • Serious diminution in library value and use with adverse publicity	High	4
Moderate	• Significant impact on library—would affect users • Use and/or library value will be affected in the short term	Medium	3
Minor	• Impact on internal organization only • There is a minor potential impact on use and library values	Low	1
Insignificant	• Insignificant impact on internal organization • No potential impact on use • No impact on library value	None	0

Following Table 03 was used to grade the likelihood of risk occurrences as suggested by Michalko *et al.*[15] .

Table 03: Grading scale used in assessing Likelihood

Criterion	Description	Weightage
Almost certain	• Event is expected to occur in most circumstances	5
Likely	• Event will probably occur in most circumstances	4
Possible	• Event might occur at some time—moderate probability	3
Unlikely	• Event could occur at some time—low probability	2
Rare	• Event may occur only in exceptional circumstances	1
Not at all	• Event will not occur in any circumstance	0

Interviewees identified risk factors were aggregated into a source of record and mean ratings were calculated with the count of the number of events. This figure takes into account the number of times any particular risk is mentioned, the assigned impact, and the likelihood estimate of all interviews as indicated in Table 04.

Table 04: HR risk impact matrix

Severity	Impact (Severity x likelihood)	Action required
20-25	Very high	immediately
15-19	High	Within three months
10-14	Moderate	Within 6 months
Below 9	Target	If possible

Findings, best practices and recommendations

Table 05 indicates the groupings discovered by the interviewees when envisaging contemporary risks at FNU. This is a systematic typology planned to foster the interviewees to contemplate the completest range of potential HR risks in the context. Many are not specific to the university library although they may be relevant to the parent university and however interviewees used this to urge their reflections. The library Management was requested to grade the identified risks (high, high/medium, medium, medium/low or low) and present associate explanations for the grading with experienced cases in point. A questionnaire was employed here to smooth the progress of completion during the interview.

Table 05: Risk assessment matrix

Risk	Severity	Likelihood	Impact (Severity x likelihood)	Action required
• Retention of HR is difficult due to low remuneration	Very high	Almost certain	Very high	*immediately*
• Retention of HR is difficult due to competitors	high	Almost certain	high	*three months*
• Senior staff getting frustrated confused in the process due to inconsistent procedures of the HR division, eg. Salary disparities in the same grade	High	Almost certain	High	*Three months*
• Recruitment of HR is difficult due to reduction of qualified candidates in the country	high	Almost certain	high	*three months*
• Library doesn't have any power to retain human resources to cover at least net yield time	Very high	Almost certain	Very high	*Immediately*

	high	Likely	high	*Three months*
• Difficulty in identifying candidates for evolving library management role due to non-applicants	high	Likely	high	*Three months*
• HR are not assigned suitably within the university to support employee retention, training and development, needed to cope up with changes happen in the library	medium	possible	normal	*If possible*
• Current HR lacks skill set to meet future needs	medium	possibly	normal	*If possible*
• Current HR fails to embrace implementation of management decisions effectively	high	Likely	high	*Three months*
• Lack of locally qualified experienced librarians	high	Likely	high	*Three months*
• Conventional personality of library employees appropriate adjustment to changed environments	medium	Likely	Normal	*If possible*
• Higher managerial burdens due to changes to the library funding model	high	Likely	high	*Three months*
• Long process of recruitment period	high	Almost certain	Very high	*immediately*
• Psychological risks such as bullying, harassment and discrimination from library management	high	Unlikely	target	*If possible*
• No promotional opportunities for junior staff	high	Likely	high	*Three months*
• Non-results oriented performance appraisal system	high	Likely	high	*Three months*
• Reduction of privileges and needs of employees	medium	possible	Normal	*If possible*
• Global library HR challenges	high	likely	high	*Three months*
• Safety at night shifts	high	likely	high	*Three months*
• Mediation of unions	high	Possibly	Normal	*If possible*

Majority of the employees stressed that many workers left the library due to low-grade working environment attributable to nonexistence of basic facilities such as absence of closely located sanitary facilities, very small working spaces with insufficient ventilation, no air conditioning in small workrooms, no restrooms, no adequate office furniture, no safety equipment etc. Also, they further stressed that an unsupportive management and offensive behaviour of supervisors creates a hostile work environment that causes employees to leave their jobs. The culture in a well-developed organisation is a major factor, which motivates employees to be retained in the organization[16]. If employees are not

satisfied with the culture, the working atmosphere and the organizational structure, they will in all likelihood leave their employments[17].

One of the leading factors of LIS employee's turnover is poor remuneration. During 2013, 20 employees in the library in the junior carder resigned from the job and joined some other organizations due to low wages. According to Shaw *et al.,*[18], "pay is something given in exchange for services rendered in an organization". Pay is the highest critical factor which plays an imperative role in retaining and rewarding the best quality workforce. Since the country does not have any master level LIS educational opportunities, quite a few locals who can afford the tuition and living expenses for MLIS programmes abroad or attend online MLIS programmes in foreign universities particularly Australian universities were there at FNU. Only three librarians had completed the MLIS degree. However, due to low remuneration at FNU, one librarian migrated to Australia. Another senior librarian, who completed her MLIS in Australia resigned and joined another local university with a huge salary hike. When professional staff get poor wages and unsatisfactory financial benefits, they no longer stay with the workplace[19]. Thus, majority of professional librarians in the university are expatriates. This is applicable to all levels of employees in the library. Due to shortage of applicants for the post of Library Assistants, FNU recruits Clerical Officers for library service and their minimum educational qualification (MQR) is non-LIS degree or non-LIS Diploma with 3 years' experience in the field of customer services in a reputable organization. Though library assistants are generally considered as technical officers in other universities, they are not considered to that level at FNU. As a result of this status quo and poor pay scales, job dissatisfaction of the employees was at a higher level, which lead many library employees to leave the job. The lack of consistency for determining the salaries have also resulted many errors, inconsistencies and improper transactions from which the employees had mixed of frustrations ultimately ended up with resignation. Existing staff had loss of faith in studying LIS and felt somewhat inferior to the Clerical Officers who do not have any LIS knowledge and experience but perform the same paraprofessional duty. As Dobbs[20] states that employees are of the opinion why the person next to them receives a higher salary for what is supposed to be the same job. Thus, it is apparent that a rational salary can be a strong determining factor for employees' job satisfaction leading to higher productivity in any organization.

The library recruits a number of people and train them using resources of the university. Once the staff get trained from the library, they are absorbed by other organizations for a higher salary. Thus the university does not have a sound strategy to make them bound for a certain period of time at least to cover

up the net yield of the cost incurred for training and development. Changing staff in terms of know-how, working attitudes and cultural adaption is nowhere easy. Libraries looking for new staff also need to deploy resources required for recruitment, induction and development. At the time of selection and finally recruitment of the onboarding employee, the managers should take the time to induct the person and provide training on how to do the job efficiently and effectively, what organisaion expect from him, how to avoid becoming dependent on the senior colleagues etc. Eventually, the library management has to do everything during initial period of the hire until he could built himself towards a high performer. The university has not yet seen the fact that the library employees are also competitive in terms of rewards, improvements and quality of the work. High staff turnover even in libraries cause FNU to be uncompetitive in its businesses in the higher education sector in the country. Thus, there should be an intense effort in FNU to compete for the best talent in the LIS market. FNU will have to go towards a great length to attract potential LIS employees from its competitors. The availability of substandard benefits to the library employees makes it difficult to maintain a healthier employee retention in the long run. However, the university's HR policy clearly indicates that mangers must ensure the retention of its employees till retirement age, as long as their performance is within acceptable limits. The aim of its HR policy is to prevent the loss of competent employees from the University. Nevertheless, the problem is no library managers strictly adhere to this policy. Annual performance appraisals or midyear check-ins are some of the prominent avenues for these discussions, but library management should also encourage workers to come to them with career aspirations throughout the year. It is also required to address competitive compensation issues as well as available education and mentoring programmes for the targeted personnel.

Advance career opportunities and recognition of work performance for employees play an important role in strong working environment. Performance appraisal process promote strong work performance as it enables employees to show how well they can do their job. The fairness of a performance appraisal system is recognized as a key impact on the success of any organization, because the perceived fairness was linked to the wider acceptance of the system leading to high performance of employees and organizations. Library staff claimed that the fairness of HR decisions is deprived and they do not consider different facets of justice. Therefore, the purpose of performance appraisal has desperately caused the perception of library employees towards the existing performance appraisal system is prejudicial and inequitable. Finally, this will directly affect the university as the performance of organisation is the performance of its employees.

Conclusion

The execution of this research will hopefully attract the attention of university managers and encourage them to ascertain potential HR risks and enable them to think about it in a systematic way. It is revealed in the case of FNU that the organization must provide employees with an appropriate salary in line with the market completion to retain them in the long run. Also, employees and managers in the library need to be connected. There is an urgent need to develop valid and reliable methods for assessing the risk of HR based on the best evidences ascertained by the employees and then the prediction, projection and management of risks should be taken care of in a strict or exacting way. Effective and cost-effective risk management requires librarians to systematically consider the various risk categories they face, so that they can establish appropriate processes for each individual. These processes will neutralize their managerial partialities in seeing the sphere the way it should be, rather than what they believe is.

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