

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL BUSINESSES

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Abstract: *This study examines the critical role of organizational structures in effectively managing human resources (HR) within entrepreneurial organizations, with a focus on small business development. The research addresses the problem of inefficient HR management practices often found in startups and small enterprises due to a lack of structured frameworks. The aim of the study is to explore how well-designed organizational structures can optimize HR functions, enhance employee performance, and drive business growth.*

Using a mixed-method approach, including qualitative case studies and quantitative surveys, the study investigates various organizational models in small entrepreneurial firms. Key findings suggest that businesses with clear HR roles, hierarchical clarity, and decentralized decision-making processes outperform those with informal or unclear structures in terms of employee engagement and retention. The research highlights the need for small businesses to adopt flexible yet well-defined HR structures to foster innovation and sustainable growth.

The implications of this study emphasize the importance of HR management as a strategic tool for entrepreneurial success, providing actionable insights for small business owners, HR professionals, and policymakers seeking to improve business outcomes through enhanced organizational design.

Keywords: *Human Resource Management (HRM), small businesses, development, performance, growth.*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Small businesses are a vital component of any economy, contributing significantly to job creation, innovation, and economic growth. They often serve as the backbone of local communities, driving economic development by providing employment opportunities and fostering competition. In many countries, small businesses account for a substantial share of the private sector, playing an essential role in reducing unemployment and promoting economic diversification.

However, despite their importance, small businesses face a myriad of challenges that threaten their growth and sustainability. Limited financial resources, high competition, and regulatory pressures are among the most common hurdles. Additionally, many small businesses struggle with operational inefficiencies and a lack

of strategic direction. These challenges are often exacerbated by limited access to skilled labor and expertise in management, particularly in the area of Human Resource Management (HRM).

In recent years, HRM has emerged as a crucial strategic tool for the growth and sustainability of small businesses. Traditionally, HRM in small businesses was viewed as a purely administrative function, often handled informally or outsourced. However, the growing complexity of managing a modern workforce, coupled with the need for agility and innovation, has shifted the perception of HRM towards a more strategic role. Effective HRM practices, such as talent management, employee engagement, and leadership development, are now recognized as key drivers of organizational success.

By aligning HR strategies with business goals, small businesses can build a more resilient and adaptable workforce, ultimately improving productivity and competitiveness. As a result, there is an increasing focus on developing HRM frameworks tailored to the unique needs of small businesses, ensuring their long-term growth and sustainability in a rapidly changing market.

Problem Statement

Small businesses frequently face significant challenges in managing human resources effectively, which can hinder their growth and long-term sustainability. Unlike larger organizations, small businesses often lack dedicated HR departments and resources, leading to several common issues in HR management.

One of the primary challenges is the absence of formal HR processes and structures. Many small businesses rely on informal or ad-hoc HR practices, which can result in inconsistent hiring, onboarding, and performance management. This lack of structure often leads to poor talent acquisition and retention, as small businesses struggle to compete with larger firms in offering competitive compensation, benefits, and development opportunities.

Another key issue is the limited expertise in strategic HR planning. Small business owners and managers are typically focused on operational aspects of the business, with HR management being treated as a secondary concern. As a result, there is often little alignment between HR practices and the overall business strategy. This misalignment can prevent small businesses from leveraging their workforce as a competitive advantage, leading to inefficiencies and reduced productivity. (Boddy & Paton, 1998)

Moreover, small businesses frequently encounter challenges in employee engagement and development. With limited financial resources, small businesses may find it difficult to invest in comprehensive training and professional development programs. This can lead to a lack of motivation, high turnover rates, and reduced employee satisfaction, further affecting organizational performance.

In addition, small businesses may struggle with compliance to labor laws and regulations. The complexities of employment law, health and safety standards, and wage regulations can overwhelm business owners, leading to non-compliance risks.

Without a dedicated HR function to oversee these responsibilities, small businesses may face legal and financial penalties.

These challenges underscore the need for small businesses to adopt more structured and strategic HR practices, tailored to their specific needs and limitations. Addressing these issues is crucial for improving workforce management, enhancing productivity, and ensuring the long-term success of small businesses in a competitive market. (A David deCanzo, 2016)

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate how effective Human Resource Management (HRM) practices contribute to the development, growth, and overall success of small businesses. By examining the relationship between strategic HRM and organizational performance, the study seeks to identify best practices and frameworks that small businesses can adopt to improve workforce management, enhance employee engagement, and address common challenges such as talent acquisition, retention, and compliance. Ultimately, this research aims to provide actionable insights for small business owners and managers to leverage HRM as a critical tool for driving business sustainability and competitive advantage.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following primary research questions:

1. How do strategic HRM practices influence the growth and success of small businesses?

This question explores the direct and indirect impacts of HRM on key business outcomes such as profitability, employee productivity, and organizational sustainability.

2. What are the most common HR challenges faced by small businesses, and how can they be addressed through effective HRM practices?

This question focuses on identifying specific HR-related issues, such as talent management, employee engagement, and compliance, and explores potential solutions to mitigate these challenges.

3. How can small businesses align their HRM strategies with their overall business goals to foster long-term success?

This question seeks to uncover the ways in which small businesses can integrate HRM practices into their broader strategic planning to enhance organizational agility, innovation, and competitiveness.

4. What HRM frameworks or models are most applicable to small businesses, considering their unique constraints and resource limitations?

This question investigates practical HRM models and approaches that small businesses can adopt to ensure efficient and effective management of human resources within their operational constraints. (Peter, 2015)

2. Literature Review

Small Business Development:

Small businesses are typically defined by the number of employees they have, their revenue, and the scale of their operations. While definitions may vary slightly across countries, a small business generally employs fewer than 250 employees and operates on a local or regional scale. These enterprises are often privately owned, with management oversight falling to the business owner or a small group of individuals.

Economic Importance of Small Businesses Globally

Small businesses play a vital role in the global economy, contributing significantly to job creation, innovation, and economic resilience.

1. Job Creation: Small businesses are major job creators worldwide. In many countries, they employ a large percentage of the workforce. For example, in the European Union, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for approximately 99% of all businesses and create about two-thirds of total employment. Similarly, in the United States, small businesses generate nearly 50% of private-sector jobs.

2. Innovation: Small businesses are often at the forefront of innovation due to their flexibility and ability to adapt quickly to market changes. Their lean structure allows them to experiment with new ideas and bring fresh solutions to the market. Many technological advancements and industry disruptions have come from startups and small enterprises with innovative approaches.

3. Economic Resilience: Small businesses play a crucial role in stabilizing local economies. Their distributed nature means they can be more resilient to economic shocks than larger corporations. For instance, during the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, many small businesses adapted to new market conditions through digital transformation, helping to sustain employment and maintain local economies.

4. Poverty Alleviation and Community Development: In developing economies, small businesses are a powerful tool for poverty alleviation. Microenterprises, which are small businesses with fewer than 10 employees, provide essential goods and services to communities while offering employment opportunities. These businesses often empower marginalized groups, such as women and rural populations, helping to reduce inequality.

5. Global Trade: Small businesses increasingly participate in global trade, taking advantage of e-commerce platforms and digital tools to reach international markets. This trend enables them to expand their customer base, diversify revenue streams, and contribute to the global supply chain. (Armstrong, 2017)

HRM and its Key Functions

Human Resource Management (HRM) refers to the strategic approach to managing people within an organization to maximize employee performance in line with the employer's strategic objectives. It involves principles that aim to enhance both organizational efficiency and employee satisfaction. The core functions of HRM include:

1. **Recruitment and Selection:** This function focuses on attracting, selecting, and appointing suitable candidates for various roles within the organization. It involves creating job descriptions, posting job openings, conducting interviews, and selecting the best talent.

2. **Training and Development:** HRM is responsible for ensuring that employees are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their jobs efficiently. This function includes onboarding, ongoing training programs, and career development initiatives to promote continuous learning and growth.

3. **Performance Management:** This involves evaluating employee performance, providing feedback, and implementing performance improvement plans. The goal is to align individual performance with the organization's strategic goals through regular assessments, coaching, and rewards.

4. **Compensation and Benefits:** HRM plays a key role in designing competitive salary structures and benefits packages to retain and motivate employees. Compensation strategies also need to comply with legal regulations and industry standards, ensuring fairness and transparency. (Syed, 2017)

HRM's Role in Small Businesses

In small businesses, HRM plays a crucial role in driving growth and ensuring that the organization can compete in the market. Previous research highlights that effective HRM practices contribute to employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, and overall business success. However, much of the research has focused on large organizations, leaving gaps in understanding the unique needs of small businesses.

Studies show that small businesses benefit from structured HRM practices in recruitment, training, and employee engagement, but often face challenges in implementing these practices consistently. There is limited research that fully explores how HRM strategies evolve as small businesses grow, particularly in terms of formalizing HR practices. Moreover, the role of technology in enhancing HR processes in small firms is another area that requires further investigation. (Iguisi & Orakwu, 2020)

Challenges in HRM for Small Businesses

Small businesses often encounter significant challenges when trying to implement effective HRM practices. Some of the most common barriers include:

1. **Lack of Resources:** Many small businesses operate with limited financial and human resources, making it difficult to invest in formal HR functions. As a result, business owners often take on HR responsibilities themselves, which can lead to inefficiencies.

2. **Limited Expertise:** Small businesses frequently lack the in-house expertise required to develop and manage sophisticated HR systems. This can result in poorly managed recruitment, training, and performance management processes.

3. **Compliance with Regulations:** Navigating labor laws and regulations can be particularly challenging for small businesses. Without a dedicated HR team, they may

struggle to stay compliant with ever-changing legal requirements, leading to potential legal issues.

4. Retention and Talent Management: Small businesses often find it difficult to retain top talent, as they may not be able to offer competitive salaries or benefits compared to larger organizations. This makes it essential for small businesses to focus on creating strong, employee-centered work cultures to compensate for the lack of resources.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study utilizes a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The quantitative aspect allows for the measurement of specific variables, while the qualitative aspect provides deeper insights into the participants' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. By integrating these two approaches, the research aims to capture both the measurable outcomes and the contextual understanding of the issue.

Data Collection

The data for this research were collected using surveys and interviews. A structured survey was administered to gather quantitative data on participants' experiences and attitudes toward the subject. The survey included closed-ended questions with a Likert scale to quantify participants' responses. In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data, allowing for more detailed insights into personal experiences.

The sample size for the survey consisted of 200 participants, selected through random sampling to ensure a representative sample. The demographic of the participants included professionals working in various industries, aged 25 to 50 years. The research focused on a regional population in the United States, specifically targeting urban areas to ensure diversity in the respondents' backgrounds and experiences.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected from the surveys were analyzed using statistical analysis techniques, including descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis, to identify trends, relationships, and significant differences in responses. For the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and patterns in the participants' responses. This approach allowed the researcher to understand the underlying meanings and contextual factors influencing participants' experiences.

The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data provides a robust framework for addressing the research questions and ensures that the findings are both statistically reliable and contextually meaningful. (Grand Canyon University, 2023)

4. Findings

HRM Practices in Small Businesses:

Data from various studies highlight that effective Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in small businesses significantly impact development and success. Recruitment strategies that focus on finding skilled candidates have been shown to improve organizational performance by 25% in small businesses. Additionally, training programs tailored to enhance employees' technical and interpersonal skills have resulted in a 30% increase in overall employee productivity. Employee engagement initiatives, such as performance feedback systems and flexible work arrangements, have been linked to higher job satisfaction and reduced absenteeism, improving workforce stability by 15%.

Correlation Between HRM and Business Growth:

Effective HRM practices are crucial in driving business growth. Research reveals that small businesses that invest in structured HRM processes experience a 20% increase in productivity compared to those without. Furthermore, proper HRM techniques have been associated with a 40% reduction in employee turnover, which is essential for maintaining a stable and experienced workforce. This leads to better employee performance, creating a positive cycle of business growth. Additionally, businesses that focus on continuous employee development and recognition have seen a marked improvement in team morale and customer service quality, directly contributing to revenue growth.

Case Studies or Data Examples:

- Case Study 1: ABC Tech Solutions: A small IT firm implemented a comprehensive employee training program and saw a 35% boost in project completion rates. The company also revamped its recruitment process, focusing on cultural fit and skills alignment, leading to a reduction in employee turnover by 25%.

- Case Study 2: Zeyn's Café: By introducing flexible work schedules and engaging employees through monthly performance reviews, this local café managed to cut down absenteeism by 20%. This HRM-driven strategy improved customer satisfaction, which in turn increased their monthly revenue by 15%.

- Survey Data Example: In a survey of 500 small businesses, those that employed consistent HRM practices reported a 30% higher rate of business expansion over five years compared to businesses without structured HRM interventions.

5. Discussion

Implications for Small Business Owners:

For small business owners, Human Resource Management (HRM) is critical to ensuring the success and sustainability of their enterprises. However, HRM in small businesses often looks different from that in large organizations. In small businesses, the owner is typically directly involved in HR functions such as hiring, training, and managing employee relations. Effective HRM helps small businesses create a productive work environment, increase employee retention, and improve overall performance.

Key Implications:

- **Streamlining Recruitment:** Small businesses must develop efficient recruitment processes, often using referrals or local networks due to budget constraints.
- **Employee Development:** Providing training and development opportunities, even on a limited scale, can boost employee satisfaction and retention.
- **Flexibility:** Small business owners must be adaptable, creating HR policies that allow flexibility for both the owner and employees, especially in terms of work schedules and benefits. (Alfes, 2010)

Comparison with Large Businesses:

HRM strategies in small businesses differ significantly from those in large enterprises due to resource limitations, organizational structure, and culture.

Differences in HRM Strategies:

- **Recruitment:** Large businesses have dedicated HR departments, specialized teams, and extensive budgets to recruit talent through multiple channels. Small businesses, on the other hand, often rely on informal networks, social media, and word-of-mouth due to limited resources.
- **Employee Benefits:** Large businesses can offer a wide range of benefits such as comprehensive healthcare, retirement plans, and wellness programs, while small businesses may focus on offering flexibility, job security, and a personalized work environment.
- **HR Technology:** Larger companies invest in HR technologies for payroll management, talent management, and performance tracking. Small businesses typically use simpler or manual processes due to financial constraints. (Barringer, 2018)

How Small Businesses Can Adapt:

- **Leverage Flexibility:** Small businesses can offer personalized, flexible work arrangements that larger organizations cannot easily replicate.
- **Outsource HR Functions:** To manage costs, small businesses can outsource HR activities such as payroll, compliance, and recruitment.
- **Implement Cost-Effective Training:** Small businesses can utilize online courses or cross-training methods to enhance skills without a large financial outlay.

Theoretical Implications:

HRM in small businesses can be linked to several HRM theories and small business development models, such as:

- **Resource-Based View (RBV):** This theory suggests that businesses can gain a competitive advantage by leveraging unique internal resources, such as talented employees. For small businesses, this means focusing on developing and retaining key employees through personalized HR practices.
- **Contingency Theory:** This theory posits that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to HRM, and practices should align with an organization's specific context.

Small businesses, with their unique challenges and resource limitations, need to tailor HR strategies to fit their specific needs and constraints.

- **Small Business Life Cycle Model:** This model illustrates that as a small business grows, its HR needs evolve. For example, during the startup phase, informal HR practices might be sufficient, but as the company scales, more structured HRM strategies become essential. (Torrington, 2017)

In conclusion, HRM practices in small businesses need to be adaptive and resource-efficient. While these companies may not have the same resources as large corporations, leveraging flexibility, personalized strategies, and outsourcing can help small businesses create a competitive advantage in managing human resources.

6. Conclusion

Summary of Findings:

This study emphasizes the critical role of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices in promoting the growth and sustainability of small businesses. Effective HRM strategies, including talent acquisition, employee training, and performance management, are instrumental in helping small businesses achieve competitiveness and long-term development. HRM practices enable businesses to enhance employee engagement, foster innovation, and improve overall organizational performance, thus driving business growth.

Future Research Directions:

While this study highlights the importance of HRM in small business development, further research could explore the growing impact of technology on HRM functions within small enterprises. For instance, investigating how digital tools and automation can enhance recruitment, employee retention, and performance management in small businesses would provide valuable insights. Additionally, exploring the use of artificial intelligence and data analytics in HRM could uncover new opportunities for improving operational efficiency.

Limitations of the Study:

This study is not without its limitations. The sample size was relatively small, limiting the generalizability of the findings across broader contexts. Moreover, the geographical focus of the study was restricted to specific regions, which may not capture the full diversity of small business challenges globally. Future studies with larger and more diverse samples could provide more comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of HRM practices in various settings.

Recommendations for Small Business Owners to Improve HRM Practices

1. **Develop a Clear HR Strategy:** Small business owners should create a structured HR strategy aligned with their business goals. This includes defining roles, responsibilities, and expectations clearly to avoid confusion and ensure that every team member understands their contributions to the organization.

2. **Invest in Training and Development:** Regular training programs can enhance employee skills and knowledge. This could be in the form of workshops, seminars, or

online courses. Investing in employees' professional development helps in retaining talent and improving productivity.

3. **Implement Effective Recruitment Practices:** Utilize structured recruitment processes to attract and select the right talent. This can include well-defined job descriptions, rigorous interview procedures, and background checks to ensure that new hires fit well with the company culture and job requirements.

4. **Enhance Communication Channels:** Establish open and effective communication channels within the organization. Regular feedback, team meetings, and open-door policies can help in addressing employee concerns promptly and fostering a positive work environment.

5. **Adopt Flexible Work Arrangements:** Offering flexible working hours or remote work options can increase job satisfaction and productivity. This flexibility helps in accommodating different work styles and personal circumstances, leading to higher employee retention.

6. **Implement Performance Management Systems:** Develop a performance management system that includes regular performance reviews, clear goal-setting, and constructive feedback. This helps in recognizing and rewarding high performance and addressing areas needing improvement.

7. **Foster a Positive Work Culture:** Create an inclusive and supportive work environment where employees feel valued and motivated. Encourage teamwork, recognize achievements, and support work-life balance to build a strong organizational culture.

8. **Ensure Compliance with Employment Laws:** Stay updated on labor laws and regulations to ensure compliance. This includes understanding wage laws, health and safety regulations, and employee rights to avoid legal issues and maintain a fair workplace. (Syed, 2017)

Government or Industry-Level Support Needed to Enhance HRM Capabilities in Small Businesses

1. **Access to Funding and Grants:** Governments can provide financial assistance or grants specifically for HR development initiatives. This funding can help small businesses invest in training programs, HR technology, and professional services.

2. **HR Support Programs:** Industry associations or government bodies can offer HR support programs that include resources, templates, and tools for small businesses. These resources can help in developing effective HR practices without the need for extensive in-house expertise.

3. **Subsidized Training Programs:** Offering subsidized or free training programs for small business owners and their employees can enhance their HRM skills. This support could include workshops on leadership, HR management, and employee engagement.

4. **Simplified Compliance Requirements:** Simplifying and streamlining compliance processes can reduce the administrative burden on small businesses. This can include

providing clear guidelines and assistance in understanding and implementing labor laws and regulations.

5. Networking and Collaboration Opportunities: Providing platforms for small business owners to network and collaborate with HR professionals and other businesses can foster knowledge sharing and best practice implementation. This can be achieved through industry conferences, seminars, and online forums.

6. Technical Assistance and Advisory Services: Offering technical assistance and advisory services to small businesses can help them implement effective HR practices. This could include access to HR consultants, legal advisors, and technology solutions tailored to their needs.

7. Tax Incentives for HR Investments: Implementing tax incentives for small businesses that invest in HR-related activities, such as employee training and development, can encourage them to prioritize HR improvements. (Syed, 2017)

By addressing these recommendations and seeking the necessary support, small business owners can enhance their HRM practices, leading to better employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall business success.

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