

Role of HR Strategies in realizing the organizational performance with reference to Indian retail industry

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Abstract

The present research paper introduces HR strategies that support retail firms to empower their employees with the necessary capabilities to jointly achieve the desired objectives set by the firms. It argues that retailers can achieve the organisational performance only through the improved employee performance. Today there is a rapid change in the way HR must deal with its employees. Organisations have many expectations from HR thus it has to pressurize itself for more innovations and turning to be business-savvy to stand toe-to-toe with overall organisational plans. Ditching the traditional role of administration, HR has to be into service delivery mode. Employees being their first customer to deliver, their role is very important. This study has been carried out in retail firms within Pune city of Maharashtra, India, on the adoption of Strategic HR practices. For the study purpose HR strategies under three verticals were chosen; diverse workforce, performance incentives, and technical training. Several items under each of these verticals were studied to know the impact of HR strategy on attainment of retail store objectives. Primary data for the study is collected through the questionnaire involving a sample of 290 HR managers working across retail firms, using the method of convenient sampling. Data were analysed using chi-square to arrive at the result, where it was concluded that adopting HR strategies have improved the retail store performance by achieving its objectives. It exhibited the need to pursue HR makeover and survive the intense pressure from the business world.

Keywords: HR strategy, diverse workforce, retail store objectives, technical training, Organizational performance

1. Introduction

In the present era corporations unanimously agree to the fact that HR must add more value to the firm by being the business partner, this implies that it has to look beyond routine administrative tasks in order to impact the organisational effectiveness. Promising organisations must depend on their human asset to remain competitive in the market, so there is a constant need to adopt a bounceback approach while dealing with people management. The HRM practices in the service sector like retailing have gained momentum until recently, in pace with other sectors. The trending topic however remains- Innovative HRM practices, that expedites the growth of any organization giving newer direction. When it comes to retail HRM, the centralized HR has lot of control over their geographically dispersed retail stores. Be it the impact on attitude of employees, motivating or retaining the employees, all starts with right human resource management practices. There is a need to explore the possibility of such strategies which are related to managing human resources to expect employees' performing well in the way desired by the organisation. This desired performance has an aim to directly impact objectives of the retail

1.1 Overview of Retail Industry:

According to the studies conducted by NITI Aayog, Govt. of India, in the past decade, the Indian market size has seen large growth, almost three times accounting for \$800 billion. In FY 2019-20, the retail market has contributed 10% of India's GDP giving employment to 35 million employees i.e 8% of the total workforce. As per report of equitymaster 2021, in FY2020, organized retail has a large share to contribute in total Indian retail industry i.e 11-12%, on its way to increase upto 16% in next 5-6 years. Boom in this sector may be due to the increase income at the disposable with the consumers who are very conscious about their taste and selection. Majorly there are four retail formats existing in the industry (a) Single/exclusive branded retail stores; franchisee showrooms by manufacturer (b) Multi-brand stores; with one product type with multiple brands under it. (c) Convergence retail store; showcase most of convenience products along with consumer products. (d) E-retailers; shopping done online. Today the retail market has adopted the modern technologies into their retail space including artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, cloud platforms and in-store digitization. Al though traditional and unorganized retail is currently dominating the market but the organized retail is penetrating deep with much use of technology intervention and AI-driven operations. In fact to the extent that when

technological intervention is countered by the customer at all touch points, retailers are able to influence their shopping behaviour.

1.2 Human Resource Management at Retail industry:

In a larger perspective, retail HRM has many fold objectives. Right from employee joins the retail store till he takes an exit, all the activities involved comes under the jurisdiction of HR department. HR management entails an array of functions right from major activities of managing recruitment, selection, developing employees, overseeing employee benefits, career development to day-to-day activities of addressing current employee concerns, improving morale and attendance keeping. While doing all these the underlying objectives are nothing but attached to the core mission and strategy of the business.

1.3 HR manager and HR strategies

Accepting the fact that managing the employees in retail industry competitiveness is a tougher task, HR strategies come to its aid. Achieving customer service goals, which has ever remain the criteria to determine if retailer survives or perishes in the tough market competition. The HR manager is responsible for these goals that can be achieved only through adequate trained staff having high skills and exhibit standard performance. Since most of the employees are working at front-end sales, training is the most important practice planned by the managers. Employees are made to undergo training modules to up skill their talents. Developing current employees is done through certification courses for promising candidates. Most challenging issue these managers face is the high attrition rate of employees. HR strategies can be formulated to address only this issue, by spending the time and resources. Every time HR leaders are churning paperwork in the department and not designing employee engagement programs or technology led HR processes to make a progressive impact on the businesses. Conditioning of personnel is necessary because generally working pattern in retail makes the employee work for long hours resulting into tiredness resulting into higher absenteeism, lower productivity and labour unrest.

2. Literature review

The role of HR strategies is to act as the connector between the HRM and organizational strategies. The objective of HRM remains (a) Recruiting best talent by promoting employee value proposition (b) Improve employee strength (c) Measuring the right competency aligned with organization objectives (d) Healthy employment relationship (e) Environment of belongingness amongst employees. When HRM is seen as a tool to attain organizational performance and success, it is hard to believe, but the fact remains that various empirical researches have been conducted to interrogate this statement and was found true. Though all these studies have never established cause and effect relationship between HRM and organizational performance, but surely an indirect link could have been recognized. A study conducted by Ulrich indicated that there can be direct relationships between the firm performance and the HR practices yet it can also vary based on measures used and change in economic parameters. The connecting bridge to the said firm performance and HR practices is HR strategies (Ulrich, 1997). Just like in any other function, HR strategy is about continuity and change, to anticipate the change in circumstance and take decisions accordingly (Purcell, 2001). To put it another way, the goal of HR strategies is to integrate what enterprises aspire to do with their HR practices and programs while also affirming their engagement in organisational goals. Many researches says HR strategies can be properly defined as part of a strategic HRM process. This leads to the creation of overall or specialized plans for HR and, most importantly, line managers to adopt. An organisation that has developed an HR strategy, on the other hand, will not practice SHRM unless that HR strategy is critical to the company's success.

Human resource management may only be called strategic if it "allows an organisation to achieve its goals," (Storey et al., 2019). According to one of the studies, leadership styles that support a company's HR strategy are important in forming emotional contracts that benefit both the company and its workforces.

3. Concept, background and framework of the study

In the retail industry, staff are the primary service providers from the initial consumer experience in the store to after-sales services. HRM is provided through the organization's HR architecture, which comprises the HR system, HR processes, and the HR delivery model used by the HR department. One such model is depicted in fig 3.a to deliver the HRM through HR strategies.

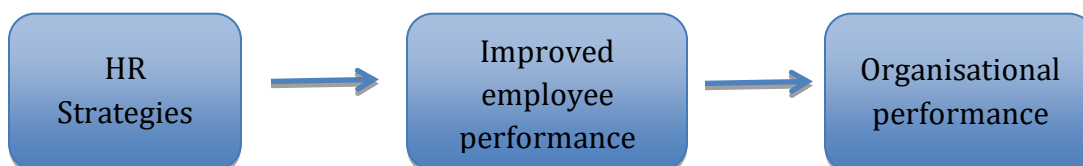


Fig 3.a Delivering HRM

HR strategies are predetermined plans that business house prepare to manage its human resource in such a way that it gets aligned with company's overall goal and intentions. It comprises all the critical areas of HR for instance searching candidates, induction, training employees, benefit management, appraising and compensating them.

Those HR strategies which are instrumental in the growth and development of employees surely lead to improved performance of employees which in turn impacts the overall organization performance. Growth in sales per square foot, overall average value, profitability, earnings, retention of customers, conversion rates, foot traffic, and inventory turnover are all performance indicators in the retail industry. However these matrices can remain just matrices if employees do not contribute towards it. Retail employees possess lot of hidden energy that could be added to their work, but perhaps never remain self-motivated to do so. It is not difficult to bring the additional creativity to work and help in increasing productivity level.

The HRM system's intensity can determine a strong company atmosphere, where employees can perceive a shared understanding of what behaviours are expected of them and rewarded as a result. In a study, the function of HRM outcomes such as employee retention as a moderating variable for the association between HRM practises and organisational performance was evaluated. (ALDamoe, F. M. A., Yazam, 2012).

3.1 Diverse Workforce : In a study conducted in IT sector mentions that workplace diversity can have beneficial consequences and has a direct and considerable bearing on the organization's total success. In this study, which examines the relationship amongst worker diversity and its impact in the educational sector in Cyprus, the influence of diversity fatigue is moderated (Farmanesh P. et al , 2020). Age diversity is a significant link for firms that wish to have a long-term staff, improved efficiency, agility, and profitability. According to the findings, age and gender diversity impacts the employee performance and, as a result, organisational output. Employees prefer to work with women, according to a considerable association between gender diversity and work effectiveness. Especially it is said that women employees adorn the retail industry more with their warm customer service approach, having multi-tasking skill and work-with-perfection nature (Chrine, C. Hapompwe, 2020).

Based on all above statements following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 1: *Employing diverse workforce contribute positively to the retail Store Objectives*

3.2 Performance Incentives : Performance linked Incentive pay no doubt motivates the employees to offer extra effort in order to develop their job skills. Though such a performance bonus will work provided employees visualize and intrinsically link between effort and reward is clear and the value of the reward is worth. Many researches have been conducted to estimate the role of performance incentives contributing towards the firm growth. The growth rate of organisation has significant implications on the incentives employees get. The considerations lead to three distinct aspects of employee growth in relation to corporate growth.

Moderate growth with scarce promotion chances but substantial compensation increases contingent on promotion; rapid growth and high-powered incentives fueled by numerous promotion possibilities; moderate growth with few promotion opportunities but large salary increases contingent on promotion;

Finally, low-powered incentives have caused some businesses to underperform. The following hypothesis has been formalised:

Hypothesis 2: *Performance incentives as an integral part of compensation contribute positively to the retail store objectives*

3.3 Training : Training plays a vital role in supporting the entire HR system to achieve overall organisational goals. On-the-job training, training delivery, and delivery technique can all have an impact on a firm's earnings. The design of the training and delivery style should be in such a way keeping in mind the exact organisational need. On -job-training saves a lot of the cost of the company. The learning and training function must always be aligned with the business by analysing present organisational capabilities against what is required now and in the future to remain competitive. (Abinash P., Swati K. & Dilip M., 2014). In a study conducted in Pakistan small, medium scale companies it was concluded that employee demands are not met through the well-structured training and developed programs thus a big gap is found in the skills required vis-a-vis skills attained. It is important to have a close watch on employee development programs to be made more purpose oriented by connecting with business activities (Niazi Abdus S., 2011). The following hypothesis has been formalised:

Hypothesis 3: *Technical training programs contribute positively to the retail store objectives*

4. Research objectives

The major objective behind doing the present research is :

- 1) To study the delivery model of Human Resource Management pertaining to retail organisations
- 2) To analyze the influence of HR practices on organisational outcome to meet the objectives of retail stores
- 3) To discuss the managerial implications of the present study on the functioning of the HR department at retail organisations.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design: The current study is empirical in nature and employs a descriptive research design to investigate the impact of specific HR practises on retail store objectives. The study conducted is cross-sectional research where the sample is selected from the population. As the descriptive study carries out the information regarding the status of the phenomenon and to convey “What exists” with reverence to the variables and conditions in a situation. The goal of the study was to identify and analyse HR practises and their link to the achievement of retail store objectives, as well as the strategic significance of HR practises in organised retail outlets. Also some of the results and interpretation has been found based on the face-to-face interview with the HR or store manager of the major retail stores.

5.2 Sample and data collection: The information was gathered by distributing a questionnaire to employees of organised retail organisations in Pune. Non-probability, Convenient Sampling has been adopted to capture the responses from the stakeholder of the HR practices i.e HR managers. Since the organised retail is still in its early stages and HR managers are hesitant to provide input when it is linked to their employees, non-probability sampling was used. As a result, data had to be obtained as and when sellers were willing to engage in the study.

The information was acquired using well-structured, pre-tested, and proved to be successful questionnaires.

The questionnaire was sent to a statistician for further changes before being administered.

HR experts from 290 companies answered, and the data was refined and classified.

Bar charts, pie charts, histograms, and other pictorial data-representing formats were constructed from the coded data in an Excel spreadsheet.

As a result, the data was analysed and interpreted.

6. Analysis and results

The analysis of data is carried out to obtain the objectives of paper:

6.1 Demographic data:

Retail stores has its spread across many lesser known areas unlike any other type of industry, so the respondents in this study also stand higher chance to vary in their demographics. The data considered here pertaining to the respondents’ demography is their work experience and job position. Work experience is an important aspect as it shows their maturity in answering the strategic questions related to employees. Similarly the job positions held by the respondent has to be captured to understand in what way the retail firm entrusts the responsibility of employee related matters to the staff function. The table below represents the demographic data :

Table No. 6.1.1: Work experience of Employees (in Yrs.)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0 to 3 years	66	22.8	22.8	22.8
	4 to 6years	68	23.4	23.4	46.2
	7 to 9 years	10	3.4	3.4	49.7
	10 to 12 Years	55	19.0	19.0	68.6
	More than 12 Years	91	31.4	31.4	100.0
	Total	290	100.0	100.0	

The majority of the respondents have more than 12 years of experience, according to the data in Table No. 6.1.1. However there is a considerable no. of HR managers who have below 6 years of experience. This indicates that the

respondents have given the input based on their high experience in the retail industry, which makes this research more strong.

Table No. 6.1.2 : Job Position of respondent					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Store Manager	204	70.3	70.3	70.3
	HR Manager	86	29.7	29.7	100.0
	Total	290	100.0	100.0	

As the data says that 70% of the employees are holding the position of store manager. This indicates that retail firms deploy the store manager with additional responsibility of handling the HR affairs. These store managers are involved in all major operational functions of the HR department.

Below is the data representation of items used to find out HR variables and retail store objective variables.

6.2 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is the methodological steps taken to measure the strength of evidences collected in this research from the sample. In the present study following null hypothesis and alternate hypothesis have been tested to draw conclusion :

H₀: Employing diverse workforce does not contribute positively to the retail Store Objectives

H₁: Employing diverse workforce contribute positively to the retail Store Objectives

Chi-Square Test (Non-Parametric) for Diverse workforce contributes in achieving the retail Store Objectives (HRSO)

Table no. 6.3.1 Workforce diversity and retail store objectives						
N=290	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Placement of employees with diverse experience in a department helps to bring in their innovative ideas and experience to work and achieve targets	4.0483	.76544	3.00	5.00	9.462	.009
Female employees give better shopping experience to female customers	4.6034	.69947	3.00	5.00	203.097	.000
Employees from all parts of country are employed to understand variety of customers and their need	4.4241	.74134	2.00	5.00	226.662	.000
Employing physically challenged employees helps to improve brand image of organisation	4.4793	.67679	3.00	5.00	100.434	.000

*Note: Level of Significance ($\alpha = 0.05$)

The items and values for the variables workforce diversity and retail store objectives are listed in Table 6.3.1. Because the Significant P Values are less than the minimal level of significance (0.05), they are considered significant. As a result, the researcher rejects the Null Hypothesis (H₀) while accepting the Alternate Hypothesis (H₁).

As a result, there is a link between having a varied workforce and meeting the goals of a retail store. H₀: Performance incentives as an integral part of compensation do not contribute positively to the retail store objectives

H₂: Performance incentives as an integral part of compensation contribute positively to the retail store objectives

Table no. 6.4 Performance incentives and retail store objectives						
N=290	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
By team incentives departments gets motivated to achieve sales target	4.5138	.87338	1.00	5.00	456.172	.000
Individual incentives make sales staff to increase cross selling of merchandises	4.7207	.83682	1.00	5.00	829.207	.000
Attractive Incentive schemes make staff to refer customers to store	4.6966	.89074	1.00	5.00	819.586	.000
Incentives to control inventory also helps Inventory staff to ensure proper inventory flow	4.2138	.91270	1.00	5.00	282.897	.000

*Note: Level of Significance ($\alpha = 0.05$)

The elements and values for the variables performance and retail store objectives are listed in Table 6.3.1. Because all P Values are less than the minimal level of significance (0.05), they are all significant. The researcher rejects the Null Hypothesis (H₀) and accepts the Alternative Hypothesis (H₁).As a result, the performance incentive as a component of compensation in the retail industry aids in the achievement of retail store goals.

H₀: Technical training programmes do not help to the goals of a retail store.

H₃: Technical training programmes do positively help to the goals of a retail store

Table no. 6.5 Technical training and retail store objectives						
N=290	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Chi-Square	Asymp. Sig.
Providing Technical training to sales staff equip them to resolve customer queries at their end	3.4310	1.20138	1.00	5.00	51.966	.000
Cross functional training helps staff to work in multiple departments	4.2034	1.18672	1.00	5.00	288.241	.000

Product specific training helps staff to contribute in customer decision making	4.2621	1.00187	1.00	5.00	268.621	.000
Soft skills training helps employees to convert good customers into best customers by add-on selling.	4.3379	1.14197	1.00	5.00	478.759	.000

*Note: Level of Significance ($\alpha = 0.05$)

The items and values for the variables technical trainings and retail store objectives are shown in Table 6.3.1.

Because all P Values are less than the minimal level of significance (0.05), they are all significant.

The researcher rejects the Null Hypothesis (H₀) and accepts the Alternative Hypothesis (H₁).As a result, providing technical training on the products aids in reaching the retail store's goals.

7. Discussion

The research evaluated the impacting role of HR strategies in attaining the retail store objectives. This was done by utilising the Chi-square test to evaluate three hypotheses on the relationship between three key HR practises in retail organisations: hiring a diverse staff in every area, offering performance incentives, and providing technical training. Retail store objectives considered for the study purpose was customer satisfaction, sound merchandising, sales profit and improved brand image.H₁ assumed that when retailers employ diverse employees on job it helps in achieving the retail store objectives, this assumption was proved correct by the empirical data collected. Diversity including gender, regional background, diverse experience and physical capability.H₂ assumed that performance linked incentives help in achieving the retail store objectives, this assumption was proven right after testing the data. Incentives included team performance, cross-selling merchandise, customer reference and waste reduction efforts. H₃ assumed that by imparting the technical training to the employees it helps in achieving the store objectives, this assumption was also proved right using chi-square test. Technical training included Cross functional, product related, technical and soft skill training.Also the demographic variables viz. Work experience and job profile of respondents are important aspects while obtaining the data on HR and organisational performance. This will ensure that the data received are from the appropriate respondents,valid who can truly represent their organisation. Here it can be seen that respondents who showed interest to participate have varied experience removing any biased opinions. The profile of respondents are either store manager or HR manager which exhibits that, in many of the retail firms the employee related functions are handled by the store manager who are also responsible to achieve the store sales target.

The open-ended questions in the questionnaire have fetched many exploratory findings especially pertaining to the challenges faced by this industry to handle their skilled employees at the micro-level. This information has a lot to substantiate towards final outcome of this study. Some of them are discussed below

(i) Knowledge shortage: Many of the front-end jobs like retail assistants, merchandise associates, and retail sales associates require good educational background. In India, not many institutes offer educational programs related to retail management. Thus employees experience a big gap in their knowledge and firm expectations. This at times spills out stress at both the ends of firm and the employee. As a result training department has to bridge the gap and impart all necessary skill, knowledge and attitude required.

(ii) Lack of awareness for retail as a career: Indian tradition had seen small retailers way back to be addressed as 'baniya' who generally were not literate. This has withdrawn many youngsters to make their career in retail industry. How much ever the big and organized retail firms search for talent in labour market, there are less youngsters opting retail management as their career. So the recruitment department face a tough time to cope up with fewer options for a perfect selection.

(iii) Variable pay: Due to low profits, retail firms largely operate on lower-wage models. This means all the employee salary structure will have less fixed components and major part will be variable component. There is always an insecurity amongst the employees regarding even the monthly take-away salary, because of the dwindling status of incentives, which entirely depends on the sales figure. For the said reason the employee is ready to switch his/her job even for a meagre pay rise. The pay and compensation structure of the retail firms are thus important criteria for prospective employees to join or existing employees to leave.

(iv) Absence of attractive fringe benefits: Most of the employees look forward to the welfare and benefits provided by the firms. If these benefits are absent they may turn out to be demotivators for the workforce. Especially women workforce expect organizational support to maintain their work-life balance. Benefits like flexible work hours, short-

leave, extra incentives, rest hours, hygienic workplace, pick and drop, safety measures, nutritional meals at work, etc. all has a great role in making the employees feel like being committed to their organisation.

8. Conclusion

Knowing the fact that power has slowly shifted from employer to employee as job opportunities have grown on higher side and technologies at its best. In such a situation employees are capable to sense the company culture and the intended objective behind every HR practice. This sense is so strong as to even differentiate between the HR practices and HR strategies. Consequently, the success of any management practice totally relies upon the willingness of employees to participate whole heartedly in it. Each day how employees experience at work in terms of empowerment, autonomy and expected support puts an impact on the micro and macro result achievement. Nevertheless, HR will constantly think of utilising employees to improve operational excellence and customer engagement. The present study has indicated the intentional effort taken by the retail firms to use the talent of employees with slight strategic moves, firstly employing a diverse workforce including female employees, varied experience and educational background and people from various regional, ethnic backgrounds helps the retailers to win the customers, who are too different from each other by serving to their customized needs. Secondly performance linked incentives which are in different shapes based on many criteria have seen triggering the need for meeting sales targets more than what has been set for individual employees. Lastly product related technical training in formal and informal way when given to retail employees, it has been found to expedite the sales by removing the deficiencies in performance and raising the confidence in retail employees. HR strategies such as these in a fragmented manner go a long way in achieving the retail store objectives.

9. Managerial Implications

The present study has contributed towards revealing the connect between the selected HR strategies on retail store objectives. HR managers must build a workplace for the future, where employees feel an integral part of the company. The result showed the growing need for the HR to equip and empower the employees to get the intended outcomes. Placing the team with diverse employees, concentrating on providing the product related training and rewarding the performing employees with suitable incentives are some of the key takeaways for the managers to focus upon.

10. Study limitations and future research opportunities

The present study has not addressed the transition of retail store objectives to overall organisational performance. Due to constraints, the opinion of employees could not be sought after, which could have given a different perspective to the results. There is further scope for the study by involving more HR strategies to find its impact on financial performance of retail firms.

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